



# NEW JERSEY CREATIVE VITALITY INDEX 2010

## Focus Groups Report - 1

### Building communities that support and nurture the arts: What works best?

A report of focus groups with cultural and public affairs professionals in New Jersey

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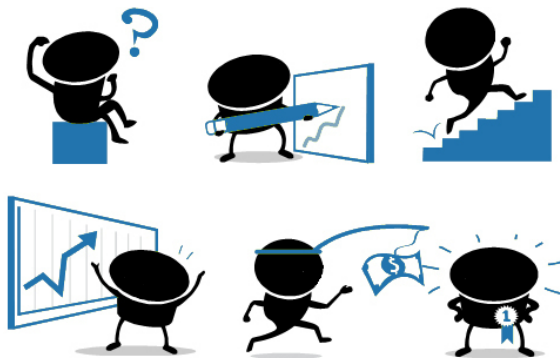
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## Introduction

The key to building an arts-friendly community is to get leaders to value arts and weave cultural activities into the community's social fabric. How do cultural professionals and community leaders do that? This was the theme of three focus groups held in 2009 with nonprofit and public sector cultural professionals and urban planners who have worked on cultural issues. More than 35 people took part in the three focus groups, held between September and December 2009.

## Key Findings

- **Understand why some leaders and communities are resistant to supporting the arts.** Do they think the arts will help their communities? What are their concerns about the arts or artists? If they support the arts in principle, why are they reluctant to provide more resources to the arts? Before you make your pitch, stop, look and listen.
- **Use statistics that focus on the economic impact of arts and the impact to children.** There are a lot of resources on the economic and social value of the arts. Every one wants a healthy economy and parents want their children to have the best opportunities possible.



- **Talk about the impacts at a local level. The arts have enormous economic impact on our states and regions.** But the numbers tend to be so large that they can be difficult for people to visualize in the economy. (Unfortunately, most economic impact reports don't compare the arts to other industries or the overall economy in a state. So readers don't know how significant X million is to the economy.) And unless you're in an arts destination or a big city, there probably are no reports talking about the impact in your

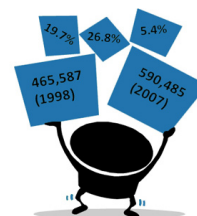
town. That can get skeptics to say something like "well it may be good for them, but not for us." In this case, talk about the research for the Americans from the Arts showing that on average, those who take part in an arts event tend to spend an additional \$20 to \$40 per person in town. Since every retailer now competes with online stores, the arts provide free marketing and shoppers to them.

- **Make the arts more visible to leaders and communities.** How many creative sector establishments are in your town – museums, art galleries, artists' studios, architecture firms, etc? You might be surprised how many there are – and so would the people you're trying to persuade.

- **Get leaders outside of the arts to be champions for the arts.** Chamber of Commerce professionals, realtors, the woman that everyone talks to at Town Hall, or whoever you know that is influential with leaders and communities. Some people have such deep-rooted stereotypes about the arts and artists that no cultural professional would be able to persuade them. But they're more willing to listen to people they trust.



- **Be persistent and show strength in numbers.** Arts advocates should be going to the meetings of their elected officials and other places where they can be seen by leaders and the communities the advocates are trying to persuade. Be patient, it can take years to change some minds.



- **Artists should build relationships and help civic organizations outside of the arts.** When these organizations – and their leaders – see that artists bring added value to them, they will be more likely to support the arts.

## Focus Groups Logistics and Participants

The three focus groups were held on these days and locations:

- September 15, 2009, Olde Jersey East Towne Village, Piscataway, NJ. Facilitator: Barbara Heisler-Williams, Integral, Inc.
- September 17, 2009, Barat Foundation, Newark, NJ. Facilitator: Ann Marie Miller, ArtPride New Jersey
- December 10, 2009, Rutgers University – Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, New Brunswick, NJ. Facilitator: Leonardo Vazquez, Professional Development Institute

The participants were invited to join the focus groups because they are executives or directors of public sector cultural organizations, nonprofit sector cultural organizations, or urban planners with experience working in the intersection of arts and community and economic development.

