Enriching Lives: Arlington Arts and Culture Strategy

Arlington Commission for the Arts
March 2017
Arlington thrives as a community because arts and culture create a sense of place, catalyze economic vitality, and enrich the lives of those who live in, visit or work here.

This vision will succeed because of our commitment to support, create and present inspiring, enjoyable, and transformational artistic experiences; to promote the growth and quality of local arts resources; and to advocate for the importance of arts and culture in Arlington.
Arlington’s relationship with the arts is rooted in its longstanding arts policies1, which since 1989 have recognized the important role that arts and culture play in enhancing the quality of community life and individual well-being. In these policies, the County seeks to create a climate that is conducive to the growth and development of Arlington’s artists and arts organizations, that fosters excellence and diversity by insuring the accessibility of a varied program of cultural activities and that supports artistic freedom and creativity.

Though these policies have served the community well, Arlington is now at a critical juncture. The community needs to envision a different approach that addresses the changing dynamics of how arts and culture are distributed. Fiscal and development pressures, as well as growing demand for arts and cultural experiences, mean that purposefully designed and built arts venues are becoming harder to acquire. Because of changing technology and market forces, there is an increasing recognition that artistic and cultural programs and services need to be delivered in a way that match audiences’ evolving expectations. Whether community arts or professionally curated programming, people expect unique participatory experiences personalized to their preferred times and locations. Finally, traditional methods and approaches of financial support for artistic and cultural organizations are no longer sufficient to provide some minimal level of fiscal sustainability — thus diminishing an organization’s ability to take risks in its programming.

Recognizing that these forces could adversely impact Arlington’s arts and culture sector, and in its effort to fulfill its duties to the Arlington County Board — which include “assisting the County in the development of cultural policy … [and] providing leadership for the continuing growth and development of the cultural life of the County”2 — the Arlington County Commission for the Arts (“the Commission”) embarked on the formulation of a comprehensive and holistic strategy for Arlington’s arts and culture sector. The Commission believes this aspirational strategy is important because it strives to:

- Increase the reach, relevance and contribution that the artistic and cultural community make to life in Arlington;

- Offer a thoughtful perspective that will inform how the Arlington community can support and shape a shared approach to supporting arts and culture with the current and next generation of artists and audiences in mind;

- Provide direction for continued investment in the arts in Arlington by identifying opportunities to increase sustainability and provide greater linkages between Arlington’s arts and culture sector and its strong creative economy.

The framework of this strategy, which takes a broad and collaborative approach to show how the whole Arlington community can benefit from an enriched arts and culture sector, is realistic and attainable in the long term. It is the product of a forward-looking and inclusive community effort that comprised consultation and dialogue with Arlington artists, organizations, creative practitioners and audiences, resulting in a shared vision for arts in Arlington.

1 Placeholder for Footnote
2 Arlington County Board, December 8, 1990
This document’s ambitious and overarching goals and strategies are meant to stimulate ideas and provide a foundation that will enable the County, Arlington’s arts community and others to develop specific tactics and work elements that focus and prioritize their commitment to — and investment in — facilities, programs and services. The Commission intends to identify specific actions associated with each goal that reflect stakeholder participation and are linked to resources, measures and outcomes.

The Commission intends this strategy to serve as a call to leadership for those individuals and organizations who are on the front lines of the arts and culture sector and share in its purpose and goals. Arts organizations and artistic entrepreneurs; Arlington County Government, including Arlington Cultural Affairs Division of Arlington Economic Development as well as Arlington Public Library, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and Arlington Public Schools; nonprofit partners, including AFAI, Ballston BID, Crystal City BID and Rosslyn BID, CPRO and Clarendon Alliance; and the many enthusiastic businesses, institutions, organizations and foundations that invest their support in the Arlington arts community all have a vital role to play to ensure that Arlington continues to be a place where arts and culture are fostered and cherished.

VALUES

These values summarize the intentions of the 70+ creators of this strategy and represent the fundamental beliefs that contributed to its development.

Art has value in itself.

Experiencing art is a necessity of a fully-lived life and should be fostered as an end in itself and as an essential component of human activity. Participating in the arts can generate a sense of well-being and improve health, happiness and fulfillment.

Arts and culture are a strategic community resource.

Arts and culture create a sense of pride in a community, identify commonalities with others and communicate that inhabitants of this place care about each other. Arts promote and foster cross-cultural understanding and tolerance of others and their traditions. Participation in the arts is associated with greater civic engagement, volunteerism and community building.

Arts and culture underpin economic development and sustainability.

A strong artistic and cultural community makes a place more attractive. Arts generate curiosity and foster critical skills like creativity, problem solving, innovation and collaboration. A community that supports the arts attracts creative industries and enhances the performance of its creative economy.
GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The goals and strategies articulated in this document are meant to provide Arlington arts stakeholders with an overarching framework for a thriving artistic and cultural community that supports the foundation of Arlington's sense of place.

