



Critical Issues Report

Pierce County Arts and Cultural Plan

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INTRODUCTION

In September, 2009, Pierce County contracted with WolfBrown, AdvisArts Consulting, and BERK and Associates to conduct a County-wide arts and cultural planning process. The first phase of that arts and cultural plan and community needs assessment process got underway in October 2009. Since that time, the consultants have:

- ➔ Reviewed materials about Pierce County and its arts and cultural sector, both in hard copy and on the web
- ➔ Conducted an initial round of meetings with the Arts and Cultural Plan Steering Committee and the Pierce County Arts Commission
- ➔ Conducted a series of in-person and telephone interviews with 48 individuals who provided details about arts and culture in Pierce County
- ➔ Developed a brief memo outlining the initial findings of our fact-finding in the form of a list of “emerging themes”
- ➔ Solicited and obtained feedback from the Steering Committee on the emerging themes memo
- ➔ Facilitated a series of community meetings in five locations in Pierce County involving 37 participants to review and test the emerging themes.

WHAT IS IN THIS REPORT

The Critical Issues Report is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of issues that need to be addressed for arts and cultural development in the County to thrive. It is the next iteration of the emerging themes memo presented earlier in the process. In addition, it contains our initial articulation of strategic concepts that address these issues as a way to begin to frame meaningful and implementable goals and strategies later in the planning process. This report has three sections:

- ➔ **Part I** provides a **preliminary draft of vision and values** for arts and cultural development in Pierce County that will be reviewed by the Steering Committee at its January meeting



- ➔ **Part II** presents a **revision and synthesis of the key issues and themes** outlined in the earlier emerging themes memo. It is based on the thoughtful review of that initial memo by over 50 people from throughout the County. It also provides, for each finding, **relevant questions** for consideration.
- ➔ **Part III** offers **strategic concepts for further exploration** that reflect the consultants' assessment of opportunities in Pierce County that may form the basis of goals and strategies in the next phase of this project.

WHERE THIS REPORT FITS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

This report represents the approximate half-way point in Pierce County's arts and cultural planning process. It marks the beginning of a transition from fact-finding to consensus-building around goals and strategies. While the transition is by no means complete – some research (including the best practices study and the arts and cultural asset mapping exercise) are still in progress – it is worth noting since it will mean a shift in attention away from *describing* the situation to *envisioning* ways to address these critical issues. As the process continues, this shift will become more apparent. As you review this report, consider the questions we raise and the general implications of these findings.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CULTURE?

For the purposes of this planning process, we have used a broad definition of culture, one that includes but is not limited to the “fine arts.” We use culture to refer to the sum total of the County's customs, beliefs, and traditions. We specifically seek to include ethnic, racial, and cultural expressions; the history and heritage of Pierce County; and public spaces, landmarks, parks, and the built environment.

WHAT YOU WILL READ HERE

This report reflects the consultants' preliminary consolidation, synthesis and analysis of input gathered from the larger community. It does not reflect the voice of Pierce County government nor should it be considered as the recommendations for the arts and cultural planning process. It brings together a broad range of community perspectives which the independent consultants have assembled as a tool for review and response from the community and the Steering Committee. It is not intended for use for any purpose other than the advancement of this arts and cultural planning process.



PART I

A PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF VALUES AND VISION

In this section of the Report, we provide a preliminary set of values and a statement of vision to guide Pierce County's arts and cultural development over the next ten years. It is based on comments from Steering Committee members at the October meeting and those of interviewees over the past weeks. It is presented as an initial draft for review, comment, and revision.

VALUES

In Pierce County we recognize and value:

- ➔ the contribution of artists to our communities.
- ➔ the importance of preserving our historic legacies and landmarks.
- ➔ arts education and creative experiences for all school age children.
- ➔ that there is an existing or potential artist in every home.
- ➔ the impact of public art on the quality of our public spaces.
- ➔ the arts, heritage and cultural communities working together.
- ➔ the arts and cultural and business sectors working together to ensure economic vitality.
- ➔ the mix of arts and cultural institutions and grassroots community actions that create the unique cultural strengths of Pierce County.

VISION - AN ASPIRATIONAL LOOK FORWARD

In 2020, ten years after the Pierce County Arts and Cultural Plan was drafted, the arts and cultural landscape of the County has been transformed. While the process began well before the Plan was undertaken, it has facilitated a transition in how arts and culture are viewed and experienced County-wide.