Each focus group lasted 1.5 hours. After introductions, participants were asked six to seven questions (including follow-up questions.) The questions were the same or similar for all groups. The questions are included in the record of responses, provided later in this report. All participants were promised confidentiality to allow for more candid answers. However, if a question did not elicit a significant response from participants, or was deemed by the facilitator to be less relevant than other questions, it was eliminated.

The questions were developed by a team of cultural and planning professionals from among the members of the Arts Build Communities Council. They included: Ann Marie Miller, ArtPride New Jersey; Karen Pinzolo, Arts Plan New Jersey; Amy Simon, New Jersey Arts Incubator; Suzanne Ishee, Broadway Center Stage Productions; and Jef Buehler, Main Street New Jersey.

The following were the participants in the focus groups held between September and December. The participants represented organizations from throughout New Jersey.

- June Ballinger, Passage Theatre, Trenton.
- Frank Banisch, Banisch Associates, Flemington.
- Gary Barat, Barat Foundation, Newark.
- Chandri Barat, Barat Foundation, Newark.
- Joe Barris, Monmouth County Planning Department.
- Cephas Bowles, Newark Public Radio, Inc., Newark.
- Jef Buehler, Main Street New Jersey, Trenton.
- Michael Cagno, Noyes Museum, Oceanville.
- Susan P. Coen, COEN Consulting Group/(Rahway Arts District), Elizabeth and Rahway.
- Lindsay Dandeo, Ocean County Cultural Heritage Council.
- Kadie Dempsey, Arts Council of Morris.
- Jeanne DeYoung, Monmouth County Division of Tourism.
- Barbara Fuller, Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs.
- Tom Gilmour, City of Asbury Park.
- Ben Goldman, City Without Walls, Newark.
- Tim Hart, Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Council.
- Kate Hartuyk, Essex County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs.
- Maureen Heffernan, Young Audiences, Princeton.
- Linda Hirsch, Sussex County Arts and Heritage Council.
- Donna Jack, Essex County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs.
- Ashley Kesling, Passaic County Cultural and Heritage Council.
- Allison Larena, The Community Theatre, Morristown.
- Meredith Lipman, Hudson County Cultural and Heritage Commission.
- Marianne Lods, Glasstown Arts District, Millville.
- Paula Long, Union County Cultural and Heritage Council.
- Mary Jo Mathias, Sussex County Arts and Heritage Council.
- Gwen Moten, City of Newark Recreation/Cultural Affairs, Newark.
- Erica Nagel, Premeire Stages at Kean University, Union.
- Rosalyn Neal, Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Council.
- Karen Pinzolo, Arts Plan New Jersey, Gloucester.
- Cynthia Mason Purdie, Atlantic County Cultural Heritage Office.
- Patricia McGarry, Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Council.
- Paul McRae, New Jersey Ballet, Livingston.
- Linwood Oglesby, Newark Arts Council, Newark.
- Martha Runyon, Mercer County Cultural Heritage.
- Stanley Slachetka, T&M Associates, Middletown.
- Steve Steiner, Surfliht Theatre/President of South Jersey Cultural Alliance, Beach Haven.
- Susan Taylor, Isles Inc., Trenton.
- Danny Tamez, Monmouth County Arts Council.
- Isha Vyas, Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Office.
- Eva Walters, Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission.
- Tom Werder, Two River Theater Company, Red Bank.
- Judy Wukitsch, The Baird/ Township of South Orange Village, South Orange.

## Record of Responses

The following is a record of the diversity of responses to the focus group questions. Because participants were promised confidentiality, there is no identifying information and portions of responses are redacted. Each bullet represents a different response from a participant.

Additional information:

- Where possible, the record quotes the most salient portions of the respondent's comments. In some cases, words were added for grammatical purposes only.
- Words in parentheses and blank lines such as \_\_\_\_\_ indicate words or names that could be used to identify the respondent.
- Quotes are used when the respondent is paraphrasing or quoting other people.

