



**PICTURED:** Community members paint a crosswalk in downtown Ashtabula. The project was the product of a partnership between the Ashtabula Arts Center and several community-based programs, including youthOPPORTUNITIES, After School Discovery, Signature Health, local libraries, and city government. Photo Credit: Meeghan Humphrey

# ESSENTIALS PLAN



## ABOUT THE OAC

The Ohio Arts Council is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically. The agency provides leadership and voice for the arts to transform people and communities

## ABOUT THE ESSENTIALS PLAN

*The Essentials Plan* is a roadmap for supporting and advancing the arts in our state and builds off prior versions that were originally crafted in 2021. The agency continues to further adapt to our changing landscape, maintaining many previous goals and methodologies while adding targeted, action-ready goals able to be implemented.

### METHODOLOGY

This plan maintains the agency's continued integrated approach to strategic planning; staff continue to make constituent outreach, engagement, and active planning a regular part of operations.

The groundwork for *The Essentials Plan* stems from a major 2023 public survey involving more than 5,700 individuals from all 88 Ohio counties. To summarize, the [survey](#) found that Ohioans want their tax dollars to support the arts, that the arts matter to Ohioans, that Ohioans participate in a wide range of arts activities, that arts education remains Ohioans' top funding priority, and that Ohioans have a positive view of the state's arts offerings.

Outreach activities conducted in recent years were revisited and carefully considered as *The Essentials Plan* was finalized. For example, during the three-year *State Arts Plan 2020*, staff made more than 500 visits to every part of Ohio, visiting spaces, viewing events, talking with artists and community members, logging feedback, and sharing input. The pandemic necessitated a full pivot toward mitigating its impact on the state's arts sector, and successful components of this pivot continue today. In 2022, the agency gathered and analyzed substantial constituent input during its Equitable Grant Making Assessment Pilot Project — known as the “Equity GAP Project.” This initiative, a pilot research project in partnership with the [National Assembly of State Arts Agencies](#), examined arts funding patterns in Ohio and helped the OAC work toward its goal of making arts funding opportunities more accessible to all Ohio communities. In 2023, the agency held “arts health” conversations with individuals in 23 counties about the arts in Ohio communities; virtual policy discussions with grant applicants and panelists; direct feedback on a variety of policy-related topics from nearly 400 grantees spanning 11 funding programs; virtual focus groups with dozens of artists administrators, artists, educators, and other members of Ohio's creative sector; and interviews between elected officials, agency heads, and national and regional partners and OAC Executive Director Donna S. Collins.

In sum, constituent input remains the primary driver of every major OAC planning process — especially strategic planning — and the agency is committed to continuing this extensive outreach as future plans are drafted and finalized.

# | INVEST |

Make bold, smart investments to sustain and advance Ohio arts and culture.



**PICTURED:** Actors from [Children's Theatre Workshop](#) in Toledo perform a scene from their production of *The Emperor's Old Clothes* (Image credit: Sarah Matlow).

## OBJECTIVE A

**Secure state, federal, and other resources that support Ohio's arts and cultural sector.**

- Agency investments in the arts and culture are recognized at the state and federal levels as being both vital for Ohio and among the best in the nation.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Communicate return on investments to Ohio elected officials; invest in statewide research to learn about and analyze the impact of public funding in the arts; produce annual [National Endowment for the Arts](#) proposal to represent state's arts work.*

- Mission-driven partnerships bring additional funding opportunities with greater available resources closer to constituents.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Secure new funds for arts and culture in Ohio, including those serving diverse audiences.*

## OBJECTIVE B

### Commit public resources that directly invest in Ohio artists and organizations in an equitable, transparent, and accessible manner.