- ➔ Residents, businesses, and visitors identify Pierce County as a place with **a strong arts and culture identity**. This identity brings pride to those who live here and the wealth of creative opportunities reflects this County’s distinctive character.
- ➔ The business community views arts and culture as an **important source of and partner in creating economic vitality**. Visitors and tourists identify Pierce County for its range of arts and heritage opportunities in tandem with its extraordinary natural assets including Mt. Rainier National Park, abundant waterfront, rural landscapes, and energized cityscapes.
- ➔ The public, private, and not-for-profit sectors share a commitment to **creating meaningful access and opportunities for life-long arts and cultural experience**. Every stage of life is enriched through meaningful involvement with the arts and culture, from personal expression and creation to audience participation.
- ➔ Engagement in the arts is supported in both **familiar venues and in unexpected places** so that arts and cultural experiences are part of the fabric of life in the County. The County is the site of nationally-recognized arts and cultural institutions as well as strong grassroots arts and cultural activities.
- ➔ Arts, heritage, and cultural **entities communicate effectively with each other and work together** to build and strengthen their impact across the County.
- ➔ School age children in Pierce County are considered fortunate since they have **access to a school curriculum that includes the arts as an equal and valued part** of their education. This is augmented by sustained creative partnerships with arts organizations that ensure that all students have the opportunity to benefit from “creative moments” and that every 6th grader receives 2 free tickets to a major arts and cultural event.
- ➔ The County’s attention to the past, the present and the future is reflected in its approach to arts and culture. The region’s **rich historic legacy is well documented and preserved** by a coordinated effort linking committed individuals and organizations. The heritage and cultural **traditions of present residents are shared and celebrated** across the County.
- ➔ **High levels of participation and engagement** in a variety of arts and cultural activities are sustained across the County. Individual artists see Pierce County as a great place to live affordably and work. Their contributions are recognized and supported. Arts and cultural organizations and businesses operate in an environment that supports their efforts through funding, participation, volunteerism and a supportive operating environment.



PART II

KEY ISSUES AND THEMES

In this section of the report, the consultants provide details of what they have learned about the current state of arts and culture in Pierce County. It reflects a synthesis of what they have heard and is organized into four issue areas:

1. Organizations, Events, and Artists
2. Creative Learning and Arts Education
3. Collaboration and Communication
4. Awareness, Leadership, and Resources.

Each issue area has several key findings that are highlighted; each finding has a list of questions that should be considered during the review of this document.

1. ORGANIZATIONS, EVENTS, AND ARTISTS

1A. PIERCE COUNTY IS RICH IN ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS AND EVENTS AND, WHILE TACOMA CONTINUES TO PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN THE COUNTY'S ARTS AND CULTURAL LIFE, SEVERAL SMALLER CITIES ARE DEVELOPING SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL IDENTITIES.

There is a **rich mix of arts, cultural, history, and heritage events and organizations in Pierce County**. In many ways, these organizations are finding their footing, becoming more sophisticated in both programmatic and administrative initiatives, even in a challenging economic environment. This is especially true of the larger, generally Tacoma-based organizations and institutions, although there are vibrant arts and cultural activities in communities throughout the County. In addition, there is a year-round array of festivals, fairs, and events that focus on or include arts, culture, and heritage throughout the County, ranging from neighborhood- and community-focused activities to resident- and tourist-oriented regional events.



Some communities, notably **Puyallup, Sumner, and Gig Harbor, are using local arts and cultural assets to enhance their quality of life and economic vitality.**

Nevertheless, Tacoma remains the County's arts and cultural hub, home to an energized community of arts and cultural organizations and artists, augmented by a substantial community of artists residing in the Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula area. The presence of the Tacoma Art Museum, the Museum of Glass, and the Washington State History Museum, along with the Broadway Center, all in downtown Tacoma, makes for a powerful institutional nexus for arts and cultural activity.

While some communities have vibrant, volunteer-driven arts and cultural activities, **others (especially in unincorporated areas) have little going on** beyond what is available in local libraries, recreation centers, or through educational outreach initiatives. Often, even in those communities with more extensive arts and cultural activities, there is a feeling among participants (including artists but also volunteers and board members of arts and cultural groups) of being disconnected within their own community and working in isolation from other efforts in the County. There are **few mechanisms that aid communication and networking between and among communities** to foster partnerships or collaborative opportunities.

