Ohioans, Colleagues, and Friends,

In recent months, the pandemic, racial inequality, social unrest, and the resulting challenges to our economy have come together as a perfect storm. At the Ohio Arts Council, we’ve been considering how best to weather this storm—how to make the many new changes we must make, while advancing the work we’ve already begun. The OAC’s Essentials Plan—a strategic plan for the coming 18 months—lays out for us a way forward through our four pillars: Invest – public funds invested in the arts for you and your community; Engage – supporting artists and presenters in providing the arts; Innovate – creating and delivering the arts in ways we had not imagined just six months ago; and Lead – leadership by you, the OAC Board and staff, and the public on behalf of the arts.

Despite today’s challenges, we must always, always acknowledge what is possible, what is good, and what is meaningful. We must remember that the sun will shine and have faith that we will recover. We know that times are hard for many of our colleagues. We understand the unknowns of the future are sometimes nearly debilitating. But we also know that when we work together the arts are stronger. We must also recognize the support and funding from Governor DeWine and the Ohio Legislature. Without these funds and this continued support we could not be as strong and resilient on behalf of the arts.

We have been in communication with so many of you - our grantees and arts supporters - and our calls, emails, and Zoom meetings have been so refreshing. Thank you for sharing your optimistic outlooks, your ideas for collaboration, your eagerness to share your stories, and—as is nearly always the case with arts folks—your ability to find hope, to pivot to new revenue models, to share back-of-house-everything to save money, and so much more.

Lastly, we thank you for sharing the communications you have had with elected officials about public funding for the arts. You are the best arts advocates because you have authentic stories to tell—and they bear repeating. Your genuine voices and your positive, forward-thinking attitudes foster this exchange of information and ideas. Being solutions-oriented produces cooperation and collaboration.

This Essentials Plan positions the Ohio Arts Council to remain relevant, responsive, and nimble as the state’s artists and arts organizations face new and unexpected challenges to their stability, resiliency, and resolve. Thank you for reading – we hope our goals support yours, we hope you see yourself and your work in these pages, and we hope you’ll join us as we each do our part to lift one another up using the arts and culture. The arts are always stronger when we work together!

Warmly,

Geraldine B. Warner
Chair

Donna S. Collins
Executive Director
MISSION

The Ohio Arts Council is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically.

VISION

Providing leadership and voice for the arts to transform people and communities.
**INVEST**

Make bold, smart investments to help stabilize Ohio arts and culture.

**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 elected officials; invest in statewide research on impact of public arts funding.

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

  **KEY ACTIONS:** Secure new funds for Ohio artists and organizations, including those serving diverse audiences; seek local partners.
**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, short-term funding is provided to project-based activities, including those focused on arts education and lifelong learning.

  **Key Actions:** Revisit project support proposals seeking new temporary projects with short-term impact; tailor special funding opportunities to different arts genres; increase in-school arts education projects in areas with greatest identified need; ensure public investments are made directly to all 88 counties.

- Individual art-making and artists’ career development are supported through responsive funding and targeted resources.

  **Key Actions:** Create micro-grants to help artists adapt skills and produce new virtual programming; offer outreach to artists with disabilities; offer teaching artist training geared at virtual instruction.

**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; streamline review processes to take advantage of virtual review environment.
Spark authentic dialogue among constituents and the public about the unique strength and value of the arts.

**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 impact of the arts and creativity.

  **KEY ACTIONS:** Produce e-newsletters and regular social media content; feature content from BIPOC and rural communities; increase sharing of research, data analysis, 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:** Highlight virtual programming, accessibility at the OAC’s Riffe Gallery; highlight examples of programming adaptations that reach audiences during pandemic restrictions in ways beyond going all-online; feature new content from rural, BIPOC, and young voices.

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

  **KEY ACTIONS:** Fund capacity building assistance to help organizations pivot to online programming; 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.

  **KEY ACTIONS:** Adapt Arts Impact Ohio conference to changing large gathering environment; convene virtual groups from various geographic regions/genres to share successes, build/maintain connections.
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:** Retool existing customer service practices/expectations for the possibility of a long-term teleworking environment.
INNOVATE

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

**OBJECTIVE A**

Encourage experimentation and risk-taking designed to 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:** Create rapid-response micro-grants for grantees unexpected needs; 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.
  
  **KEY ACTIONS:** Administer AIR Institute programming to connect community members across sectors; connect constituents to training in crisis communication, public health, disaster preparedness, etc.

- Arts learning programs emphasize depth in learning experiences, flexibility in design, quality of instruction, and geographic reach.
  
