

Executive Summary

Introduction

Eugene’s City Council authorized a “Cultural Policy Review” in the spring of 2005. The Eugene Budget Committee recommended funding for two years in support of the City Council Goal that promotes the Arts and Outdoors, which included the City Council's endorsement of branding Eugene as the “World's Greatest City of the Arts & Outdoors.” The City contracted with WolfBrown in June 2006 to conduct the year-long process. The purpose of the Review was to examine current conditions, services, and gaps in the cultural sector, to identify goals and strategies to strengthen that sector, and to provide options to assist the City in defining its role in support of Eugene’s arts and culture.

This Report provides details of that Review and offers a vision, goals and strategies, and an approach to implementation designed to enhance and strengthen the cultural sector. While the City is the recipient of this Report, many strategies can be implemented by other entities. For example, there may be public/private partnerships that involve the City or there may be efforts undertaken, individually or jointly, by cultural or civic organizations, artists, business or community groups, educational institutions, teachers, or many others. The City’s options are fully described in Parts IV and V of this report.

As part of this Review, the consultants have:

- Conducted a **cultural assessment** through over 50 confidential interviews and a dozen focus groups with representatives of all sectors of the community.
- Designed and conducted a **public process** of community meetings, attended by over 300 individuals.
- Conducted an **assessment of cultural facilities** including both an inventory of visual and performing arts spaces and on-site review of selected facilities.
- Implemented a “**cultural census**” survey of Eugene residents’ interests in and priorities for arts and culture that was completed by almost 2,500 individuals.

- Worked with a specially-appointed **Mayor’s Committee** that provided community perspectives and feedback.

This Review defines a “road map” for action for the next decade that reflects a vision for cultural development in the community at large. The consultants’ recommendations build on and synthesize community priorities and opportunities for action without being tactically proscriptive about how those priorities are implemented.

Overview of Eugene and the Region

Eugene and the region are in the midst of a long, slow recovery from the impact of significant shifts in its economic base that began in the 1980s. The region has emerged from a difficult period with a more diversified economy than it has had in the past. Population has been growing, although more slowly since 2000. While Eugene is still predominantly white, there is small but growing Hispanic population. The presence of the University of Oregon has played a key role in the evolution of the City through its large student, faculty and staff population, its academic and cultural offerings, and its impact on the economy. In addition, the City’s geographic location, which allows it to serve as a retail and wholesale trade center for central and southern Oregon, contributes to its growth and vibrancy.

Eugene residents pride themselves on their independent inclinations, which have at times made collective decision-making a challenge. In general, community and philanthropic leadership tends to be “quiet,” which often means that leaders work behind the scenes rather than take high visibility positions. The level of community involvement is extraordinarily high. This was reflected during the Cultural Policy Review with over 300 people attending community meetings and almost 2,500 individuals completing the “cultural census” survey.

A Perspective on the Value of Arts and Culture

There is an increasingly impressive body of research that highlights the impact of arts, culture, and creativity on the quality of life of a community. Cities large and small across the country are focusing on the ways in which arts and culture can enhance the quality of life. For example:

- National data¹ highlight that the nonprofit cultural sector alone contributes over \$166 billion annually and includes 5.7 million full-time equivalent jobs.
- Data show, for example, that the price of single family homes jumped 15 percent in a single year after an art museum opened in a depressed mill town in Massachusetts.²
- College Board research indicates that students who took four years of arts coursework outperformed their peers without that training by 58 points on the verbal portion and 38 points on the math portion of the SAT.³
- A recent initiative in the schools was designed “to improve student achievement by building connections between the arts and the core curriculum.” After only two years in operation, 2nd grade students scored significantly higher than their counterparts on all standardized tests.⁴

Overview of Arts and Culture in Eugene

The range and diversity of arts and culture in Eugene is breath-taking – it includes the Oregon Country Fair, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, the Mayor’s Art Show, Art in the Vineyard, the Oregon Festival of American Music, the Oregon Bach Festival, as well as the other Resident Companies of the Hult Center and many, many others. The City boasts a mix of arts, culture, and entertainment that goes well beyond what one would expect in a city of 150,000 people. City government, having operated the Hult Center for 25 years, has played an important role in Eugene’s cultural sector. But while the Hult has added much to the City, it has also absorbed virtually all City cultural support, making it harder to address other community concerns relative to arts and culture.