There is great interest throughout Pierce County in arts and cultural facilities. Most of the major venues for visual and performing arts are located in Tacoma and **it can be difficult to learn about and find appropriate sites for arts activities outside of the city,** including both performing and visual arts spaces. In general, parks, recreation, school, and library spaces are most commonly used, although often **there is little coordination or centralized access to information about availability,** including rental or shared usage of space managed by arts organizations. Schools often have performance spaces that might be available for local arts groups' usage, although they may require some acoustic improvements and the interaction between schools and arts groups is not always clearly understood by arts groups. Many communities outside of Tacoma have a strong desire to build or otherwise acquire improved access to suitable arts and cultural presentation facilities. This desire is tempered by the challenges of developing, constructing, and sustainably operating such facilities.

QUESTIONS

1. How can we strengthen connections, relationships, and information-sharing within the arts and cultural sector in the County?
2. How might arts and cultural organizations maximize their use of facilities?
3. What approaches might enhance access to arts and cultural activities in rural and suburban communities?



1B. THERE IS A VIBRANT AND GROWING COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS, ALTHOUGH EARNING A LIVING REMAINS A CHALLENGE.

More than many counties of a similar scale, **Pierce County has a tremendous number of artist-initiated activities** going on at “street level.” This grassroots, independent, entrepreneurial, do-it-yourself spirit is strong, especially among younger artists and within the City of Tacoma. The commercial gallery scene, while witnessing the economic vicissitudes common to that field, remains a small but vibrant presence and many artists have served as “urban pioneers,” seeding the revitalization of Tacoma and other communities.

Artists are attracted to Pierce County because of **the comparatively low cost of living**, the availability of suitable and relatively low-cost working spaces, the presence of institutions of higher learning, **and because of the creative energy** that is emerging in Tacoma and throughout Pierce County. The area is seen as fertile ground for the arts and individual artists. However, there is a sense among working artists that residents, while valuing local arts resources, have not matured as attenders, viewers, or consumers of art. Thus, it is difficult to count on local sales and earning a living from art-making is problematic.

Artists who live outside of Tacoma find it difficult to find local opportunities and audiences and are unclear how to create links to Tacoma artists. In particular, it is difficult for artists to learn about school-based opportunities for teaching artists. While finding work in their field is always a challenge for artists, some initiatives aim to provide arts-related employment for local artists. In addition, the grants programs of the Tacoma Arts Commission and the public art purchasing of the Pierce County Arts Commission are acknowledged as valuable, although concerns are expressed about the work involved in completing applications, especially considering the size of typical grants.

QUESTIONS

- 1.** How might artists residing in Pierce County be better connected to opportunities and information?
- 2.** What can be done to streamline artist application procedures by Pierce County funders?
- 3.** How might opportunities and information for teaching artists be enhanced?

1C. HISTORY AND HERITAGE PLAY A KEY ROLE IN PIERCE COUNTY’S CULTURAL LIFE.

There is **increasing attention paid in Pierce County to the historic preservation of buildings and districts** and a growing appreciation for preservation’s aesthetic, cultural heritage, and economic development value for communities. A number of communities are



using or exploring the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street approach to revitalize downtown and neighborhood business districts.

Heritage organizations in Pierce County range from the huge State Historical Society in downtown Tacoma to smaller, community-oriented groups such as the historical societies in Lakewood, Gig Harbor, or the Points Northeast Historical Society, representing the communities of Browns Point, Dash Point, and Northeast Tacoma. Yet, just like many of the smaller arts groups, **many heritage groups are challenged to find adequate volunteer staff and board members** to invest the necessary time to keep these groups afloat. In addition, the economy has taken a significant toll on their operations. For example, the Tacoma Historical Society recently had to close its exhibit area in order to save money. Many historic and heritage sites, especially those in the less travelled rural areas, are unlikely to support historic museums or other major facilities.

It is interesting to note that **heritage activities, contrary to arts activities, are often more accessible in suburban and rural communities.** In rural areas there is enthusiasm for and a need to capture the history and cultural legacy as the economy shifts away from earlier extraction industries. This is significant because delays to historic preservation of buildings can mean the loss of historic structures, thus many issues are extremely time sensitive. Washington State has recently mandated that a portion of the fee paid to register certain documents with counties be used, among other things, "to promote historical preservation or historical programs..." (2005 House Bill 1386.) This may benefit the wealth of historic and heritage resources present in the County.

QUESTIONS

1. How might heritage organizations and agencies maximize their resources to ensure a stronger sector?
2. Is a County-wide scan needed to identify the most time-sensitive heritage sites? If so, how might that be accomplished?
3. What types of heritage programs can most cost-effectively engage the public in rural as well as urban areas?

1D. THERE IS INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTS AND CULTURAL PROGRAMMING FOR DIVERSE CONSTITUENCIES, ALTHOUGH SOME POPULATIONS REMAIN UNDERSERVED.