The implementation of this strategy will require actions and resources from all stakeholders, which include local and regional arts organizations and artists, nonprofit partners and for-profit sponsors, Arlington County government, business leaders and, importantly, Arlington’s residents, visitors and workers. The Arlington Commission for the Arts has taken on the responsibility to oversee, monitor, support and report on its implementation.

To accomplish this, the Commission will work to formally engage stakeholders in the development of an implementation matrix as a tool to regularly evaluate, articulate and prioritize specific tactics that will be employed to advance these strategies.

This document will also be used to strengthen the Commission’s relationship with the County Board by reporting regularly on its progress and by using its goals and strategies to frame important issues and opportunities that may arise.

“Coming Together,” a free community concert by the internationally renowned Kronos Quartet on the first anniversary of 9/11, presented by Arlington Cultural Affairs
GOAL ONE:
INTEGRATE ARTS AND CULTURE INTO ALL ASPECTS OF CIVIC AND COMMUNITY LIFE.

A vibrant, engaged community is safer, healthier, more environmentally sustainable and economically stronger. Research has shown that adults who attend art museums or live arts events volunteer, vote and take part in community events at a higher rate than those who do not. Furthermore, their relatively high rates of engagement in the community continue to prevail, even after adjusting for the effects of education, gender, age, parental status and other demographic factors. A community whose members are engaged with life, education and one another is more likely to come together to address important issues. The use of creative tools for community engagement can make it easier to design community amenities with and for the public, thereby positively impacting all dimensions of civic planning. Creative strategies for community engagement may include innovative visual arts techniques, storytelling, social-networking technology, exhibits, music, performance, festivals and community gatherings.

STRATEGIES:

1. [ ENGAGE ]
Use arts and culture to create engagement opportunities that reflect and involve Arlington’s diverse and immigrant populations and the full spectrum of their creative expressions. Use creative engagement tools such as storytelling and the collection of oral histories to encourage the gathering of diverse community perspectives. An example of this is Echoes of Little Saigon: Vietnamese Immigration and the Changing Face of Arlington, a booklet by Kim A. O’Connell documenting the contributions of Vietnamese immigrants to Arlington. It is based on oral histories conducted with community members.

2. [ BRING TOGETHER ]
Leverage the ability of the arts to strengthen community bonds and promote equity and inclusion in civic and cultural activities. Promote engagement methods such as arts in schools, technological resources, family festivals, street fairs, co-created artistic experiences, informal and formal exhibits, performances and heritage gatherings to strengthen the understanding and exploration of community values and increase stakeholder involvement.

Footnote: 3 National Endowment for the Arts
Use creative approaches that are enjoyable and effective to increase participation by all members of the community. This can be seen through Arlington’s Nauck Community Portraits, an exhibit featuring works created by students reflecting neighborhood history-makers in collaboration with acclaimed public artist Cheryl Foster. Students created visual biographies of leaders and history-makers in Arlington’s historically African American Nauck community.

Students exhibit at Drew Model Elementary School

3. [EMBED] Incorporate the varied and essential civic benefits of arts and culture by considering and including these benefits in all relevant County plans and studies. Use creative engagement tools to facilitate the site plan process and enhance urban design projects. Arlington’s use of many of these techniques has been part of the Sector Plan process through which community engagement has strengthened urban design by involving the public directly. Creative engagement programs produce results that are more grounded in the community’s values.

Put the “I” into C_vic by artist Linda Hesh. The interactive public sculpture invites YOU to complete the picture.
GOAL TWO: INVEST IN A VIBRANT, EQUITABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND EVOLVING ARTS AND CULTURE ECOSYSTEM.

A successful arts and culture ecosystem features a complex, dynamic and interdependent set of relationships among artistic and cultural organizations, arts infrastructure and the cultural policies that influence the production and consumption of arts and culture in the community. Creating fertile ground for Arlington’s arts and culture ecosystem requires the strengthening of arts infrastructure such as venues, organizations, programs, funding, as well as the networks and relationships that underpin the sector. It is vital to establish, sustain and promote opportunities to support and celebrate creative excellence among artists, arts organizations, businesses, community and education institutions and County staff.

STRATEGIES:

1. [INFRASTRUCTURE]
   Build essential and purposeful venues and other infrastructure that support high-quality arts activity and provide the Arlington community with opportunities to participate in a variety of artistic and cultural options. Support the availability, affordability and sustainability of cultural spaces and venues to enable the growth of Arlington’s arts and culture sector. Formulate comprehensive long-term strategies specifically targeted to the planning,
development and management of artistic and cultural venues that address existing facility issues and provide a framework for future years. Consider alternative artistic and cultural hubs including arts districts, arts centers in central civic plazas and stand-alone or mobile platforms that take advantage of existing community infrastructure. Build on the success of Arlington’s smart growth planning by locating art and culture venues in transit accessible locations.