Indeed, many of the issues addressed in the valuable “ArtsPlan” of the mid-1990s remain as challenges to the cultural sector today. Most notably, cultural organizations (in common with their colleagues nation-wide) struggle to identify sources of earned and contributed revenue from a limited base of residents and visitors. With some exceptions, these organizations are under-capitalized with limited paid professional staff. But the challenges extend beyond individual organizations to the sector as a whole. As much as Eugene’s cultural organizations

¹ Americans for the Arts, Arts & Economic Prosperity III, June, 2007 (<http://artsusa.org>)

² Opinion Journal, “What MassMOCA has Wrought” July 7, 2004.

³ The College Board, “2005 College-Bound Seniors: Total Group Profile Report” 2005

⁴ Maricopa Regional Arts and Culture Task Force, “Vibrant Culture – Thriving Economy” 2004.

contribute to the City's quality of life, that contribution remains constrained because of the lack of the necessary "connective tissue," the infrastructure that coordinates communication, collaboration, and joint action within the cultural sector and between the sector and other aspects of the City. This problem is exacerbated by the general lack of awareness of the value of arts and culture.

It is important to note that Eugene's focus on combining its unique cultural and outdoor attributes (an aspiration articulated in the City's slogan) provides important opportunities for developing more effective partnerships between these two important sectors in order to better position the City to attract visitors.

Key Findings

The consultants identified a number of core issue areas and those have been refined over the course of the Review. Key findings in five issue areas are summarized below, with additional detail provided in Part II of the report.

Leadership and Resources

Cultural leadership in Eugene has been strong but it is difficult to find new, younger individuals to assume leadership roles. This is a national problem but is especially pressing here. It is complicated by the lack of an effective, city-wide local arts agency, an entity that is responsible for facilitating initiatives and coordinating collaborations within the cultural sector as well as being "at the table" for key community processes. Such an entity is often central to building community leadership for arts and culture.

Eugene's "cultural ecology" has been driven in large part by the Hult Center which has made many positive contributions to the community. However the Hult's current operating model is problematic and until this problem (which has existed since at least 1996) is resolved, it will serve as a brake on the sector, preventing it from reaching its full potential. City of Eugene staff capacity is narrowly focused on the Hult Center and does not address community-wide cultural issues

Fund raising in the private sector is challenging and competition among nonprofit organizations in various sectors has become more intense over the last decade. There is, however, some potential for growth in funding for arts and culture, especially if cultural initiatives are coupled with other community priorities, such as downtown development or improved education.

Education and Lifelong Learning

As Eugene's public schools have had to cut back on arts education programs, cultural organizations have moved to fill the gap by providing extensive arts learning programming. However organizations' initiatives are not coordinated and that makes it considerably harder for educators to navigate among the various offerings. This problem is made more complicated because there is a general lack of understanding of the value of arts learning as a basic skill and as a way to enhance learning in all curricular areas. Lane Community College's integrative arts learning initiative has begun to address this.

The University of Oregon and Lane Community College have a vibrant mix of cultural facilities and active programs in the arts and they play an important role in the cultural life of the community. However, there is little coordination between these cultural initiatives and those of the non-academic cultural organizations so that possible synergies and community benefits are less likely to be fully realized.