There is concern that **some residents have limited access to arts, heritage, and cultural opportunities, based on geography, ethnicity, or income level.** Without access to these experiences it is very unlikely that residents will enjoy the benefits that arts and culture may add to their lives. In particular, Pierce County has some ethnically specific arts and cultural organizations that are vibrant and produce a significant array of events and activities, but most have relatively small budgets and operate primarily through volunteers and with low visibility. Many such organization have limited audiences outside of their



specific ethnic community, while a few seek to share their arts and cultural traditions broadly through vehicles such as festivals.

Some factors that limit participation among these groups will be difficult to address. For example, the impact on attendance of the \$4 toll on the bridge that links Gig Harbor and the Key Peninsula to Tacoma is mentioned as a barrier to participation in arts and cultural activities in Tacoma. Other factors can more readily be addressed. These include the mix of visual and performing arts programming or the availability of discounted tickets or other program fees.

Culturally specific organizations and activities often have strong participation by their targeted cultural community. In the larger arts and cultural sector there is generally a preponderance of participants who are white and middle-class, although **some organizations are undertaking initiatives to build a stronger base of participation among other sectors of Pierce County's population.** Engaging diverse populations, as audience, staff, and board members, requires considerable effort of arts and cultural organizations and has been haphazard over the years. The ability of arts and cultural groups to listen to the interests, needs, and priorities of residents is hampered by their limited resources. **Support – both funding and technical assistance – for culturally specific groups or projects is very limited.**

QUESTIONS

1. Is training and support needed for arts and cultural organizations to better address shifting community demographics relative to their programs, staffing, and board membership?
2. How can culturally specific groups be better supported to help preserve, share, and develop diverse cultural traditions and interests and reach broader audiences?

2. CREATIVE LEARNING AND ARTS EDUCATION

2A. THERE ARE FLAGSHIP ARTS EDUCATION EFFORTS IN PIERCE COUNTY, THOUGH SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVE LIMITED CAPACITY TO PROVIDE ARTS EDUCATION OR TO INTEGRATE ARTS LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOLS RELY HEAVILY ON ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS.

With some notable exceptions, there is **lack of support and resources for providing arts education in the public schools.** This is of particular interest since the State of Washington has outlined new Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) in the arts and will start to measure competency in four areas: music, dance, theater and visual arts. Many **teachers feel unprepared to integrate the arts into their teaching** and there are limited numbers of certified arts teachers, and those are primarily in music and the visual arts. There is strong **interest in the role that arts learning can play in developing**



students' capacity to be creative problem solvers and thinkers and how that is a basis for strengthening Pierce County's 21st century workforce.

Partnerships with **arts and cultural organizations are a key component for student arts education** experiences, primarily for those schools able to access the arts institutions in Tacoma through field trips. Such **partnerships have generally relied on initiation from arts entities** and those organizations have little capacity to generate or build those relationships consistently over time. There is no clearinghouse or matchmaking service for schools or teachers interested in developing a relationship with arts organizations.

Other partnerships include opportunities for teacher training. While there are some highly successful and sustained partnerships, they appear not to be distributed throughout the County and access is often driven by the initiative of a particular individual (often a principal) or geographic proximity. At this time, there is **little systemic incentive to include the arts in schools so such action rests on individuals** who value the arts and are willing and able to take action, which is easiest when there is district or city support. Key to improving arts education in public schools is to connect with the school principal and helping him or her to appreciate the value of the arts as a teaching tool.

QUESTIONS

1. What would a clearinghouse or matchmaking function that connected interested schools, teachers, arts and cultural organizations, and/or teaching artists look like? Who might house this function? Might the Artist-in-Residence program of the Arts and Cultural Services Division serve this function?
2. What kind of community advocacy and support will convince the leadership of Pierce County school districts to implement or expand arts education?
3. What can be done about the disparity of access to arts and cultural field trips County-wide?
4. How can flagship arts programs be used to raise the visibility of Pierce County as a national leader in creative education?

2B. CREATIVE LEARNING EXTENDS BEYOND SCHOOLS AND MANY COMMUNITIES ARE INTERESTED IN PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL AGES AND SKILL LEVELS.

Creative exploration and mastery of the arts is taking place in both formal and informal settings throughout Pierce County. In many cases this is through classes and workshops provided by independent schools and programs but frequently community centers, libraries, or parks facilities are the sites for such learning, including aspects of heritage and popular culture. **Such activities are most available in cities and individuals in smaller towns or unincorporated areas have less access.** In some cases, arts learning and creative personal expression are taking place as part of social or human services or are targeted to youth as a productive form of engagement and learning. In



addition to formal classes, more informal networks of creative expression and arts learning exist, from writing groups to craft project circles or music making with others.