2. [ RISKY BUSINESS ]
Value and reward risk-taking for innovative and impactful achievements across the artistic and cultural community. Recognize excellence and experimentation by supporting artists and arts organizations that develop and produce high-quality work. Strengthen artists and artistic and cultural organizations by increasing their capacity to attain sustainability, innovate, reach new audiences, develop skills and support livelihoods. Facilitate financial sustainability through grant and other community supported programs. Ensure that innovative programs are rewarded with available funding, while providing additional support resources to all artistic and cultural organizations and artists.

3. [ CROSS-POLLINATE ]
Encourage partnership and collaboration across art forms, sectors and the community to grow and deliver strategic investments in the arts and culture ecosystem. Construct networks and partnerships to create fertile ground for Arlington’s arts and culture sector. Form partnerships that develop platforms, funding streams and networks to enable the risk-taking and innovation that is necessary for a successful and sustainable arts and culture ecosystem. Inspire artists, arts organizations, businesses, community and education institutions, social service organizations and County staff to support and celebrate creative excellence. Define, document and encourage sustainable private investment in arts and culture.
GOAL THREE: USE ARTS AND CULTURE TO FACILITATE ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING, HEALTH, DISCOVERY AND CREATIVITY.

Learning in and through the arts helps foster creativity, curiosity, healing and compassion. Thoughtful practice in the arts provides skills that people carry with them for a lifetime; arts education and arts therapy have the power to transform lives and make them more meaningful. In addition, arts participation and arts education promote improved cognitive, social and behavioral outcomes across the human lifespan in early childhood, in adolescence and young adulthood and in later years. Neuroscience research has shown strong connections between arts learning and improved cognitive development. Participation in the arts and creative activities contributes to school readiness in early childhood and positive academic and social outcomes for at-risk teenagers. Participating in art therapy improves cognitive functioning and enhances quality of life for older adults and veterans readjusting to life outside the military or coping with service-related injuries.

STRATEGIES:

1. **[AGELESS INCLUSION]**
   Create opportunities for participatory artistic and cultural experiences for all age groups throughout Arlington’s network of neighborhoods. Create opportunities for artistic and cultural activities to be integrated in schools, hospitals, senior centers, libraries, parks and other community and public spaces. Make the delivery of accessible arts experiences a high priority for Arlington artists, organizations and institutions.
2. **[SCHOOL DAYS]**

Encourage partnerships between artists, artistic and cultural organizations and schools to develop new curricular approaches that will enrich academic performance and student growth. Cultivate learning and artistic development for all students and teachers by promoting, encouraging and supporting arts and culture as an integral part of education and lifelong learning for residents and visitors. Support and complement the role of arts and culture in language arts, social studies, special education and STEM disciplines and across the formal and informal (school and out-of-school) education spectrum. Partner with schools and other organizations to provide experiential learning opportunities using arts and culture.

3. **[MULTI-CULTURE CULTURE]**

Offer traditional and contemporary artistic and cultural opportunities to foster cross cultural engagement and understanding. Incentivize organizations and individual artists to use the arts and cultural activities in innovative ways to connect different parts of the community. Present global contemporary arts programming to build cultural understanding, mutual respect and strong communities for Arlington’s new populations.

4. **[TOMORROW’S TALENT]**

Promote arts and culture as critical components of 21st century workforce skills.

Enhance Arlington’s creative workforce and economy by using arts activities to teach and advance important skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, innovation, global awareness and technological literacy. Make Arlington an attractive community that appeals to creative workers.
GOAL FOUR: INCREASE THE VISIBILITY, AWARENESS AND PROMINENCE OF ARTISTS, ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS IN ARLINGTON.

Arlington’s reputation as a community that values and supports arts and culture is fundamental to its achievement of economic and social goals. Community arts and culture are sustainable assets that aid in the attraction and retention of businesses, workforce, residents, visitors and investment. Promoting and endorsing the talents of Arlington’s artists and organizations, the rich traditions of vibrant heritage organizations, the offerings of professionally curated arts programming and the contributions of arts patrons and supporters, reinforce a sense of place and help define the distinctive and authentic character of the Arlington community.

Arlington Cultural Affairs assisted the National Chamber Ensemble engage a professional graphic designer and managed the re-design of their logo and suite of collateral to create a more cohesive branding identity for this acclaimed ensemble.
STRATEGIES:

1. **[PUBLIC PASSION]**
   
   **Create sustainable public will, desire and support for arts and culture.** Explicitly embrace the public value of the arts and culture as a way of improving lives and creating a stronger community. Increase the community’s awareness of the history, rationale and context of Arlington’s investment in the arts and culture. Articulate the public value of this support and the belief in public/private partnerships.

