

Arts, culture, and creativity are among the core elements that make Washtenaw County a special place. Look at any of the "best of" awards that the communities in this county regularly win and there'll doubtlessly be listed a reference to the area's high quality of life, with its cultural assets typically highlighted.

Arts and culture have a long history in Washtenaw County, with groups such as the University Musical Society and the Ann Arbor Art Center reaching their 100th anniversaries and beyond. This longevity and the lively appearance of the cultural community, however, mask the true fragility of this sector. Peer behind the polished facades of many cultural organizations or talk to the artists practicing their craft here and you'll find a vulnerable industry struggling to survive.

This Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan is a response to that challenge.



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communityfoundation
FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN



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The Arts Alliance serves all of Washtenaw County, working to create an environment where culture and creativity can flourish and the arts are accessible to all.

Artsalliance

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HIGHLIGHTS

WASHTENAW COUNTY CULTURAL MASTER PLAN



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The Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan

is a strategic vision of the future that includes 34 Actions to be implemented over a 5-year period. These Actions are organized into six strategic areas:

- Lifelong Arts & Education
- Creative Economic Development
- Capacity Building, Funding, and Investment
- Communications, Audience Development, and Advocacy
- Cultural Facilities
- Diversity & Access

The Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan is the result of an 18-month, community-based planning effort that emphasized the participation of cultural, educational, civic, business, and government representatives from each of the county's key population centers: Ann Arbor, Chelsea, Dexter, Manchester, Milan, Saline, and Ypsilanti. The plan reflects the direct input of nearly 5,000 Washtenaw County residents as captured in an online survey, an artists census, a study of the area's creative economy, and in 29 interviews and community forums. The effort has been coordinated by the Arts Alliance, a county-wide service organization. From the master plan, the Arts Alliance will work with the seven population centers to customize the plan to their local needs and interests.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

• **Make Arts and Culture an Integral Part of K-12 Education Throughout Washtenaw County**

What? Children in all parts of Washtenaw County will be able to reap the documented benefits of exposure to and involvement in arts activities in an organized, ongoing, and comprehensive program. Engagement opportunities will expose students to cultures different than their own and prepare them to face the challenges of an increasingly diverse 21st century. Authentic arts learning will provide students with important career-building experiences as well as generate revenue for artists, cultural organizations, and creative businesses.

Why? There is unequal access to cultural and creative education programs throughout the county; numerous studies show that access to arts education significantly enhances a student's future professional and personal success.

• **Provide Services That Support the Growth of the Creative Economy**

What? Artists, cultural organizations, and creative businesses will have access to business skills training that will enable them to function more successfully. Resources such as artist incubators and micro-loans will assist artists and creative businesses to add to the county's economic vitality. Cultural events organizers will collaborate with tourism, business and economic development partners to maximize the economic impact of their programs. For-profit businesses will find new opportunities to sell their services to creative businesses.

Why? Strengthening creative workers' business management, marketing, and other skills will help create a stronger cultural ecosystem; affordable spaces for artists to live and work will keep creative workers from leaving the county; vibrant creative businesses will enhance the quality of place of the county's cities and towns.

• **Increase the Visibility of the Cultural Sector Through Collaborative Marketing**

What? Cultural activities will capture greater attention and generate increased revenues when marketed in joint advertising and promotional ventures. A centralized cultural web portal will make finding cultural information of any kind easy. Mobile young knowledge workers will identify the region as a place where cool things are happening.

Why? The cultural sector is fragmented and does not communicate its offerings or its value as effectively as its quality merits; uncoordinated marketing diminishes the value the cultural sector adds to efforts to promote the Ann Arbor region as a destination for new businesses, knowledge workers, residents, and tourists.

• **Increase Public and Private Sector Funding for Arts and Culture**

What? A "blue-ribbon" panel will be established to thoroughly investigate innovative funding models for arts and culture and make recommendations for implementing a county-wide system. Cultural organizations will learn the skills to diversify and increase their earned income streams.

Why? Funding is the #1 challenge facing the county's cultural organizations; traditional systems for funding arts and culture are no longer effective in today's rapidly changing world; public arts funding is surprisingly weak given the acknowledged quality and significance of the county's cultural sector.

• **Benchmark Diversity in the Audiences, Staffs, and Programming of Washtenaw County Cultural Organizations**

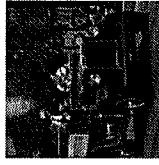
What? A community-oriented, carefully constructed research program will provide essential data that will enable cultural organizations of all types and sizes to plan how they can best go about engaging diverse populations in their programs and governance.

Why? The rich diversity of Washtenaw County (home to over 90 different ethnic groups) is generally not reflected in the offerings and personnel of the cultural sector; the area's cultural diversity is a strength that needs to be showcased.

• **Strengthen the Arts Alliance**

What? An Arts Alliance that is adequately funded will be able to unite under one roof the interests of artists, nonprofit cultural organizations and for-profit creative businesses throughout the county. This service organization will be able to represent the cultural sector in discussions of county-wide challenges with business, government, civic, and educational leaders. The Arts Alliance will be able to provide the services requested of it in this plan which will create a stronger cultural sector as well as an economically healthier Washtenaw County.

Why? No other county-wide organization can make sure the recommendations of the cultural master plan are implemented; there is no other organization that can represent the cultural sector in regional, cross-jurisdictional discussions.



KEY FINDINGS OF THE CULTURAL PLAN

• **People in Washtenaw County Value Arts and Culture**

- 63% said arts and cultural programs were very important in their choice to live in Washtenaw County.
- 75% said that business support for culture made a difference when they chose what businesses to patronize.

• **Many Businesses Recognize the Value of Arts and Culture to the Bottom Line**

- 63% said that access to arts and culture was important in their decision to locate or keep their businesses in Washtenaw County.
- 57% thought access to cultural programs was important in helping to recruit and retain qualified workers.

• **The Creative Sector Plays a Distinct Role in the County's Economy**

- 4.6% of the county's total workforce works in the creative economy.
- 10% of the county's total payroll is generated by the creative economy.
- 823 students from the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University earned degrees related to the creative economy in 2007.

• **The Quality of Our Cultural Offerings is Generally High, but not Everyone has Access to Them**

- 88% were satisfied with the quality of arts, heritage and interpretive science programs in their community.
- 66% felt that good science and arts education is not equally available to students throughout the county.

• **Artists (visual, performing and literary) are a Significant Force in Washtenaw County**

- 2,530 individuals responded to the Artists' Census and were classified as Washtenaw County Artists. Of these 1,173 individuals satisfied specific criteria and were identified as Working Artists.
- 17% of Working Artists said they support themselves by doing their art, while 32% reported earning a living from a day job that was related to their creative field.
- Artists said their most important needs are:
 - Networking with others with similar interests
 - Increased sales or other earnings
 - Marketing
 - Validation of their work

• **Public and Charitable Organizations Should Help Support Cultural Organizations**

- 89% agreed that public tax funding through local governments (county, city or township) should help support nonprofit arts and cultural programs.
- 98% agreed that local foundations should include culture (arts, heritage, and interpretive science) among their funding priorities.

* Data drawn from the Washtenaw County Cultural Assessment Online Survey Report, Washtenaw County Cultural Assessment Community Forums Fall Archival Report, 2008 Artists' Census Report, and The Creative Economy Analysis conducted by Ann Arbor SPARK, 2008.