Higher education provides a range of cultural and artistic learning opportunities as well. Community colleges are playing a larger role in arts and cultural life in their communities and are attentive to opportunities that reflect the diversity of cultural backgrounds in the County. **Their programs include opportunities for life-long learning** in the arts in addition to degree programs. Universities in the area also provide learning opportunities through workshops, lectures, and performances and occasionally work as program partners with arts and cultural groups. Independent arts schools and programs also provide opportunities but they are very economically fragile and many are hard hit by the recession.

Parks and recreation departments and libraries often provide basic experiences in art, craft, dance, and other disciplines. However, they generally have limited expertise and few resources for creating quality arts or cultural learning opportunities. Often there is **limited knowledge in the community that they offer such programs and that they are free or very low cost.**

QUESTIONS

1. How can libraries, community centers, parks, community colleges, and universities better serve as conduits to arts and cultural learning for Pierce County residents?
2. What systems might better support such efforts County-wide?
3. What approaches might help independent arts schools and programs survive the recession?

2C. GROWING INTEREST IN PERSONAL AND LIFE-LONG PARTICIPATION IN CREATIVE PURSUITS IS CRITICAL TO PROVIDING A RICH MIX OF ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE COUNTY.

Conversations with County residents and national research point to the **increased importance of active, engaged participation in arts and cultural experiences** – as opposed to an older model that involved participants in a more passive role. Participation in such activities as **book groups, community theatre, church choirs, scrapbooking, various dance traditions, garage bands, or maintaining personal websites or blogs,** and others suggest the importance of life-long personal creative pursuits among County residents of all ages and in many neighborhoods and communities. This participation, which may take the form of ethnic and heritage festivals or activities on college campuses, add significantly to the richness of arts and cultural expression in the County and provide a broad and diverse level of participation beyond that of more visible arts, cultural, and heritage institutions.



This mix of activities supplements the impressive range of Pierce County's mid-sized and larger arts, cultural and heritage institutions. **It is sustained primarily through the volunteer efforts of residents**, sometimes augmented by organizations with a small number of paid staff, or through community agencies, or communities of faith or ethnicity. The efforts of these volunteers are central to the vitality of the arts and cultural sector, even among larger organizations.

QUESTIONS

1. What kind of networks or tools might support the informal arts and cultural pursuits of County residents?
2. How might electronic media help link people, including those in rural or distant parts of the County, regarding shared arts and cultural pursuits?

3. COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

3A. THERE HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS AND THERE ARE UNTAPPED POSSIBILITIES, BUT IMPLEMENTING COLLABORATIONS IS CHALLENGING WITHOUT ENTITIES TO FACILITATE THEM.

Among the highest visibility collaborations in the region are the Broadway Center's Kennedy Center arts in education partnership that engages three school districts, and the joint marketing arrangements among three downtown museums: Tacoma Art Museum, Museum of Glass, and Washington State History Museum. While these initiatives indicate that Pierce County arts and cultural organizations understand the value of partnerships and collaborations, **there is much that stands in the way of implementing them more readily.**

According to interviewees, a significant part of the difficulty is the **lack of the organizational capacity of arts and cultural organizations in the region to facilitate the collaborative process.** This, coupled with the limited staff and board capacity of most arts and cultural organizations, makes it hard for arts groups to sort out the details of collaborative arrangements and build them so that they are cost-effective and sustainable. **There is a need for tools, process facilitation, and a better understanding of the complete range of available options for collaborations.** Often, existing opportunities to build skills for the board and staff of arts and cultural organizations, including the Washington State Arts Alliance's annual statewide conference, are attended by only a few people from Pierce County.

Many interviewees point out that **there are numerous untapped collaborative possibilities among and between arts and cultural organizations.** Possibilities also exist between the arts and cultural sector and local and regional businesses (including sport and other recreational interests) or non-arts nonprofit agencies (including human and social



service organizations). Collaborations with the for-profit sector need not be limited to philanthropy or market-oriented sponsorships, but might include opportunities like the arrangement between Old Cannery Furniture and community theater in Sumner to present performances in a non-traditional space. Such endeavors build mutual visibility and interest. This is particularly important since, as several interviewees mentioned, **arts groups often expect support from business but do not generally reciprocate by supporting those businesses.**

One area that holds **significant potential for ongoing collaboration is between arts and culture and tourism.** In many areas – ranging from Mount Rainier to Tacoma’s downtown – tourism and the arts may be able to strengthen mutually beneficial relationships. The relationship of the arts and cultural sector to lodging and hospitality is not as strong as it might be, both outside of and within Tacoma. **Too often, these relationships are given lip service on both sides** without doing the work necessary to develop longer-term and enduring initiatives or partnerships between the sectors. In this instance, both arts and cultural and hospitality interests need to better understand the working reality and priorities of the other.

