

**Open letter to leaders
serving the Seattle region**

in government, neighborhoods, business,
arts & culture, philanthropy and nonprofit organizations

Rediscovering the Value of Arts and Culture

We are pleased to share with you an interim report summarizing a community-wide series of conversations – held in the fall of 2014 – addressing the role that art and culture play in ensuring the economic vitality, civic cohesion and quality of life in our region. These conversations engaged more than 200 people from a variety of professions, industries and backgrounds. They suggest an opportunity to reframe the role and value of arts and culture in the Puget Sound community, and reflect:

- A common belief in the dynamic interplay between economic growth and cultural assets;
- A widely-held (and deeply-felt) concern that the region is at risk of marginalizing the role arts and culture plays in advancing economic vitality, regional identity and other commonly held civic goals;
- A frequently expressed desire for the region to take more full advantage of its arts and cultural sector, and the role it plays in creating an unparalleled quality of life, and to attend to the underlying issues that will determine the sector’s long-term viability

The region is at a pivotal moment. We are experiencing (i) extraordinary and growing cultural diversity; (ii) an expanding knowledge-based economy; (iii) a business community eager to position the metropolitan region as “a global city;” (iv) new political leadership, both locally and at the state level; and (v) a core population enthusiastic about incorporating arts and culture into their life and work.

Given the magnitude of both the challenges and opportunities facing the region, we believe it is time for a broad-based coalition committed to:

1. Fully incorporating the arts and culture sector’s assets and perspective in public and private problem solving, including areas of economic development, land use, transportation, and social change;
2. Embracing new, collaborative strategies to influence policy, develop messaging and expand resources that will strengthen both the sector and its contributions to the region, and
3. Safeguarding the current vibrant arts and cultural sector while encouraging new forms and outlets of creative expression.

Over the coming months we will share this interim report with all those who participated in the community meetings, as well as with public officials, philanthropy and civic leaders. We also intend to coordinate and collaborate in this effort with strategic partners including Cultural Access Washington, the City's Office of Policy and Innovation, the Economic Development Commission, and suburban officials and arts commissions.

Our goal is that as we report on the key themes expressed in fifteen distinct community conversations, we will expand the conversation in an organized and strategic way and encourage community-wide cross-sector participation. We encourage for profit, non-profit and public sector leaders to join us in exploring the role arts and culture can play in our communities, in business and in public policy.

Additionally, as the arts and culture sector more fully engages in cross-sector work to assure a vibrant, sustainable, regional economy, we will focus on developing a regional cultural vision and strategy - one that finds its strength and purpose in the three principles outlined above. We are energized by the people we met in this process and excited by the promise of a new form of cultural planning that is more collaborative, home-grown and action-oriented than others we have observed.

For further information, or to share thoughts or questions, contact Sarah Sidman, ArtsFund Director of Strategic Initiatives & Communications | sarahsidman@artsfund.org | 206.281.9050.

We encourage all those who are interested to join with us.

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Microsoft

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Seattle Office of Arts and Culture

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Rediscovering the Value of Arts and Culture

An Interim Report

January 2015

Our region is known throughout the world for its natural beauty, innovative global businesses and rich tapestry of arts and cultural treasures. There is a dynamic interplay between these qualities and it benefits all of us greatly. The well-educated, diverse workforce driving our region's economic success is here, in large part, because the region offers such an extraordinary combination of economic opportunity, environmental quality and cultural assets. This report focuses on one element of that value proposition – the role that arts and culture play in sustaining economic well-being and civic health. It summarizes a community-wide series of conversations – held in the fall of 2014 – to identify challenges within the sector and explore steps to meet them. The report further highlights a frequently expressed concern that the region is neither taking full advantage of its arts and cultural sector, nor attending to the underlying issues that will determine the sector's long-term viability.

Background

This region has long benefitted from the creative talent, diverse cultural traditions and optimistic outlook of its population. Puget Sound's reputation for innovation is well-earned, as evidenced by its leadership in the global aircraft industry, and more recently, in the technology, consumer services and knowledge industries. The region's artistic and cultural organizations have been integral to this success by attracting a youthful and imaginative work force, and helping to create a culture of innovation that characterizes all sectors of our community. Energy, creativity and industry, along with generous philanthropic and public support, have also propelled a thriving arts and culture sector.

The great recession disrupted and diminished traditional sources of support for arts and culture. Even as we celebrate the economy's recovery, new and equally disruptive threats are emerging. Today's burgeoning local economy, while offering enormous benefits, creates unexpected stresses for artists and organizations - not the least of which is rising rents and frustrating traffic snarls. Shifting demographics bring new energy and creativity and, yet, continuously evolving audience behaviors up-

end traditional approaches to programming and sustainability. As if all this was not enough, new competition for philanthropic and public dollars adds to the anxieties and insecurity.