Cultural Organizations and Artists

Eugene's professionally managed and volunteer-driven cultural organizations are capable of producing high quality art, as are its professional and avocational performing and visual artists. However, these groups are subject to the same pressures such organizations face across the nation and achieving economic stability for both organizations and artists is difficult. The great majority of nonprofit cultural groups have small or mid-sized budgets and all of them, even those with large budgets (over \$1 million) are under-capitalized. This means that they are fragile administratively and less able to address long- and short-term issues.

Available performance and exhibition spaces are generally adequate but would benefit from improved maintenance and upgrades. In general, however, few facilities have the full mix of needed spaces for productions or exhibitions and support spaces for rehearsal, set or exhibit construction, and dressing rooms are problematic.

Artists and cultural organizations share a need for professional development. Organizations are concerned about capacity building relative to fund raising in general and board development in particular. While funders expressed concern about duplication and a lack of collaboration among cultural groups, there is some evidence that such efforts are underway. One problem is that there is no organization or other mechanism to facilitate collaborations and joint initiatives among cultural organizations in Eugene and the groups do not have the capacity to do it on their own.

Audiences and Participation

Overall, the cultural census survey results are consistent with national trends that point to increased involvement and interest in more active forms of cultural participation, as well as arts experiences that serve to advance social needs, like spending more time with friends and family. Increasingly, informal venues such as the home, community centers, and places of worship, are playing an important role as a setting for arts and culture. This means that cultural groups must become more flexible in program design and communication to respond to these shifts.

Communication about arts and cultural activities and events is fragmented, both for residents and for visitors. There is no central source – either on-line or in print – for sharing information about the sector and its activities. This is a significant hindrance to building new local and tourist audiences and encouraging low-frequency attendees to increase their participation.

Downtown and the Built Environment

The downtown is positioned to employ arts and culture to play an important role as a catalyst for its on-going revitalization. There are many major cultural assets located downtown, including the Hult Center, the new main branch of the Eugene Public Library, DIVA, the WOW Hall, the Shedd Institute, and an informal “gallery district,” as well as a “First Friday” art walk. But for arts and culture to play a more effective role, arts groups will need to be more actively engaged as part of a much larger revitalization initiative, one that includes a strong downtown residential component. Planning and development efforts require cultural sector representation from their inception.

Public art, much of it downtown but also in neighborhoods, can play a role in this revitalization as well as illustrate Eugene’s commitment to art and the outdoors. Architectural design, effective signage, and more appealing streetscapes and street furniture will also work to enhance the downtown’s appeal and to highlight the value Eugene places on arts and culture.

A Vision for Cultural Development in Eugene

Participants in the Cultural Policy Review shared their ideas for a vision of Eugene and its arts and cultural landscape for the year 2017. A summary of that vision is presented on the following page.

“Eugene in 2017 is a nationally renowned center of creativity in general and the arts in particular. Eugene is acknowledged as a leader in cultural opportunities that engage residents and draw visitors. The cultural sector is a source of community pride and its impact is central to the livability and economic vitality of the City. Eugene’s downtown is alive with an appealing mix of creative experiences for people of all ages. The Hult Center, its Resident Companies, and a thriving gallery district provide a downtown anchor for cultural programming. Its schools use the arts effectively for their expressive value and as a powerful tool in teaching and learning. Arts learning is a lifelong pursuit through programs for all ages. The cultural assets of the University of Oregon and Lane Community College are part of the powerful mix that builds the identity of Eugene as a center for the arts. City officials, leaders of public and higher education, the business sector, and arts and culture work together to support Eugene’s cultural sector to enhance Eugene’s livability and the civic pride of its residents.”

Goals and Strategies

Five goals and sixteen strategies have been defined to strengthen and enhance Eugene’s cultural sector so that it can contribute even more to the future vitality of the City. These goals and strategies are described in detail in the body of the Report, which also includes discussions of possible tactics, identification of potential roles for the City of Eugene and other entities, and a description of each strategy’s priority.

Goal I

To strengthen public and private sector engagement, leadership, and funding for arts and culture in Eugene.