QUESTIONS

1. What kind of mechanism could facilitate the building of collaborative initiatives in the region?
2. How can skill-building opportunities be more available and accessible to board and staff members of arts and cultural organizations throughout the County?
3. How might we build better collaborations between non-arts-specific facilities and businesses and arts and cultural users?
4. What is needed to strengthen the relationship between the culture and tourism sectors?

3B. COMMUNICATION AMONG ARTISTS AND ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS AND BETWEEN THE ARTS AND CULTURAL SECTOR AND THE LARGER COMMUNITY IS ADAPTING SLOWLY TO NEW APPROACHES.

Developments in communication, especially electronic communication, have created **new opportunities to foster important connections within the arts and cultural community.** A notable example of this is the City of Tacoma’s arts listserv, which has been a catalyst for sharing information and access to opportunities for artists and others interested in the arts. It is overseen by the Tacoma Arts Commission but it is used by artists and others from many parts of Pierce County. That said, **there is still a general lack of knowledge about what is going on locally,** even among individuals who are active in the County’s arts and cultural scene. And, while the Tacoma Arts listserv is effective in sharing information within some portions of the arts and cultural sector, **there is no analogous mechanism to share information between the arts and cultural sector and the larger community.**



Local newspapers are also seen as important partners although their effectiveness relative to raising the visibility of arts and culture varies. In many communities, print media represents the critical – and in some cases, only – local communications link. Arts groups tend to be competitive with each other relative to coverage rather than working to provide a coordinated approach that includes reaching out to print media outlets in a way that highlights the benefits of working together for all parties. While there is much complaining about media coverage, **there is no comprehensive strategic approach, even though some media leaders are seen as likely supporters of such an effort.**

QUESTIONS

1. What are the key opportunities County-wide to use online resources and social media for the arts and cultural community?
2. Do such opportunities differ if we look at artists, arts and cultural organizations, the civic realm, or those seeking arts experiences? If so, how?
3. How can communities build more effective approaches to encourage local print media to serve as a key local information source?

4. AWARENESS, LEADERSHIP, AND RESOURCES

4A. UNDERSTANDING OF THE VALUE OF ARTS AND CULTURE VARIES AMONG CIVIC LEADERS AND THE CIVIC ROLE OF THE ARTS AND CULTURAL SECTOR IS NOT AS GREAT AS IT MIGHT BE.

Awareness and visibility of arts and culture is unevenly distributed across Pierce County. In Tacoma and a few smaller communities arts, culture and heritage have a strong presence, are part of the local civic identity, and are acknowledged by civic leadership as an integral component of civic life. In some communities, this results in direct support from the public and business sectors; in others, it creates a more generally hospitable environment for arts and culture. But for many communities across the County, arts and culture is simply not on the radar. **There is a belief that Tacoma and the County are poised today to have a strong arts and cultural identity but that it will require an intentional, strategic, and collaborative effort** to take the next step.

Those communities where elected officials and other civic leaders have a strong interest and belief in the contribution of arts and culture are reaping benefits. These benefits include a more energized and cohesive community, stronger community identity and pride, increased tourism, as well as increased arts and cultural opportunities for their residents. **The existence of an active public commission or a strong community group that champions and coordinates the arts and cultural sector appears to be a key component** in how arts and culture is valued in a community. Bridges between the arts and cultural and civic sectors are strongest where arts and cultural leaders are deeply



engaged in the broader community. In the County overall, the arts and cultural sector is fragmented with limited capacity for coordinated efforts to build visibility as a sector.

Even when elected officials and civic leaders appreciate the value of arts and culture, **they often do not see a cohesive sector and have not had a compelling case made** in a consistent manner in support of the role of arts and culture in fostering community priorities such as economic development, tourism, community cohesion, or quality of life. **The arts and cultural sector is not currently united to foster awareness or visibility**, although there is interest in increasing such efforts, including the fledgling Art and Cultural Executives of Pierce County. Leaders in the arts and cultural sector have limited time and capacity, and in some cases inclination, to be significantly involved in larger civic roles and issues and this limits the effectiveness of their relationships across sectors.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the most likely ways for the arts and cultural sector in Pierce County to craft a more unified and sustainable sector and voice?
2. How might relationships between the arts and cultural sector and the business and civic community be strengthened?
3. How can arts and cultural leaders who take on this work be supported by their peers?