These disruptive forces pose existential threats to organizations and individuals deemed vital to the region's future. One only need consider the near demise of a local award-winning theater, or peruse the income statements of treasured institutions, to understand this. But even taking a more optimistic view and envisioning a scenario in which the sector adapts to new challenges, there are new fears that arts and culture's contributions to broad societal goals – issues like growth management, civic engagement and social justice – are overlooked and ultimately forfeited.

The Community Conversations

In late 2013, a small group including representatives from ArtsFund, 4Culture, the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Microsoft, Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and The Boeing Company began asking how they might address this dilemma. By early 2014, the group had expanded to include additional voices from arts organizations, cultural institutions, government agencies, and business. United in a belief that a healthy arts and culture sector is essential to the well-being of the region, the group (thereafter referred to as the steering committee) began a collaborative process of defining itself and the work it wanted to do. Steering committee members were quick to agree that arts and culture not only provide a framework for personal growth, but more to the point, have the potential to advance broad goals of economic vitality, civic cohesion and social justice. They also agreed that the sector was disconnected and politically weak.

Initially, the steering committee considered whether a regional cultural plan, similar to those developed in Chicago, Denver and Austin, would focus attention and inspire community leaders to address these questions. However, before reaching a conclusion, the group decided to launch a "discovery process" to engage the broader community in its inquiry. This process was underwritten by The Boeing Company. With ArtsFund as Project Lead, members of the steering committee personally took on the most essential work of this discovery phase. Subsets of steering committee members, usually comprised of two to three individuals, engaged fifteen different stakeholder groups in informal, but structured conversations. The conversations covered a range of issues from the role of arts and culture in daily lives to whether more collaborative planning might be a useful strategy.

Key observations from community conversations:

The steering committee met with a broad cross-section of people, nearly 200 in total, ranging from business leaders to teachers; from stage hands to museum directors. While not an exhaustive list of interested parties, these meetings represented a diverse set of interests. (The full list of individuals and groups participating can be found in Appendix A.)

Generally the ideas that emerged in the “discovery process” aligned with those expressed earlier by the steering committee. But in many cases, the participants expanded more eloquently, citing their own life examples and suggesting specific solutions. Almost all participating in these meetings were deeply appreciative that they had been asked to offer their opinion, and were enthusiastic about the potential for collective action. Many volunteered to help with a new planning process, should it go forward.

Members of the steering committee summarized what they heard as follows:

- **People recognize the essential and multi-faceted role that arts and culture plays in the life of the region.** The committee heard this sentiment expressed in countless ways, with recurring statements about how arts and culture improve the local economy, enhance metropolitan and neighborhood development, encourage civic cohesiveness and promote the advancement of social justice. Steering committee members were impressed by how emphatic speakers were when describing the essential role the sector plays in improving quality of life.
- **People express the value of arts and culture in terms of “the common good.”** It would not have been surprising if the teachers, union reps, business leaders and those working in arts and culture had expressed their perspectives from the specific interests they represented. That did not often occur. The language used in almost all the conversations focused on how arts and culture fosters community well-being.
- **People believe that arts and culture is an integral part of regional identity and a source of civic pride; they also worry the region is not taking advantage of that identity.** Not only did the committee hear that arts and culture are essential to regional identity, it also learned that specific cities and neighborhoods attach their local identity to cultural assets and activities. People take pride in differentiating themselves by the quality of their cultural assets. They also wonder why the region doesn’t leverage that identity in its messaging.