**Describe at least one time when you were successful in persuading elected officials, community leaders, or other influential people to support arts or cultural activities. What information did you use to help to convince and persuade them?**

- By showing the impact of the arts through dollars spent. Spending seems to be the best stat.
- In order to get participation, elected officials must be educated about the arts. (One example is) Arts Cap, a public arts committee that was responsible for doing research, designing ordinances that supported the arts, and then presenting the impact of their proposed ordinances to Council. The city's government was involved from the start. (You have to) serve everything to them on a platter (so there is) no work on their part.
- Bringing together artists in all fields will spur economic development. Exposure to the arts creates a more educated community. Use studies (involving children). Show that schools have higher overall success rates

when involved in the arts

- Tailor the proposal to whomever you are presenting it to. Different officials are focused on different things. Educate as you go along. (One example is) a scenic byway project. The professionals involved in the project were asked to bring it to the county officials' hometowns. The professionals leveraged the support for the project at a local level to expand it around the county. "If I'm going to do it for your town...I may as well do it for your surrounding communities as well."
- We met with \_\_\_\_\_ (a major business in the area) and secured funding. We developed a list showing various statistics to support their initiative, including the number of people served and how the money is funneled back into the community. We showed graphically how the funds received from \_\_\_\_\_ could be used to leverage further funding
- We graphically showed how the money would be spent in the community. We graphically showed how the money would be spent in the agency...right down to toilet paper.
- We used findings from the Americans for the Arts Survey to show demand.
- The mayor was originally opposed to mural displays throughout the town. We made sure that the mayor was involved in every single meeting. Once (the mayor) realized the number of people that were involved, (the mayor's views) changed slightly. The mayor was able to get some recognition as well as support from the arts community. It was a win/win situation.
- Use statistics and facts – market analysis, surveys, body counts . We have mostly visual arts; the city has stepped forward always when some funding had fallen apart.

- Showing arts improving lives specially of young people, using statistics.
- Using more direct approach – bringing a child forward, their stories and testimonies work.
- We faced real resistance in town to house actors. We had to educate the community and leaders on how valuable it is to have actors working in \_\_\_\_\_. We brought actors on our board (to engage residents).
- We brought business owners and a 12-year-old to tell the stories. Facts and figures, statistics and personal connection to students have made tremendous impacts. Humanize the facts and figures.
- Also involve local community and business owners apart from government officials and make sure everyone is on the same page.

**Describe at least one time when you were unsuccessful in persuading other elected officials, community leaders, or other influential people to support arts or cultural activities. Why?**

- In \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ was working on taking advantage of a mural space. It took two years to get Council approval despite “relentless” persuasion by volunteers. The council was ‘opposed to graffiti. After two years of lost time, people lost interest and passion
- It doesn’t always need to be an elected official or a council that needs to be persuaded. It is often a clerk, or the community.
- Wanted to integrate his arts redevelopment plan into the County Master Plan, but got no support from superiors in department.
- [Reflection] Arts Councils don’t use the “right language.” They tend to be inspirational vs. aspirational. They have to connect those aspirations with a language that planners and elected officials can relate to. (Planners and artists) have measures of success that (are) different
- [Reflection] Elected officials and planners need to know if there is return on investment involved. Is there a mandate? Artists are motivational. Where’s the cost benefit analysis?
- [Reflection] Officials need to see concrete goals and measures. How can this help their constituents?
- I remember a few years back...there was a study done on the impacts of arts. Huge backlash (in arts community). People felt that we shouldn’t be attaching dollar amounts to arts initiatives. ‘Arts is a different realm.’
- Finished their five year plan in May. Held focus groups for elected officials; Not one showed up. There wasn’t enough exposure regarding the focus groups. The elected officials did not see their role in the efforts and questioned its significance.
- In an attempt to build up their office budget, \_\_\_\_\_ went to freeholders with oral explanations of their efforts and initiatives. It wasn’t enough to get the officials involved. In response, they began an artist directory. Showed the number of artists in the area, their preferences, the # of them that were registered to vote - received a much better response
- Elected officials said that people can’t come to them when budget is being done. (In response) letters are going out to them (officials) more often to thank them if something good happens. Invite them more often for the events.
- [Reflection] Find the right person to talk to. Begin to understand the politics and dynamics of the city.
- \_\_\_\_\_ program began and it was time to fund the participants. During council meeting, the members did not know anything about who is being supported and funded. So \_\_\_\_\_ ran a program and informed Star Ledger and they loved it. There was an article on it and funding came through connections.
- It was a disbelief that people would come because NJ is not as good as NY. It was made such a joke. That’s the basic attitude that ‘no one would come’

