



Arts & Culture Assessment For Summit County

supported by



FINAL REPORT

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Introduction

The Arts and Culture Assessment for Summit County (“ACASC”) was conducted from February - September 2013. It was conducted by The Osgood Group, with consultancy team members Patricia Cirillo, PhD, Cypress Research Group and Amy Morgenstern, Main Stream Enterprises, Inc. The project received oversight from a steering committee of 19 community leaders from Summit County, public, private and nonprofit entities including: arts and culture, economic development, city and county government, industry, higher education, K-12 education. They include:

Mark Auburn, Greater Akron Musical Association
Leslie Parker Barnes, YEPAW
Fred Bidwell, Fred and Ruth Bidwell Foundation
Bob Bonchack, Huntington Bank
Sally Childs, Akron Public Schools
Barbara Feld, Tuesday Musical Association (retired during project)
Steve Felix, Akron Film+Pixel
H. Leigh Gerstenberger, FirstMerit Bank
Suzie Graham, Downtown Akron Partnership
Candace Campbell Jackson, University of Akron
Sandy Kreisman, Akron Area Arts Alliance
Dave Lieberth, The Lieberth Consulting Group
Christine Mayer, GAR Foundation
Gregg Mervis, John S. Knight Center/Akron-Summit Convention and Visitors Bureau
Carol Murphy, University Park Alliance (now with Akron Art Museum)
Howard Parr, Akron Civic Theatre
Adele Dorfner Roth, City of Akron, Mayor Plusquellic’s Office
Jill Skapin, Summit County, Executive Pry’s Office
Jennifer Thomas, Knight Foundation



“Arts and culture does matter. It helps us attract the appropriate talent. It’s important that we have diversity. It makes quality of life better and improves the perception of the community. Even though I’m not an arts lover myself, I think it’s important for the broader community.”

Key Stakeholder

Introduction (continued)

Background: The impetus behind this effort is directly related to one of the findings of the effort itself: quality of life for an area’s residents is deeply impacted by the vibrancy and breadth of the arts and cultural offerings of that region. The vibrancy and breadth of the arts and cultural offerings in a region depend on the financial health and resiliency of the group of organizations which provide those offerings.

The organizations that provide the arts and cultural offerings to Summit County residents make up a sector. Just like any other sector, as an economic ecosystem it is comprised of related organizations that are inexorably tied to both their customers and their suppliers. In this effort, we examined the arts and cultural sector serving Summit County from the many angles which impact its ability to serve the community as a whole: its financial health and stability; its connection to the community (its customers); and how it fits into Summit County’s future.

Methods: This overall effort was comprised of several components, all designed to capture input on the sector from various vantage points. Those components were:

- A review of the financial status and trends of Summit County’s larger non-profit arts and cultural organizations, and, a *snapshot* of the most current picture of the financial health of the arts and cultural community.
- An online and telephone survey of 800 randomly chosen Summit County residents;
- An online survey of 131 artists and arts and cultural organizations in Summit County;
- Community Roundtables (4) with key community groups;
- Executive interviews of 30 community leaders from other for-profit and non-profit organizations and sectors.
- Executive interviews (11) with community leaders and experts from 7 other communities that have undergone a revitalization effort of their arts and cultural sectors.

The detailed findings from the quantitative surveys can be found under separate cover. The ASASC steering committee reviewed all findings from all efforts described above. Herein we provide a summary of what was learned in this process.



"I only want to reinforce that there must be a more intelligent approach to marketing and development, to those who can't write a check today. Over time, they should become contributors."

Key Stakeholder

Summary Findings

1. Mostly, Summit County residents are “satisfied” with their “arts and culture life.” Most people who participate in arts and culture get what they need from Summit County and Cuyahoga County (or elsewhere), and don’t mind traveling to satisfy their desires. But if one looks at Summit County specifically, only a minority feel that Summit County has the quality and/or “what I want.” If other groups are somewhat apathetic about Summit County arts and culture, African Americans and young people are not. Both groups would like more that is related to their experiences.