- Consistent, accessible, flexible funding is provided to help sustain the resiliency and ongoing operations of nonprofit arts sector organizations.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Provide flexible application and reporting requirements; allow grantees to use operating funds to the fullest extent of their needs within the scope of mission-critical arts support.*

- Nimble funding is provided to project-based activities, including those focused on arts education and lifelong learning.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Increase in-school arts education projects in areas with greatest identified need; ensure public investments are made directly to all 88 counties.*

- Individual artmaking and artists' career development are supported through targeted resources responsive to artists' needs.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Offer outreach to artists with disabilities.*

## OBJECTIVE C

### Streamline and improve agency grantmaking processes through regular assessment and adjustment.

- Grantmaking policies are updated biennially in direct response to board, constituent, and staff feedback.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Identify and remove racial and other biases in grantmaking practices, language, or processes; refine Individual Excellence Award review processes; formally solicit and analyze panel feedback to identify potential impediments to panel retention, recruitment, and participation, and identify other panel process improvements; position operating support as favorable goal for project support grantees.*



# | ENGAGE |

Spark authentic dialogue among constituents and the public about the unique strength and value of the arts.



**PICTURED:** More than 100 arts educators and teaching artists from across the state gather in Mansfield for Destination Arts Integration 2024. The two-day event was held at the Renaissance Theatre and featured professional development workshops, networking, arts experiences, and more. Destination Arts Integration is presented annually by the Ohio Kennedy Center Collaborative (Image credit: Andrew Paa).

## OBJECTIVE A

**Share compelling stories and data that make clear the value of the arts to Ohio communities.**

- **Constituent successes, current research, and best practices demonstrate the positive impact of the arts and creativity.**

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Produce e-newsletters, regular social media content, and other digital communications; feature content from BIPOC and rural communities; increase sharing of research, data analysis, and best practices.*

## OBJECTIVE B

### Create capacity building and professional development opportunities for individuals and organizations.

- ▶ Professional learning opportunities align with constituent needs at multiple points of career development and in many organizational roles.

■ **KEY ACTIONS:** *Feature new content from rural, BIPOC, and young voices.*

- ▶ Constituent capacity building support focuses on providing needed resources and connections.

■ **KEY ACTIONS:** *Identify and share the consultants and resources best suited to support new solutions.*

- ▶ A wide variety of constituents are convened on a regular basis to discuss trends in the arts and creativity, share best practices and research, and exchange ideas.

## OBJECTIVE C

### Provide the highest level of accessible customer service to constituents and the public.

- ▶ Ongoing staff cross-training improves communication, speeds constituent responsiveness, deepens understanding of agency policies and programs, and safeguards key operations.

■ **KEY ACTIONS:** *Improve cross-training and succession planning among OAC departments.*

- ▶ Customer service metrics are updated to accurately measure satisfaction with agency programs, services, processes, and resources.

■ **KEY ACTIONS:** *Assess/evaluate constituent satisfaction survey to determine if new questions need created to gather new or different data to be asked; make strategic staff trips to all regions of the state (as outlined in regional staff travel plans).*

# | INNOVATE |

Drive Ohio's arts community toward forward-looking and adaptable creative evolution.

## OBJECTIVE A

**Encourage innovative practices that improve the accessibility, affordability, and diversity of arts experiences.**

- Grant programs reward applicants' creative problem-solving in improving program design, accessibility, delivery, and affordability.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Analyze Final Report data for trends, lessons learned.*

- Arts-based economic development projects are supported via a flexible review process well-suited to sudden opportunities or challenges.
- Arts learning programs emphasize depth in learning experiences, flexibility in design, quality of instruction, and geographic reach.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Highlight arts education's positive transformational role in supporting social-emotional learning, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, etc.; offer increased residency funding to communities of greatest identified need; compile a complete picture of arts education activities funded/supported by the agency through analysis of Sustainability and project support grant programs.*

## OBJECTIVE B

**Maintain the agency's strategic development and use of up-to-date technology.**

- Strategic IT planning guides staff skill-building, equipment maintenance and purchasing, and data management.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Maintain website in accordance with DAS and federal directives and prepare for any transitions; update and find a possible replacement for the Percent for Art database.*



**PICTURED:** Flavor'd Flow breakdances at Scrawl, an annual mural-making festival presented by the Franklinton Arts District. In addition to mural-making, the community event also features live music performances and a breakdance battle (Image credit: Tim Evans Photography).

# | LEAD |

Play an active leadership role in ensuring equity and resilience in Ohio's arts and cultural sector.