- **Strategy I.1:** Establish an “Alliance” for arts and culture that will coordinate and strengthen the efforts of the public, private, and nonprofit cultural sectors and foster high-level civic leadership in support of arts and culture.
- **Strategy I.2:** Define a broader role for the City of Eugene relative to arts and culture and provide the necessary staff and budgetary support.
- **Strategy I.3:** Establish and fund a dedicated endowment or trust for Eugene’s cultural organizations to increase public and private sector financial support for arts and culture.

- **Strategy I.4:** Conduct a thorough review of Hult Center operations to develop, if necessary, a new mission and implement a new operating model that will support that mission in a long-term, financially sustainable way.

Goal II

To provide comprehensive arts learning experiences for Eugene’s children, youth, and adults.

- **Strategy II.1:** Create mechanisms to deliver more comprehensive and coordinated arts learning for Eugene children and youth through K-12 schooling and extracurricular opportunities.
- **Strategy II.2:** Enrich the range of and access to arts and cultural learning opportunities for teens and adults.
- **Strategy II.3:** Build more effective ties between Eugene’s institutions of higher learning, the City, and cultural organizations and audiences.

Goal III

To build participation in and audiences for arts and culture in Eugene.

- **Strategy III.1:** Develop a comprehensive communication mechanism to provide information about Eugene’s arts and culture to residents and visitors.
- **Strategy III.2:** Implement a coordinated awareness campaign to highlight the value and strength of Eugene’s arts and culture.
- **Strategy III.3:** Build existing audiences and develop new ones for arts and culture.

Goal IV

To strengthen the ability of cultural organizations and artists to serve the community.

- **Strategy IV.1:** Build the capacity of Eugene’s artists and cultural organizations through coordinated programs of professional development.
- **Strategy IV.2:** Assist cultural organizations to develop initiatives that respond to trends in cultural programming.

Goal V

To integrate arts and culture into the fabric of downtown Eugene and other neighborhoods as part of a comprehensive strategy of revitalization.

- **Strategy V.1:** Integrate arts and culture into planning and development activities in Eugene’s downtown.
- **Strategy V.2:** Establish approaches to cultural development in the downtown that dovetail with community priorities.
- **Strategy V.3:** Enhance Eugene’s physical environment through public art in downtown and throughout the City.
- **Strategy V.4:** Enhance Eugene’s urban environment through the use of architecture and streetscape design, signage, public spaces, and other amenities.

Initial Next Steps

Once the Report has been presented to City Council, the task of implementation will begin. The consultants propose a “Cultural Policy Review Implementation Task Force” made up of six community leaders (representing business, cultural organizations, and higher education) and reporting to the Executive Director of the City’s Library Recreation and Cultural Services Department. This group would meet frequently to set priorities and make sure that a few, carefully selected initiatives are moving forward. It would present annual reports to the community to detail outcomes and progress. As the proposed Alliance takes shape, this Task Force can become the nucleus of its governing body. Responsibility for coordination and review of implementation would then fall to a sub-committee of the Alliance’s board. Additional details are provided in Part V of the Report.

Conclusion

This planning process has been remarkably participatory. No other community in which the consultants have worked, no matter how large it is, has shown the degree of diligence and passion evidenced by Eugene residents and in particular the members of the Mayor’s Committee. Planning is not an easy process. It requires attention to various viewpoints and overlapping perspectives and often puts existing systems and structures into the spotlight. The willingness of all parties involved to

look carefully at issues both large and small has led to the development of a road map that has the engagement and input of a broad cross-section of the community.

Not everyone – perhaps no one – will agree with *everything* in this document. But most participants will find some reflection of the comments that they made at various stages in the Cultural Policy Review. That is what makes this document powerful – its organic growth from the comments of hundreds, and ultimately thousands, of individuals. The consultants believe that the months of review and passionate debate have made this a stronger document that can serve as the first step on a journey to an even more vibrant and exciting cultural sector in Eugene.