2. There’s a disconnect between arts and culture sector perceptions of itself and the public’s perception.

63% of arts and culture see the sector as somewhat strong and vital vs. key stakeholders who mostly see it as challenged from a funding standpoint. Providers of arts and culture see offerings as deep and varied, but the market doesn’t necessarily agree. African Americans don’t see what’s there for them, and many potential consumers don’t participate, both high income “power types” and the population at large. Outsiders to the sector see it as disorganized and not unified -- that is, not a sector but rather distinct organizations. The sector does not seem to have great awareness of its own ‘big picture.’

3. As a sector, arts and culture organizations are not on strong financial ground and don’t regularly analyze their business. There has been a 22% decline in revenue with only 0.9% population decline (2007 vs. 2011), and 19 of 31 organizations had “negative growth” during that time period. Months of cash for the period has declined from 3.7 to 3.1 . . . at the bottom of the Nonprofit Finance Fund “safe zone” (a best practice guideline for nonprofits). Basic stats aren’t tracked, and there’s virtually no participation in the Cultural Data Project, a tool for helping arts nonprofits to be strategic about their financial and service data. Only a third of the organizations review customer data regularly.

4. Fund development (at the highest level) is a significant opportunity for the sector. The organizations see this as their weakest area of internal capacity. This is confirmed by stakeholders. Many key stakeholders don’t know leaders of the major arts institutions, and report that arts and culture organizations only approach them when they need money. There is a lack of long-term relationship building, which also manifests itself in low board participation from “power players” in town. Typical “loyalty indicators” such as memberships and subscriptions are also weak.



“Does having a strong arts and cultural community matter? Sure it does. It all contributes to the culture of the community and our ability to attract and retain young talent.”

Key Stakeholder

Summary Findings (continued)

5. Communication with consumers is an opportunity.

Many consumers complain that they don't know what's going on in the area. Media habits are highly fractured; there is no identified “one source” for information about the arts and culture scene. In general, consumers report low awareness of the things they like (whatever those may be). This could partially explain lower levels of participation in Summit County.

6. There is no real arts and culture “sector” in Summit

County. This sentiment came through most clearly among key stakeholders who perceive that there are “only individual institutions”; they do not see signs of collaboration or leadership across institutions. Additionally, we found that there are 604 arts and culture organizations or individual artists in Summit County. However, only 80 of them, at best, are involved with the Akron Area Arts Alliance. In summary, there does not seem to be a collective voice nor a platform for it. It is important to note that AAAA is perceived as a valuable community asset, just not the representative of the full arts and culture community.

7. Support for new funding initiatives could be cultivated, but will take leadership and time. Arts and culture is low on the list of public priorities, although most recognize that a vibrant arts and culture sector is necessary for high quality of life, and is necessary to attract/retain businesses. Current “funders of significance” could be supportive of a well-conceived plan to strengthen the sector; however, they are not willing to throw more money at individual institutions. Initiatives that have been undertaken in other communities (e.g., United Arts Fund, an arts dedicated levy, a shared messaging campaign) could be progressive steps for Summit County, but not yet. A United Arts Fund requires a strong corporate network of support, which does not currently exist in Summit County, and there has been no case made for the necessary support to pass a levy. It is also important to note that comments suggest that a levy in Summit County that is specific (e.g., a downtown cultural district) is much more likely to succeed than a levy for general operating support.



"I think they need more focus on what the arts are to the residents."

Key Stakeholder

Summary Findings (continued)

8. Leadership strength is lacking (but critical for change). Substantive change rarely happens solely from the bottom up – it takes a few strong leaders to push things forward. Summit County’s “powerful people” are not engaged in arts and culture (relative to other sectors), and arts and culture institutional leadership is perceived as lacking. There is no “collective voice of the sector” and no organization in place right now that can assume leadership of any sector initiatives.

9. There is no perceived “problem” to be solved and therefore no urgency to change anything. Most consumers of arts and culture are satisfied with the status quo in Summit County and are not concerned if some institutions go away. Nor do they indicate that they think it is likely that Summit County arts organizations are in imminent danger of going away. Many arts consumers often travel to Cuyahoga County for some of their arts experiences. On the arts organization side, beyond a desire for more funding, many arts and culture institutions themselves believe that they are meeting all of their audience’s needs and are ‘healthy enough’ financially.