### What information would you have liked to have that would have helped you convince and persuade them?

- Local statistics. We have State level data. Local data will be more effective.
- Combine State level and local level data with National data.
- Statistics help making roads but if arts represented use statistics, it doesn't get attention. We have to take a lead. We need a language for branding NJ
- Arts is a significant economic generator. Stories are critical. Local leaders want to hear such stories and how it is impacting children, seniors. We need real impact stories.
- We had council members on our board of education and we had a great program in Trenton \_\_\_\_\_. Get (leaders) to visit arts related events and places. They know but they don't own it; to own it, they need to visit it.

### Other than funding, what would you hope to get from elected officials, community leaders, etc. that would help your organization succeed? (Alternately) What kind of research would you like to see? What information do you feel would better assist in the development and promotion of the arts sector?

- RESPECT!!!! (a collective response from public sector cultural professionals)
- Simple miscellaneous support: printing graphics assistance, marketing (from restaurants, hotels), volunteers (sheriffs department) for historic site tours, evidence that would show a bigger impact (such as number of people who come to a municipality's art venue, and eat and shop at local restaurants and stores)
- Attendance of events by elected officials
- A collective partnership between municipalities/ common vision. (There is a) division between municipalities in \_\_\_\_\_ County
- Have elected officials actually put arts events on their calendar so as to commit themselves
- Every municipality should have one designated

person to handle all initiatives that fall under one category. Perhaps the integration or overlap in departments within municipalities will expose more people to a given area in revitalization. More assistance in fund-raising. Stronger arts programs in the education systems.

- Elected officials should take arts initiatives with them on outside endeavors. Integrate it into other fields of community development. Mention it at other events
- [On types of research desired] Research on return on investments: Improvements to the physical and economic environment, volunteer hours committed to the arts, events, attendance, media exposure, hotel beds for tourism. Have universal standards across the state. The research has been done, but the modality hasn't been there.
- [On types of research desired] Should be an analysis done on the top 10 arts communities in NJ. Could serve as a model.
- Impact study to compare South, Central and North Jersey
- Get local officials to attend program through their children. Local officials/ commissioner have their child or grandchild in some program.
- Find developer or CEO to talk about numbers/ facts.
- We need influential people to tell the story. We need leadership. We need Governors to support arts and stick to it. We need Sec. of State to give more than just voice. We want them to support art councils and give resources to art organizations. We need tourism Director for marketing and development. We need leaders to advocate art during council budget meetings. We have to make them our friend

and develop relationships. We need to let them know what we are doing and ask them if they need help.

**Why do you think some communities more supportive of arts and cultural activities than others? (Folo: how much do you think the cultural makeup of your community influences the support and kinds of support for your arts?)**