4B. LEADERSHIP IN THE REGION'S ARTS AND CULTURAL SECTOR IS DIFFUSE AND ARTS COMMISSIONS, OR SIMILAR ENTITIES, CAN BE CRITICAL GAME CHANGERS IN BUILDING SUCH LEADERSHIP.

Communities with vibrant and engaged arts commissions or that have arts and cultural leadership that participates in civic groups are building stronger and more cohesive arts and cultural sectors. This is manifested through such things as increased coordination and communication, visibility, relationships with business and the larger civic community, and resource sharing. **Communities that do not have such leadership entities or individuals express an increased sense of fragmentation and lack of ability to coordinate or galvanize the sector**, and often believe that such a body is the missing link to the next stage of local arts and cultural maturity.

Communities without such entities see the value of creating such a body but often lack the knowledge or resources to take action to develop a commission or council. There is also awareness that creating such a body without a plan for sustainability is not desirable, and that the current economy suggests caution in building such efforts, unless they can be done sustainably. There is **interest in finding more systematic ways to identify and nurture arts and cultural leadership within the sector** and to serve as bridge builders and arts and cultural sector champions in the larger civic arena. This might take the form of developing strong boards for arts and cultural nonprofits.



Support for ongoing professional development of arts commissioners, staff, or other local arts and cultural leaders is rare although there are resources and information that exist at the state and national level, as well as among local and regional peers. Identifying and nurturing individuals who may provide leadership is currently based more on coincidence than any systematic approaches. In addition, there is no County-wide mechanism for sharing information or resources among such bodies, so information sharing is difficult, especially for smaller communities.

QUESTIONS

1. What knowledge and technical assistance might be useful in creating and operating effective local arts and cultural councils or commissions and developing local arts and cultural leadership?
2. What kind of County-wide mechanism for sharing information or resources among councils or commissions would be useful? Who might administer such a mechanism?

4C. LIMITED FUNDING AND STAFF RESOURCES HAVE MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR THE PIERCE COUNTY ARTS AND CULTURAL SERVICES DIVISION TO BUILD AWARENESS OF ITS ROLE AND FUNCTION.

There is significant support for Pierce County government's efforts to develop a stronger and more strategic approach to the arts and cultural sector, and for expanding information on the Arts and Cultural Services Division's functions. Interviewees voice **a clear sense of the Division's potential and believe that it could play a critical role in shaping a more vibrant, cohesive arts and cultural sector** and enhance the quality of life in Pierce County.

Currently, because of lack of staffing and budget limitations, the **Pierce County Arts and Cultural Services Division has a low profile in the arts and cultural community** though there is a great deal of interest in the work and potential of the Division. The majority of individuals participating in the arts and cultural planning process to date have limited knowledge of, or clarity on, its current programs. There is a limited understanding of its role, its mission, and its scope of activity. **Those people who are familiar with the Division are aware primarily of its grant making function.** Some interviewees expressed interest in serving on the Pierce County Arts Commission, but the process is viewed as unclear. Some individuals assume, incorrectly, that Commissioners are selected for their fund-raising capacity. There is also a perception in the community that the Commission is not as active as similar entities in other counties or cities.

Relationship building is seen as critical to building County-wide networks for information, support, media coverage and advocacy. Sector constituents voice interest in seeing the Division take on such a role and reach out to strengthen the connections in the arts and cultural sector. **Serving as a link to bring people together and to facilitate or support those interactions is seen as a highly valued potential role for the Division.**



QUESTIONS

1. How might the Division build stronger relationships and visibility in the arts and cultural sector and with the media?
2. Could the Division serve as a mechanism to link, facilitate, or support greater interaction within the arts and cultural sector?
3. Might the Division play a role in facilitating the creation and growth of local arts and cultural commissions or similar entities, and connecting them to resources?
4. How might the role of the Pierce County Arts Commission be clarified and strengthened? How might service on the Commission be encouraged?

4D. THE ARTS AND CULTURAL SECTOR FACES THE MOST CHALLENGING ECONOMIC SITUATION IN THE PAST FIFTY YEARS.

Lack of financial resources represents a significant problem for most arts and cultural organizations in Pierce County. While the current economic downturn has made the situation especially difficult, **the problem is deeper and of longer standing.** The economy's decline has had a **significant impact on foundation and corporate** giving by limiting contributions and strengthening interest in fostering collaborative strategies among arts and cultural organizations. Support from sources such as ArtsFund and the Washington State Arts Commission, and **other public and private grant makers has declined**, reflecting reduced endowments, donations, and budgets. Individual giving as well as earned income has increased in importance for arts and cultural organizations but also face hurdles.