Financial Health of The Arts & Cultural Sector

We captured financial performance data from the non-profit arts community via their tax filings (990 filings). Larger organizations are required to file a 'long form' and smaller ones a 'short form.' Both contain only basic financial information, and lack of important detail for financial health analysis. Therefore, it is difficult to get a true and comprehensive picture of the financial health of any non-profit sector via the 990 information alone.

Because of this problem, in 2004, the Pew Charitable Trust began a project designed to improve the availability of financial data from the non-profit arts community. The 'Cultural Data Project' (the CDP) developed a standardized on-line form where organizations can enter financial, programmatic and operational data. The data is then available in raw form for analysis. This program is voluntary for organizations, but when a high proportion of organizations in a community participate, a very rich information and data picture can be drawn which helps guide initiatives to strengthen the sector. Unfortunately, only 4 Summit County arts and cultural organizations (out of an estimated 60 possible) participated in Ohio's version of the CDP. We therefore could not rely on that data for our analysis, and instead needed to turn to the less useful 990 data.

As a result, our first recommendation from this effort is for the arts and cultural sector to organize around vastly increasing the participation rate in the annual CDP process. Other regions' arts and cultural sectors are actively participating and are leveraging the power of the information the CDP analysis brings them. The Summit County arts and cultural sector is put at a disadvantage simply by not having access to this information.

We reviewed the organizations' 990 data in two ways:

- Trends from 2007 to 2011. For this analysis trend data (five years' worth of data) was available for only 31 organizations.
- Snapshot of 2011 financial data. For this analysis, we had 990 data for a larger set of organizations: 74.

Financial Trends: Looking at the financial data for any non-profit sector from 2007 until 2011 is not terribly prescriptive because that period wraps around the financial melt-down of 2008. That said, it appears that, as a whole, the arts and cultural sector of Summit County had a very difficult 5 year period ending in 2007:

- The total revenues of the 31 organizations examined (which comprise the subset of the larger arts and cultural organizations in Summit County), decreased by 22% (\$33,151,818 to \$25,972,643).



Financial Health of The Arts & Cultural Sector (continued)

Financial Trends (continued):

- Most of the organizations showed great volatility in their annual revenues. Almost all experienced at least one year where there was a decrease in revenues of at least 25%. In other words, almost all of the organizations managed through a year where great operational adjustments were required to respond to revenue shortfalls.
- Through the 5 year period, 19 organizations experienced an overall negative growth in revenues. Twelve experienced positive growth in revenues. For the most part, that five-year growth has been modest (12% or less for 7 of the 12 growing organizations). Five have seen healthy growth in the past five years (more than 15% increase in revenues).
- The physical assets (land, buildings and equipment) have increased in value (+11%) during that 5 year period, however (from \$66,981,175 to \$74,491,240). This was heavily driven by a \$38M capital investment for one organization (Akron Art Museum). That said, it is notable that there is considerably-sized investment in the arts and cultural community in Summit County.
- Months of cash on hand decreased from 3.7 to 3.1 during this period, placing Summit County in line with arts organizations in general, and at the bottom of the Nonprofit Finance Fund “safe zone.” Many organizations at the bottom of the “safe zone” struggle with liquidity issues.

2011 Snapshot:

- Of the 74 organizations from which we had 2011 financial data, 10 were organizations with annual revenues of \$1M or more; 9 had annual revenues of \$500K-\$1M; 28 had annual revenues of \$100K-\$500K) and the remaining 27 had annual revenues of \$100K or less. This distribution of organizational sizes is typical of arts and cultural sectors across the country.
- Revenues for these organizations, as a group, was distributed fairly evenly among “contributions/grants” (42% of total aggregated revenues) and “program revenue” (44%). Investment income was very small (4%) and ‘other’ revenue was also relatively small (10%).
- These 74 organizations hold a total of \$133,069,921 in assets. Just about half (\$67,177,905) are unrestricted assets. Most of the remaining are permanently restricted assets (\$44,596,590). Another \$21,296,426 are held as temporarily restricted assets.



“Do we have enough cool restaurants? No. Local music venues? No. Used to have the ‘Akron sound.’ There used to be places to play. There really isn’t now.”