- The ROI oriented communities probably do better in giving support to the arts
- The common thread is education and communication. If the importance of arts is taught effectively, people will understand its value in communities. Some communities are simply adverse to the influx of new populations of people. \_\_\_\_\_ is hosting a huge (sporting event). It will bring over \$15 million to the County, yet people are still adverse to the idea.
- What's the difference between a "regional attraction" and the "influx of people."
- Artists are their own worst enemy. They compete for dollars, seek out their own space, so when we try to bring them together, there's no unity. Education and communication from a united front moves mountains. The arts sector is becoming an enemy of the government because it is disorganized and can't work together.
- Artists are so unconventional that it becomes difficult to group them into a conventional organization...and if you could, they wouldn't really be artists. Why (support for)sports and not art. There is heavy municipal economic support for sports
- It's the children that spur investment in activities. Sports is ingrained in our culture – sports is important to children. If we can get the children involved, we can get the parents involved.
- [Providing example of one community where arts is heavily supported and another where it is not]. Haddington uses the arts to build up it's Main Street. The government and private businesses banded together. It received public and private funding and was successful. In \_\_\_\_\_ the government and private businesses are against each other. As a result, many projects never see their launch date
- Some municipalities are very historically oriented. Some municipalities have strong arts programs in their schools
- Money (financial status) and education will equate to a true understanding and appreciation of the arts
- Programs are primarily directed at youth and aging populations
- There are huge turnouts in \_\_\_\_\_ with the Asian and Hispanic populations. However, they are usually centered around events that are culturally specific.
- Municipalities such as Monroe and Highland Park largely support the arts, however, they are both wealthy municipalities. In New Brunswick, they have had large success with the Mexican festivals attracting large crowds
- Montclair has a large arts based population and services, however, also very wealthy.
- (Cultural professionals) have to get involved in the community- give them help, become members in school boards and educate them so they won't cut art budget. We have to become leaders ourselves to help in decision making.
- In Europe, everywhere we went, there was some art

component and we can in our own community.

- People said that we moved to this town because they there is arts. We need volunteers for arts.

**What would it take to get a larger portion of your community budget dedicated to the arts?**

- Demonstrate the demand as well as the economic impact. Generate more public support.
- Public support.
- Public support. A broader understanding by the public as well as elected officials on the importance and significance of art and culture in today's world.

**To help promote more arts and cultural activities in your community, what persons or groups would be most influential?**

- Restaurants love you but retail doesn't.
- Developing partnerships and connections with the retail.
- Move to radical instruments, develop deep relationships with organizations such as city planning, schools. Convince council people are not motivated enough to like us.
- We need to convince our peers. We can put arts into education and turn them into jobs – in arts, entertainments and media. Prevent drop-out rates by reaching out to children an convincing them to stay in school.
- The public.
- Arts Council, children, and artists.
- Developers that promote the arts in order to sell their developments.
- Power brokers in the Arts Divisions. People from other sectors.

## Focus Group Questions and Instructions to Facilitators

The following are the questions developed for the focus groups and instructions to facilitators. Facilitators had the autonomy to diverge from questions if they did not yield sufficient responses or to add follow-up questions as they saw fit.

### Instructions to facilitator:

The interview questions should start no later than 25 minutes into the focus group session.

*Interview questions):* (Top 6 will be asked)

Please allow up to 10 minutes for each question

1. Describe at least one time when you were successful in persuading elected officials, community leaders, or other influential people to support arts or cultural activities. What information did you use to help to convince and persuade them?
2. Describe at least one time when you were unsuccessful in persuading other elected officials, community leaders, or other influential people to support arts or cultural activities. Why?
3. What information would you have liked to have that would have helped you convince and persuade them?

4. Other than funding, what would you want to get from elected officials, community leaders, and your community to help your organization succeed?

5. Why do you think some communities more supportive of arts and cultural activities than others? (Follow-up question: how much do you think the cultural makeup of your community influences the support and kinds of support for the arts?)

6. What do you hear from your colleagues, audiences, or members about your governing body's support or lack of support for ACH? (Follow-up question: What would it take to get more of your community's budget dedicated to arts and cultural activities?)

7. To help promote more arts and cultural activities in your community, what persons or groups would be most influential?

If time, ask:

8. What are the best sources of funding for ACH in your community? Have you considered or even received funding for ACH from an interesting source?

If there is still more time, invite the members of the group to offer any comments, questions, etc., that they would like.