## OBJECTIVE A

**Develop all agency investments, communications, partnerships, and activities with diversity, equity, and inclusion at the forefront of decision-making and prioritization.**

- Programs and policies deliver increased support toward the goal of promoting cultural equity.

**KEY ACTIONS:** Review agency policy/procedure/practices documents and communications protocols; implement best up-to-date practices for accessibility across agency communications.

- The leadership role of the arts in driving positive change is emphasized and amplified.

**KEY ACTIONS:** Increase the number of constituent groups and communities including BIPOC, people with disabilities, older adults, Appalachian and rural, lower income, LGBTQ+, veterans, justice-impacted citizens, and emerging leaders in agency activities, events, panels, communications, etc.

- Ohio's cultural sector both contributes to and increasingly adopts a posture of listening to and learning from BIPOC and rural voices and perspectives.

**KEY ACTIONS:** Engage in all-staff cultural equity training.

**EEO STRATEGIC PLAN:** Through the State of Ohio's equity agenda, state agencies are tasked with creating EEO strategic plans. As leaders in Ohio's creative sector, work in this area, including opportunity, access, and accessibility is organic to the Ohio Arts Council's mission, vision, and values. Learn more about the OAC's efforts in the agency's [EEO Plan 2024-2026](#).



**PICTURED:** The [Bluecoats Drum and Bugle Corps](#) performs at Innovations in Brass, one of the largest drum and bugle shows in the United States. Located in Stark County, the highly decorated ensemble is a Northeast Ohio nonprofit organization dedicated to providing performing arts experiences for young people (Image credit: Bluecoats Drum and Bugle Corps).



## OBJECTIVE B

### Develop and leverage mission-driven relationships, strategic partnerships, and collaborations.

- ▶ Partnerships are formed with local, state, regional, and national organizations to improve the efficiency, reach, and impact of the arts and arts education.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Maintain statewide teaching artist roster; expand folk and traditional arts partnerships; maintain robust national arts sector partnerships.*

- ▶ Cross-promotional efforts position the arts at the center of Ohio tourism and development efforts.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Maintain key collaborations with TourismOhio; maintain ArtsinOhio.com partnership with a focus on strengthening CVB participation and events throughout Ohio.*

- ▶ Arts and arts education policy development is informed by ongoing open communication among state arts, education, and arts education leaders.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Lend staff expertise to Collaborative for Arts Education in Ohio, Statewide Creative Conversations, Blurred Borders sessions, and other statewide and national partner collaborations; update the Ohio Arts Education Data Dashboard and promote the data-tool as a resource for school leaders, parents, policymakers, etc.*

## OBJECTIVE C

### Maintain agency visibility, vitality, and key assets.

- ▶ Flagship agency events and materials are evaluated regularly to maximize vitality and positive impact.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Tailor Poetry Out Loud activities to drive participation and success.*

- ▶ Strategic planning integrates ongoing, deliberate reflection to remain vital and flexible in accommodating new opportunities and challenges.

**KEY ACTIONS:** *Formalize system of using quarterly on- and off-ramps for future agency strategic planning Actions; create a system where teams add and subtract Actions mid-cycle so plan remains fresh and relevant.*

# | ONGOING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES |

Items with continuing long-term importance for the agency will remain active in this Plan.

## INVEST

Support of locally driven and authentic creative place-making activities; development of interactive online mapping to better document staff field work and other data.

## INNOVATE

Updating existing directories and other online tools to maximize accessibility; development of location-based tools (e.g. mobile apps) designed to showcase constituent activities and provide data on arts attractions/events.

## ENGAGE

Development and maintenance of a network of journalists and professional arts marketers; targeted plan for staff and board visits to Ohio communities to gather feedback and success stories from local artists, educators, and arts administrators.

## LEAD

Further development of administrative fellowship and internships opportunities to emerging arts leaders; provision of expertise, services, counsel, resources, etc. to elected officials and other collaborators as appropriate.



**PICTURED:** Concert-goers attend the [Nelsonville Music Festival](#) in Southeast Ohio. The multi-day festival, which attracts local, regional, and national acts, is produced by [Stuart's Opera House](#) and serves as a fundraiser for the organization's arts education programming (Image credit: Nelsonville Music Festival).

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