Key Stakeholder

Summit County Residents’ Demand for Arts and Cultural Offerings

Through a telephone and online survey of a representative sample of Summit County residents, we learned about how broadly and deeply residents are participating in and are engaged with the arts and cultural community. In addition, we conducted a series of four Community Roundtable sessions to directly hear the voices of community members.

- Almost half (44%) of residents place an arts and cultural activity as ‘one of their favorite things to do in their spare time.’ Thirty-three percent place arts and cultural activities as the ‘highest priority use of their spare time.’
 - The majority of Summit County residents (75%) have participated in at least one arts and cultural activity within the previous year.
- While the demand for arts and cultural experiences by Summit County residents is significant, **less than half of that demand is met within Summit County.** That is, more than half (54%) of the experiences reported were *outside of Summit County*. For a majority of the time, Summit County residents leave the county for: live performances for children, art galleries, live theater performances, art museums, historical sites/natural history museums, and science museums. In contrast, a majority of experiences which were fulfilled *in* Summit County were: state/national parks, ethnic/cultural festivals, live dance performances, live musical performances, nature center/zoos, and arts and craft fairs/festivals.
- Only 14% of Summit County residents reported that all of their arts and cultural experiences were done inside of Summit County. For 11%, none of their arts and cultural experiences were in Summit County.
- Barriers to participation:
 - **Affordability was a barrier** for about one-in-five Summit County residents.
 - **Lack of awareness** of specific events **was a barrier.**
 - **Lack of interest** in specific programming or events **was a barrier.**
 - **Confusion or uncertainty** about arts and cultural experiences’ locations **was not a barrier.**
 - **Concerns over the safety** of those locations **was not a barrier.**
- In addition to low participation levels in Summit County arts and cultural experiences (half of the demand is fulfilled outside of the county), the level of *engagement* with arts and cultural organizations was relatively low (compared to what we see in other regions’ sectors). Organizations rarely had high numbers of members or subscription-holders.
In general, there appears to be a mismatch both in terms of expected quality and desired programming for Summit County residents. Only one-third agreed that “Summit County has *the types* of arts and cultural activities I am most interested in.” And only one-third agreed that “Summit County has the *level of quality* of arts and cultural activities I am interested in.”



"You just can't kill it (arts and culture). It's a part of humanity. You may lose an institution, but something else would come up."

Key Stakeholder

Summit County Residents' Demand for Arts and Cultural Offerings (continued)

Through both the survey and the community roundtable sessions we learned that there are two large **"gaps" in programming** in Summit County.

- **One is a musical genre: jazz.** Residents lamented the loss of what was once a very vibrant jazz community which has now virtually disappeared. Jazz fans now largely have to travel outside of the county to meet their needs.
- **The other relates to a demographic group: "young people."** We found that younger residents have to travel outside of the county more often (when they have the means), and others expressed the lack of a 'vibrant night life' for young adults in Summit County. This was expressed in economic terms by local business leaders who noted that they routinely **bring young recruits to 'night life' areas outside of Summit County** in their recruiting efforts. They see this gap as a problem for their businesses. Summit County too-often fails to provide that key quality of life component.
- Summit County residents who are interested in pursuing local arts and cultural experiences face **very fragmented sources of information about upcoming events**. No source is used by a majority of residents, yet a large number of different sources were cited. That means that residents have to do a lot of homework to determine what there is to do in the coming weeks in terms of art and culture. Related: arts and cultural organizations must constantly face difficult decisions about where to advertise their events. No source reaches a majority of residents, which likely forces many to **spread their thin advertising budgets across too many sources**.
- When asked the reason for 'why' a community should have a vibrant and healthy arts and cultural community, the most common reason, by far, was **'to improve the quality of life for citizens'** (56%). **A much less widely held belief is that arts and culture are an economic engine** (creates jobs, 4%; brings money into the county, 15%; makes it easier to keep talented workers, 8%; makes the area more attractive to tourists, 13%).



“We support their fundraising, but, at some point in time people have to come see your stuff.... Everybody has to be relevant to SOMEBODY.”