- **People want stronger messaging and branding for the sector.** Reflecting a concern that the region is not doing enough to care for its cultural assets, many suggested that the arts and culture sector must tell its story more effectively to its civic leaders, key decision makers and the general public. Some argued for a marketing campaign that would brand the metropolitan area as an arts and culture destination, noting that it would be cost-effective and potentially beneficial for tourism.
- **People speak persuasively about the contributions that art and culture make to improve public policy and neighborhood development.** Reflecting a growing movement across the country for “creative placemaking,” participants often made recommendations about neighborhood development. They spoke of the value of “art district” overlays in land-use planning, the opportunity to create more artist housing through zoning incentives, the need for street engineers and transit authorities to address vexing transportation issues that can ruin a night out at the theater, or thwart an art gallery opening.
- **People see value in a unifying, regional cultural plan as well as the wisdom of including arts and culture policies in local city plans.** The Seattle Arts Commission was particularly articulate in its support for a region-wide cultural plan. Similarly, some (though not all) suburban officials believe that they can more effectively incorporate arts and cultural concerns into local planning activities.
- **People are deeply committed to social justice and equity.** Many spoke of arts and culture as natural vehicles for engaging a community in conversation about inclusion, access and equity. Many expressed their concern that individual artists, organizations and activities outside traditional decision-making channels are too easily excluded from public and private conversations that drive policy and funding decisions. Within this context there were frequent references to immigrants and young people who have creative energy, perspective and vision to offer through their own unique forms of artistic expression.
- **People worry the region is not doing enough to care for and sustain the sector and its artists.** Given the importance of arts and culture to those participating, it is not altogether surprising that most of them believe regional decision makers are not attentive enough to the role the sector can and should play in the region.
- **People are thoughtful about the wide variety of challenges facing the sector.** It is easy to imagine that cash-strapped individuals and organizations would talk primarily about the need for more funding when talking to a delegation that included ArtsFund and other funders.

However, this was not the case. Their descriptions of challenges facing the sector went well beyond finances. Many commented that, in a time of dramatic growth and demographic shifts, elected officials need to consider new public policies to protect and enhance arts and culture. They suggested that arts organizations engage in more collaborative marketing and that the region brand itself more closely with its cultural assets. They spoke of their fears for the future if arts education continues to be eliminated in public schools.

- **People express enthusiasm for more sector-wide coordination and collaborative planning.**

There was near unanimous enthusiasm for some form of cultural planning, strategy, toolkit or collective action. There were frequent suggestions that arts and cultural organizations work more cooperatively to share data, coordinate marketing, and press their case with public policymakers and philanthropists.

Conclusions and Action:

It is a rare metropolitan region that is home to a rich, indigenous Native culture alongside a world-class symphony, opera, and ballet, or one that can claim both Tony-winning theaters and exuberant neighborhood and ethnic festivals. We are fortunate in this region. We engage emerging local artists and internationally renowned musicians in our daily lives. We offer residents a doorway to visual arts, local history and cultural heritage through a stunning collection of museums, festivals and neighborhood gatherings. Our history is celebrated in the architecture we preserve. These same attributes draw tourist dollars to the region and enliven education for our students. It would be unforgivable if a new generation of civic leaders, blessed with a dynamic community of artists, arts organizations, cultural institutions, and philanthropists allowed that delicate ecosystem to degrade.

The steering committee believes the region is at a pivotal moment, experiencing:

- Extraordinary and growing cultural diversity;
- An expanding knowledge-based economy;
- A business community eager to position the metropolitan region as “a global city;”
- New political leadership, both locally and at the state level; and
- A core population enthusiastic about incorporating arts and culture into their life and work.

These are wonderful developments and there is much to celebrate. Yet, those who rely on arts and culture for their inspiration, their work, and even their livelihood, are telling us that all is not well -

either for them, or for the region. They remind us that if our region marginalizes the role of arts and culture in civic life, it will – in the best case – lose a rare chance to strengthen our region’s identity and advance vital goals of social justice, civic cohesion, economic development and global influence. In the worst case, it will jeopardize hard-fought battles won by previous generations to build institutions and audiences that create an unparalleled quality of life for residents.

Those on the steering committee struggle with the implications of these observations. We know that we want to live and work in a region in which arts and culture matter. More importantly, we believe that there are enormous gains to be made when business leaders, public policy makers, community leaders, and arts organizations themselves, broaden their view of what arts and culture has to offer society.

Given the magnitude of both the challenges and opportunities facing the region, and a belief that nothing less than a new collective will is required, the steering committee invites others to join in:

1. Fully incorporating the arts and culture sector’s assets and perspective in public and private problem solving, including areas of economic development, land use, transportation, and social change;
2. Embracing new, collaborative strategies to influence policy, develop messaging and expand resources that will strengthen the sector and its contributions to the region, and
3. Safeguarding the current vibrant arts and cultural sector while encouraging new forms and outlets of creative expression.

Next steps:

Over the coming months we will share this interim report with all those who participated in the community meetings, as well as with public officials, philanthropy and civic leaders. We also intend to coordinate and collaborate in this effort with strategic partners including Cultural Access Washington, the City’s Office of Policy and Innovation, the Economic Development Commission, and suburban officials and arts commissions.

Our goal is that as we report on the key themes expressed in fifteen distinct community conversations, we will expand the conversation in an organized and strategic way and encourage community-wide cross-sector participation. We encourage for profit, non-profit and public sector leaders to join us in exploring the role arts and culture can play in our communities, in business and in public policy.