2. **[KEEP IT LOCAL]**
   
   **Showcase and cultivate local artistic and cultural talent.** Use a variety of communication platforms, including social and digital media, to promote opportunities to experience, celebrate and participate in Arlington arts and culture. Enhance the programming of Arlington artistic and cultural activities and events to build larger and more diverse audiences. Help artists and arts organizations in Arlington leverage their assets to achieve the goals and strategies of this plan. Build the marketing and outreach capacities of local arts organizations to become essential assets of Arlington’s art and culture brand and identity. Promote Arlington’s diverse and creative artistic and cultural experiences as unique community assets that make Arlington a desirable place to visit and live.

3. **[SHINE]**
   
   **Generate brand awareness of Arlington’s artistic and cultural activities and accomplishments.** Formulate and implement a brand strategy for Arlington arts and culture that incorporates identity, key attributes, messaging, demographics and audience development. Recognize, develop and promote Arlington’s regional arts presence by partnering with organizations from the Metro D.C. area. Make arts and culture an integral component of the Arlington brand.
GOAL FIVE:
ESTABLISH PUBLIC SPACES THAT OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR APPRECIATING AND INTERACTING WITH ARTS AND CULTURE TO ENHANCE THE DAILY EXPERIENCE.

Artistic and cultural strategies can be used in a community to help reveal and enhance its unique sense of place – that is the meaning, value, character and form of its physical places. Using artistic and cultural programming as a placemaking tool to understand Arlington’s historical, cultural, economic and social contexts can lead to the creation of appealing and vibrant public spaces. These spaces, which comprise the gathering places within a community—its streets, sidewalks, parks, buildings and other public spaces—represent opportunities for using Arlington’s artistic and cultural communities to invite greater interaction between people and foster healthier, social and economically viable communities.

STRATEGIES:

1. [ EVERYONE WINS ]
Deliver civic and publicly accessible spaces that generate economic, environmental and social sustainability benefits for the community. Consider designing civic places as High Performance Public Spaces (HPPS), defined as “publicly accessible spaces that generate economic, environmental and social sustainability benefits for the local community.” Consult criteria that have been established to assist in the development of such spaces which include parks, trails, squares, natural areas and plazas.

2. [ CIVIC FUN ]
Use artistic and cultural programming to activate public spaces. Ensure that temporary artistic expression and permanent public art are integral to Arlington’s planning efforts and enhance the livability, walkability and vibrancy of the Arlington community, its neighborhoods and built environment. Geographically

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Barth, David, University of Florida Criteria for High Performance Public Spaces, 2013

Placeholder for Footnote
disperse public art throughout Arlington so that art is woven into the fabric of Arlington’s neighborhoods. Support artistic activities in public spaces, e.g. farmers’ markets. Use artistic and cultural programming to provide education about Arlington’s historical and cultural contexts by increasing opportunities for participation in community life through festivals, events and performances, interactive classes and workshops and a variety of other activities.

3. [ ART EVERYWHERE ]
Incorporate public art in the design, planning, and building of the public realm. Ensure that the process of creating public art is fully integrated into the design of public spaces. Make artists integral members of planning and design teams from the outset of the process so that their collaboration with other designers, such as architects and engineers, can enhance all components of the project. Promote a simple and inclusive process to facilitate art and design in public places. Form a resource network for developers and others interested in commissioning public art.
Arlington Arts Organizations
Alma Boliviana
ACW Dances
Arlington Artists Alliance
Arlington Arts Center
Arlington Philharmonic Association
Arlington Players, The
BalletNova Center for Dance
Dance Asia
Dominion Stage
Educational Theatre Company
Encore Stage & Studio
Festival Argentino
First Draft at the Rose Theatre Co.
Jane Franklin Dance
Los Quetzales
Metropolitan Chorus, The
National Chamber Ensemble, Inc., The
Old Dominion Cloggers
Opera NOVA
Prio Bangla, Inc.
Requiebros Spanish Dance Group
Shristee Nrittyangon, Inc.
Signature Theatre, Inc.
Teatro de la Luna
UrbanArias, Inc.
Washington Shakespeare Company

Arlington Cultural Affairs Division
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Jim Byers
Hal Crawford
Kathy Glennon
Joan Lynch
Michelle Isabelle-Stark
Josh Stoltzfus

Partnerships
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Matt Hussmann, Clarendon Alliance

Arlington Arts and Culture Steering Group
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Carol Cadby, Arts Commission
Lucia deCorde, Rosslyn BID
Stephanie Fedor, Arlington Arts Center
Pam Farrell, Arlington County Public Schools
Angela Fox, Crystal City BID
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