Key Stakeholder

The Arts and Cultural Sector in Summit County: Its Capacity to Serve the Market

In our survey of arts and cultural organizations and through our other data collection efforts, we learned a great deal about how the sector believes it fits into the larger community of Summit County.

The arts and cultural sector in Summit County is indeed diverse and broad. There **does not seem to be significant gaps in offerings** – in either genres (music, dance, theater, visual art) or customer focus (adults, children, seniors, etc.).

However, **the arts and cultural sector in Summit County is not well-organized.** There is no one membership ‘group’ which a large portion of arts and cultural community members are a part of. We were able to find – through an exhaustive search of all arts and cultural organizations and individual artists/groups – a total of 604 organizations/people (again, supporting the point that the sector is broad and diverse). But the recognized membership organization in Summit County represents, at best, 80 of those organizations. **There is significant opportunity to bring the arts and cultural community together into a unified force, a critical first step in any effort to ensure the financial sustainability of the sector.** It needs to be “seen” as a sector – to act like one – in order to receive the benefit of attention and consideration as a sector. This was confirmed in all interviews with experts/leaders in other regions that had made significant change happen. **Organization and collective action must precede change.**

The 174 organizations we interviewed employed 911 full-time employees, 949 part-time employees and 650 full- and part-time contractors. A total of 4,906 volunteers are working with these 174 organizations (note that some people could volunteer in more than one organization).

On the whole, **the sector has a positive outlook about its strength and sustainability.** Sixty-three percent believe that the arts and cultural community in Summit County is “strong...some organizations are thriving and are sustainable” and 8% believe that the sector is “very strong – most organizations are thriving and sustainable.” In sum, **there is not a strong call-to-action** within the arts and cultural sector. As a group, **they do not see a problem** which needs to be addressed, which **represents a challenge to group action.** **This perspective was not shared by business and community leaders,** who, to varying degrees, see the sector as challenged.

Members of the sector also feel that the needs of the community are being met: 29% believe that the offerings in Summit County are “very rich” and another 58% feel it is “somewhat rich.” **This is in contrast to what the community says and does** – only one-third felt that they found what they needed locally and almost all go outside of the county to get at least some of their arts and cultural needs met.



“The real truth is everyone is afraid of mergers – they will lose their jobs. Fear and self-preservation rules and keeps people from working together.”

Key Stakeholder

The Arts and Cultural Sector in Summit County: Its Capacity to Serve the Market (continued)

Getting better: The arts and cultural sector members did see a need for various capacity building efforts within their own organizations. **Most saw a need for organizational improvement** in terms of: finance/accounting/business analysis, marketing/communications, HR/professional development, and especially fundraising/development.

Many also saw a need **for better quality space and/or more paid staff** (lower reliance on volunteers), and expanded menus of program offerings.

For the most part, they felt **strong in terms of the delivery of their arts and cultural services and/or products.**

Through examination of the discussions with and surveys of arts organizations, we see another **capacity building issue: market segmentation, targeting and positioning.** The organizations struggled with being able to articulate “who” their customer was. Many felt that ‘everyone’ is their potential customer – which could be true but doesn’t really demonstrate a keen understanding of who is most using services or products. The lack of healthy understanding of the customer base was wide-spread in this sector and should be included as a key capacity-building need sector wide.

Collaboration: Getting to know you. The non-arts community leaders we interviewed felt a lack of connection *within* the arts and culture community and a lack of connection between their own sector or organizations and the arts and cultural community. The arts and cultural community is perceived as being very insulated; and, although 54% of the organizations reported some type of collaboration with other organizations, **many arts and culture organizations are perceived by the outside world as being insular.** This likely inhibits the sector’s ability to be tuned in with the market and compromises the sector’s and any individual organization’s ability to be sustainable.

Arts and cultural organizations did report a lot of interest in collaborating with other sector members, especially when it comes to: marketing/communications/PR, electronic marketing and social media management, programming and events, website development/maintenance and accounting/finance/bookkeeping. We urge the members of the sector to aggressively seek these opportunities. Not only will they help develop tighter relationships among organizations within the sector, they will also very likely lead to an improved product and service delivery to the market and, very importantly, signal to other sectors’ leaders that the arts and cultural community is seeking ways to be good stewards of the philanthropic funds it receives and continuously seeks opportunities to increase efficiency and cut costs.



