A Long-Range Plan for the Arts in South Carolina, 2011- 2020

The Canvas of the People

How the Canvas of the People was conducted

The Canvas process included a citizen survey, public forums, and other ways of gathering input.

Citizen Survey

The 2010 Canvas of the People began in fall 2009, with a survey of S.C. citizens 18 and older conducted by the University of South Carolina's Institute for Public Service and Policy Research. The South Carolina Arts Commission placed several questions about public participation in and attitudes about the arts in the survey.

The survey, weighted to accurately reflect the demographics of the state, is conducted twice a year to provide timely, reliable and cost-effective data for policy makers and researchers. The Arts Commission has participated in this citizen survey four times since 1990, relying on the data to establish a "snapshot" of arts awareness and involvement among the state's general population.

Findings

The full report includes the questionnaire, demographic data and more. Here are some highlights:

- Almost 67 percent of adult South Carolinians participated in the arts at least once during the last year.
- The average frequency of participation was 14 times during the year.
- Almost 44 percent of the population donated money, time, or both to the arts during the year.
- Just over 13 percent purchased an original work of art.
- Almost 60 percent rated their communities as either excellent or good places to pursue their artistic interests.
- Eighty-seven percent say it is important to have quality arts events in their communities.
- Ninety-five percent of respondents said that the arts are important part of basic education.
- Fifty-four percent rated the contribution that the arts make to the education of children as the most important benefit of the arts in their lives and communities. Other choices included experiencing enjoyment (22 percent), economic impact (9 percent), and one's own creative activity (8 percent). Only 6 percent said that the arts provide no real benefit.
- South Carolinians strongly support state and local government funding for the arts. Thirty-eight percent favor increased funding for the arts and 55 percent say that it should be kept at its current level.
- More than 92 percent support taxpayer funding for the arts – and almost 40 percent want to see public funding for the arts ***increased***.
- 79 percent favor increased funding to strengthen arts education in our schools.

Canvas of the People Forums

The Canvas of the People included public forums in seven locations, beginning in February 2010 in Columbia and visiting Beaufort, Greenville, Hartsville, Aiken and North Charleston before wrapping up in Spartanburg in April. The forums were open to anyone interested in the arts.

Canvas 2010 background >>

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Additionally, in each community, a group of local leaders was invited to share their thoughts about the state of their communities. The diverse groups included representatives from business, local government, chambers of commerce, real estate, the faith community, civil rights organizations, health care, libraries, higher education and K-12 education, foundations and nonprofits. Although the arts were not off limits as a topic, the group was encouraged to talk about any issues important to their communities.

By design, the input from these community leaders focused less on arts issues and more on larger issues and aspirations and took shape around these "public outcomes":

- Liveable communities with distinctive built environments, great quality of life, and broad public participation that attract newcomers and retain talent, whether homegrown or imported.
- Well-educated citizens who are prepared to succeed in the 21st century economy.
- A culture of creativity that fosters innovation in the arts, business and civic life.
- A stronger, globally competitive economy that produces higher per capita income for our citizens.
- A positive image of our state, both within and beyond its borders, as an inviting place of natural beauty, with vibrant communities, cultural diversity, creativity, educational achievement, and a cohesive, can-do spirit.

During the forums attended by the public, the conversation was focused on what's working and what needs improvement in the arts. The conversations were wide-ranging, but results grouped into these major "arts outcomes":

- South Carolina citizens and visitors benefit from diverse opportunities for relevant, rewarding arts experiences in communities throughout the state.
- South Carolina's professional artists are able to produce exceptional art and build satisfying, sustainable careers in our state.
- Students receive a comprehensive education in the arts that develops their creativity, problem solving and collaborative skills, and prepares them for a lifetime of engagement with the arts and productive citizenship.
- South Carolina arts organizations and other arts providers have the capacity and necessary resources to deliver relevant, high quality arts experiences to citizens and visitors.
- There is broad recognition within the state and beyond its borders of the value of and unique contribution made by the arts in South Carolina.

The Canvas process was, naturally, designed to include the arts community, but also deliberately to reach out to those who work in other sectors. The intersections between the "public outcomes" and the "arts outcomes" identified are where much of the broad public value of the arts is created, and it is on these intersections that our plan focuses.

Additional Input

Electronic and social media have dramatically changed how we communicate since the last Canvas process. This time, the Arts Commission employed the agency's website and e-newsletter, along with Facebook and Twitter, to help promote the Canvas process and the forums and to gather input. Those who could not attend a forum were encouraged to share their thoughts through an online public survey. The survey questions mirrored those asked during the public forums.

Other information-gathering opportunities arose. S.C. Arts Alliance board members assessed the state's progress on major issues identified in the last plan and provided new input. Participants at the 2009 Statewide Arts Conference and artists at the 2010 S.C. Artists' Ventures retreat provided input.

All told, almost 1,400 people took the time to participate by sharing their ideas and thoughts about the arts in South Carolina and what direction the future should take.

All of this input—from the anonymous answers given on the S.C. State Survey to additional thoughts received from a participant the day after a forum—was carefully recorded, considered and distilled to identify common themes, determine needs identified by citizens and develop target objectives.

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