  **KEY ACTIONS:** Highlight arts education’s critical role in supporting social-emotional learning; adapt in-school residency programs to the flexible educational models now in use across Ohio; offer increased residency funding to communities of greatest identified need; demonstrate impact of the agency’s arts learning investments.

**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 with timely and relevant updates; ensure resources for staff to deliver excellent customer service during indefinite teleworking period.
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:** Revise/update Building Cultural Diversity program to focus impact; broaden Capacity Building program to specifically address diversity, cultural equity training; review agency policy documents and communications protocols.

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

  **KEY ACTIONS:** Increase the number of BIPOC and rural voices in agency activities, events, panels, communications, etc., including emerging leaders; use OAC Riffe Gallery to amplify BIPOC perspectives; support BIPOC and rural community partners, artists, curators.

- 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:** Complete staff cultural equity training; lead constituent conversations around key contemporary concepts including anti-racism, cultural equity, and the intersectionality of the arts.

Learn more about the Ohio Arts Council’s DEI efforts in the agency’s *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan.*
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; pursue arts exhibition partnerships at the OAC Riffe Gallery and beyond; 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; lead discussion of arts sector resiliency and recovery during/after pandemic period.

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

  **KEY ACTIONS:** Lend staff expertise to Collaborative for Arts Education in Ohio; update the Ohio Arts Education Data Project.

OBJECTIVE C

Maintain agency visibility, vitality, and key assets.

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

  **KEY ACTIONS:** Retool Governor’s Awards for the Arts to maintain relevance and momentum during pandemic; tailor Poetry Out Loud activities to accommodate evolving school adaptations and restrictions.

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

  **KEY ACTIONS:** Conduct online field survey during 2021; develop follow-up bridge plan focused on next steps following the economic and restrictive effects of the pandemic.
ONGOING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Items with continuing long-term importance for the agency will remain active during the 18 months spanned by this Plan. These Ongoing Strategic Priorities will be revisited/revised as conditions permit and may re-enter the agency’s highest priority focus areas in its subsequent plan.

INVEST

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

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 administrators.

INNOVATE

Updating legacy 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.

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.
ABOUT THE PLAN

Essentials Plan 2021 is an 18-month bridge plan crafted during the initial months of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020. In a departure from the agency’s typical multi-year strategic planning, this plan will guide our work during a brief but critical period for Ohio’s arts and cultural sector. The actions needed to respond to the burgeoning crisis during and after the COVID-19 pandemic are urgent, wide-ranging, and ever-evolving. This plan positions the Ohio Arts Council to remain relevant, responsive, and nimble as the state’s artists and arts organizations face new and unexpected challenges to their stability, resiliency, and resolve.

METHODOLOGY

The agency continued its integrated approach to strategic planning leading up to the creation of this document; staff now makes constituent outreach, engagement, and active planning a regular part of operations. The groundwork for the immediate past and current plans stems from a major public survey concluded in 2015 involving nearly 6,000 individuals from all 88 Ohio counties (to be reprised in 2021). 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, and returning to log feedback and share input.

Additional outreach for Essentials Plan 2021 included:

- **Arts Health Conversations:** Between January and May 2020, staff gathered targeted feedback on the perceived health of the arts in Ohio communities, speaking with over 80 individuals in 23 counties, including rural and urban settings.

- **Panel Meeting Policy Discussions:** Between April and July 2020, staff held 11 virtual policy discussions with grant applicants to discuss agency policies, funding priorities, and program guidelines for both individual artists and organizations.

- **Direct Grantee Feedback:** In the spring of 2020, feedback was gathered from nearly 400 grantees spanning 11 separate funding programs describing the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on artists’ career development, organizational staffing, financial stability, and program offerings.

- **Virtual Focus Groups:** In August 2020, the OAC conducted seven virtual focus groups with a diverse range of 52 arts administrators, artists, arts educators, and other thought leaders from Ohio’s creative sector, including many representing areas with greatest identified need.

- **Executive Director Interviews:** OAC Executive Director Donna S. Collins participated in numerous conversations throughout the spring and summer of 2020 involving board members, elected officials, officials of other Ohio state agencies, key agency partners, and a diverse range of state, regional, and national policy makers and arts leaders, with feedback directly informing the Essentials Plan development process.
Front Cover Images: Northern Ohio Youth Orchestra, winter concert 2020 (left); and The Arts Commission of Greater Toledo, Young Artists at Work program (right).

Back Cover Image Credits: (Clockwise, from top right) Canton Museum of Art; Ohio Heritage Fellow Hasu Patel; Ohio Arts Beacon submission from Ludie Senatus; and Ballet Theatre of Toledo.