"If you can solve the disconnect from the business community, you've solved a lot."

Key Stakeholder

The Arts and Cultural Sector in Summit County: Its Capacity to Serve the Market (continued)

Governance: On average, there are 15 board members for each non-profit arts organization. For one-third of the non-profit organizations, their board is a 'working board.' For one in five organizations, the board is strictly a 'governance' board. The remainder has a mix of the two.

There were some complaints of partially engaged boards, but the major issue, through the eyes of the organizations, was a lack of participation from the business community on the boards. The business community confirmed that this is true, and gave two reasons for it. First, they don't see arts and culture as being a high priority in the community. They see that their talents are needed more in the health and human services nonprofit arena. Second, they really don't know about board opportunities in the arts and cultural community. In other words, they haven't been asked.

This phenomenon is in stark contrast to what is seen in most other communities, where arts and culture boards are seen as *the* boards to be on, and the region's most powerful people – those able to garner resources - tend to be on those boards.

Data: Second only to the ability to organize, **communicating the case for support through numbers is critical**, according to surveys of other communities. Aggregated data demonstrates: 1) why arts and culture matters to Summit County's economy, which is critical to generating additional financial support; and 2) a willingness to self-examine the state of the arts and cultural community and use that information to steer the sector. Participation in the Cultural Data Project is a logical step in the right direction toward communicating what is happening, overall, to the health and welfare of the sector.

NEXT STEPS. . .

So what happens next? How can we collectively seize upon the opportunities for growth, tackle problems where we have found them, and catapult Greater Akron's art scene to a new level of vibrancy?

Clearly, a key takeaway from the study is that centralized, "backbone" leadership is needed for the Greater Akron area arts and cultural assets - to organize the sector *as a sector* (instead of a collection of disconnected organizations and artists), to distill a compelling vision about the distinctive value of our arts and culture, and to drive collective action.

Many will play a role in the creation and setting of priorities of the "backbone" and your input will be critical. In addition, here are some ways in which you can take immediate action.

If you are an arts organization, you can. . .

- Come together with your peer organizations and artists to advance the needed sector-building work.
- Reach out to business leaders to find out what you can do to serve their needs and help solve their problems.
- Report your audience / financial data through the Cultural Data Project vehicle so that the arts sector in Summit County can more easily and powerfully tell its story and command attention.
- Seek board members from the private sector and among other "unusual suspects" so that your work will benefit from a broad community perspective.
- Take advantage of technical assistance offerings that may well come out of this work -- such as workshops on analyzing financial data, segmenting and targeting your market, and building membership.
- Brace for change and embrace proactive planning efforts that will give arts organizations a strong voice in how change plays out in Akron and Summit County.
- Share your ideas and input! Engage online in the conversation about where we can go as a community to strengthen our arts. Go to www.theciviccommons.com/SummitArtsandCulture and lend your voice to the conversation today!

If you are an arts lover, you can. . .

- Patronize local arts assets and encourage your friends and family to do the same! There is much to discover right here in Greater Akron.
- Direct some of your charitable giving to arts and culture in Akron and Summit County.
- Donate your time -- seek out volunteer leadership opportunities with local arts organizations.
- Share your ideas and input! Engage online in the conversation about where we can go as a community to strengthen our arts. Go to www.theciviccommons.com/SummitArtsandCulture and lend your voice to the conversation today!

If you are on the board of an arts organization, you can. . .

- Help your organization to frame its work and its vision more broadly, with consideration of the arts as a sector and with an eye toward innovative collaboration.
- Ask hard questions to ensure that you and your board colleagues deeply understand the organization's finances and its financial sustainability.
- Look for board member training opportunities to improve your board's level of service to the organization's mission.
- Embrace change that is based on engaging audience, innovating to meet the needs of audience, reaching out to new audiences, and building ongoing support for the arts.
- Share your ideas and input! Engage online in the conversation about where we can go as a community to strengthen our arts. Go to www.theciviccommons.com/SummitArtsandCulture and lend your voice to the conversation today!