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We encourage all those who are interested to join with us.

DRAFT

Appendix A

Community Conversation participants

Marco Abbruzzese	Seattle Symphony	Ron Erickson	Theatrical Wardrobe Union
Sheena Aebig	Town Hall	Verna Evereitt	Seattle University
Mark Anderson	Town Hall	Roger Fernandes	Naha Illahie
Ronda Billerbeck	City of Kent Arts Commission	David Fischer	Cultural Access Washington
Ros Bird	City of Shoreline	Sarah Frederick	Eastside Heritage Center
Becky Bogard	Cultural Access Washington	Zach Frimmel	Musician, Artist Trust
John Bradshaw	Seattle Shakespeare	Barbara G	Ballad Locks Association
Shelley Brittingham	City of Bellevue	Trina Gadsden	Youth in Focus
Kate Brostoff	Town Hall	Jerry Garcia	Olson Kundig
David Brown	Cultural Access Washington	Edgardo Garcia	Dia de los Muertos
Stephanie Brown	City of Tukwila	Dick Gemperle	Seattle Opera
Allison Buchanan	Seattle University	Libby Gerber	Visual Artist, Artist Trust
Michelle Bufano	Chihuly Garden and Glass	Ali Ghambari	Iranian Festival
Thomas Bui	Tet Festival	Gary Gillespie	Federal Way
Jeanne Burbidge	City of Federal Way	Mary Jane Glaser	Maple Valley Creative Arts Council
Dennis Caldirola	Italian Festival	Joch Gokcen	TurkFest
Leslie Chihuly	Seattle Symphony	Felicia Gonzalez	University of Washington
Tsering Choedon	Tibet Fest	Anna Gordon	Mercer Island Arts Council
Tenzin Chokey	Tibet Fest	Emily Grosenick	Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra
Lindsay Clawson	Seattle University	Stephanie Guerra	Individual Teaching Artist
Steven Clifford	Seattle Opera	Susan Gulkis Assadi	Seattle Symphony and Opera Players Organization
Laura Cooper	Ballard Historical Society	Shannon Halberstadt	Artist Trust
Betsy Cooper	University of Washington	Tim Hale	Seattle Symphony and Opera Players Organization
Connie Cooper	Seattle Chamber Music Society	Wier Harman	Town Hall
Jack Cowan	French Fest	Kathryn Hedrick	Cultural Access Washington
Jonathon Cunningham	EMP Museum	Kara Hefley	University of Washington
Camina Del Rosario	Teaching Artist	Josh Heim	City of Redmond
Mariquita deMira	Seattle University	Michael Herschensohn	Queen Anne Historical Society
Chris Dewar	Seattle Children's Theatre	Bonnie Hilory	Cultural Access Washington
Ruth Dickey	Seattle Arts & Lectures	Lorrie Hoffman	Shoreline-LFP Arts Council
Summaya E. Diop	ArtsCorps	Carolyn Hope	City of Redmond
Thom Ditty	Seattle Monorail Services	Phillip Hoshko	City of Kirkland
Patrick Doherty	City of Edmonds	Kathy Hsieh	Seattle Office of Arts & Culture
Diane Douglas	Seattle City Club	Kevin Hughes	Cultural Access Washington
Elizabeth Duffell	UW World Series	Kevin Hughes	Seattle University
Amy Dukes	City of Issaquah	Kate Jackman	Seattle Repertory Theatre
Laura Eichelberger	American Guild of Musical Artists	Robert James	Central District Forum
Sue Elliot	Seattle Opera	Gary Jang	Kenmore Heritage Society
Stephen Elliot	Meydenbauer	Vernon Jenkins	Historical Society of Federal Way
AJ Epstein	West of Lenin, Artistic Director	Lynda Jenkins	Historical Society of Federal Way
Ceil Erickson	The Seattle Foundation		

Rosemary Jones	Cornish College of the Arts	Jamie Moses	Seattle University
Roberto Jourdan	Festival Sundiata	GaoSheng Moua	Hmong New Year
Gina Kallman	City of Burien	Steve Mullet	Tukwila Arts Commission
Marya Sea Kaminksi	Seattle Repertory Theatre	Melissa Nelson	Kirkland Cultural Arts Commission
Rose Kaser	Seattle University	John Nesholm	Nesholm Foundation/Seattle Opera
Brian Kennedy	Tukwila Arts Commission	Verna Ness	Queen Anne Historical Society
Aarti Khana	Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce	Vic Newhard	Kirkland Historical Society
Boyie Kim	Seattle University	Scott Nolte	Taproot Theatre
Louise Kinead	Mercer Island Center for the Arts	Daniel Pak	Totem Star
Wendy Kirchner	City of Newcastle, Evergreen City Ballet	Melanie Paredes	Pagdiriwang
Yasmine Kiss	American Guild of Musical Artists	Alma Plancich	Ethnic Heritage Council
Gary La Turner	City of Enumclaw	Kate Porter	Youth in Focus
Alisa Lahti	Polish Festival	Jarrad Powell	Cornish College of the Arts
Ned Laird	Seattle Symphony/Benaroya Hall	Regan Pro	Seattle Art Museum
Aidan Lang	Seattle Opera	Kristen Ramer Liang	Seattle University
Joy Langley	Cultural Access Washington	Pamela Rembold	Kirkland Arts Center
Lynne Langseth	Town Hall	Fern Renville	Red Eagle Soaring
Jim Langston	Des Moines Historical Society	Aaron Robertson	Seattle Foundation
Tina LaPadula	Arts Corps	Judie Romeo	The Center for Wooden Boats
Kirk Laughlin	Seattle Children's Museum	Jon Rosen	Seattle Symphony
Jill Leininger	Spectrum Dance	Anya Rudnick	The 5th Ave Theatre
Elisa Lewis	Maple Valley Youth Symphony	Jill Ruellkoetter	Frye Art Museum
Eric Lin	Citizen University	Dan Ruter	Seattle University
Tonya Locker	Velocity Dance Center	David Sabee	Seattle Symphony, Seattle Music, Inc.
Mike Luis	The Center for Wooden Boats	Latha Sambamurta	Festival of Lights
Michael Luis	Cultural Access Washington, The Center for Wooden Boats	Tazue Sasaki	Cherry Blossom
Kjristine Lund	Seattle Symphony	Yutaka Sasaki	Cherry Blossom
Suzy Martinez	Seattle University	Cherie Sayer	Greater Kent Historical Society
Kaitlin McCarthy	Dance Artist	Corey Sbarbaro	Cultural Access Washington
Charly McCreary	Seattle University	Miles Schlagel	Seattle University
Maija McKnight	City of Auburn	Deborah Schneider	King County Library
Joe Mclalwain	Cultural Access Washington/Edmonds Center for the Arts	Zoe Scott	Seattle Public Theatre
Barbara McMichael	AKCHO, South King County Culture	Rosanna Sharpe	Northwest African American Museum
Ana Mendonca	BrasilFest	Michael Slonski	Seattle Symphony
Louise Miller	Seattle Opera	Pam Smith	Auburn Performing Arts Center
Ellen Miller-Wolfe	City of Kirkland	Edgar Solares	Fiestas Patrias
Danuta Moc	Polish Festival	Derek Speck	City of Tukwila
Ben Moore	Cultural Access Washington	Nanci Spieker	Irish Festival
Cathryn Morovich	CroatiaFest	Lisa Spink	Cornish College of the Arts
Scott Morris	Cultural Access Washington	Claudia Stelle	Coyote Central
		John Stilin	City of Redmond
		Andrew Storms	Seattle University

John Sullivan	Seattle Opera
Loren Supp	Gensler
Tree Swenson	Richard Hugo House
Maryanne Tagney	Seattle Opera
Laila Taji Saliba	Arab Festival
Eric Taylor	4Culture
Dani Tirrell	Dance Artist, Dani Tirrell Dance
Robert Townsend	Northwest Folklife
Susan Trapnell	Town Hall
Peter Tsai	Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month
Nancy Uscher	Cornish College of the Arts
Caroline Van Harmelen	Town Hall
Moya Vasquez	Seattle Opera
Dick Wagner	The Center for Wooden Boats
Colleen Wagner	The Center for Wooden Boats
Ellen Walker	Pacific Northwest Ballet
Jamie Walker	University of Washington
Aaron Walker-Loud	Seattle JazzEd, Arts Corps, Big World Breaks, Creative Advantage
Mary Ellen Walters	Theatrical Wardrobe Union
Elizabeth Whitford	Arts Corps
Sarah Wilke	On the Boards
Barb Williams	Eastside Heritage Center
Sharon Williams	Central District Forum
Alice Winship	Association of King County Historical Organizations; Maritime Folknet
Michelle Witt	UW World Series
Carol Wolfe Clay	Seattle University
Fred Wong	Shoreline Lake Forest Park Arts Council
Virginia Wright	Rainier Valley Historical Society
Mario Zavaleta	Latin Northwest Communications
Julie Ziegler	Humanities Washington
Thelma	Des Moines Historical Society
John	History House