There is concern that **resident arts and cultural spending is declining**, having an impact on earned income in the arts, especially in terms of sales of art work and ability of residents to pay ticket costs or class fees. This situation also impacts artists and may influence their ability to make their home in Pierce County. Diminished financial resources have resulted in cut backs in personnel, hours, and programming across the sector. **Small arts and heritage groups, especially those without longstanding community roots, are particularly vulnerable in this economy.**

The economic downturn has, however, **spurred creative entrepreneurial and collaborative approaches at all levels of the sector**, including joint marketing among major institutions, cooperative studio arrangements, increased use of non-traditional and online sales venues and fundraisers, and exploration of new relationships or alliances with social and human services or business. There are efforts underway to create a long-term source of support for arts and cultural organizations in Washington State through a Cultural Access Fund of the Prosperity Partnership initiative, which has strong Pierce County arts and cultural leadership involvement. This effort, while potentially of major importance for arts and cultural institutions, is not yet a reality nor is it on the immediate horizon.



There is **strong reliance on volunteer resources to fuel the sector**, which includes volunteer boards of directors. In general, there is **continued enthusiasm and resilience** and the economic situation is seen as a temporary hurdle that can not, and should not, eclipse the forward motion of arts and cultural endeavors.

QUESTIONS

1. What steps can be taken to build a more cohesive, less competitive or fractured arts and cultural funding landscape?
2. What broad initiatives or approaches might improve financial resources for the sector? How can they be supported? Are there non-traditional sources or ideas that are timely?
3. Are there particular approaches that can bolster vibrant but fragile entrepreneurial efforts or small arts and heritage groups?
4. What ongoing technical assistance needs are greatest for the arts and cultural sector in Pierce County? What are the immediate needs related to the current economic climate?



PART III

STRATEGIC CONCEPTS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

This arts and cultural planning process, undertaken and supported by the Pierce County Arts and Cultural Services Division, provides a window into the County’s arts and cultural ecology and offers a comprehensive picture to help shape goals and strategies to strengthen the arts and cultural sector and the County’s quality of life.

We have identified three initial strategic concepts to explore and develop as the process moves forward. These are based on the key issues and themes that synthesize the input from over fifty individuals as well as other information sources. The three concepts outlined here reflect our assessment of critical needs specific to Pierce County. They are presented here as three “points of entry” for creating strategic change that will enhance the health and contribution of the arts and cultural sector.

Keep in mind that areas for strategic change should be of relevance to the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors of the arts and cultural eco-system. The greatest potential lies in having each of these sectors focus on these concepts as a road map, in ways that overlap and enhance each other. In addition, each of these Strategic Concepts is suited to a combination of both short term (2 to 4 year) and longer term (4 to 10 year) approaches. They are presented here, in preliminary form, for further discussion.

- 1. Creating advocacy and information sharing networks.** There is a need to develop stronger bonds among and between arts and cultural entities and supporters throughout the County. Fragmentation and isolation are frequently cited challenges (especially for those outside of Tacoma) for building bridges in a number of critical arenas, including funding, program resource sharing, effective practices, earned income strategies, awareness and knowledge, increased participation, among others. Arts organizations, heritage initiatives, arts education and community arts programs, business partners, and other supporters all seek a more powerful and united voice and more effective and supportive networks.



- 2. Building relationships with businesses and between arts and cultural groups to support local arts and cultural initiatives and programs.** The most effective arts and cultural environments in Pierce County are in those communities where local arts and cultural players are able to access and work with an identified entity, such as a public or private sector arts commission, council or alliance, in concert with local businesses. There is a wealth of entrepreneurial, grassroots, and volunteer resource at play across the County. These efforts, however, often lose momentum without an infrastructure and relationships to nurture them. Some of the region's larger arts institutions have significant capacity in these areas while small and mid-size groups and those in suburban and rural areas lack opportunities for peer guidance and mentoring. Support and technical assistance to help communities build arts and cultural infrastructure and community relationships has the potential to be catalytic.

- 3. Strengthening and increasing coordination for arts learning and engagement.** There are some strong arts education initiatives in Pierce County and a broad-based constituency for life-long arts and cultural activity. There is concern, however, that efforts are not adequately coordinated to create the kind of systemic impact that can improve the quality of life for children and adults and ensure access and participation across the County. The public education system, as well as some arts and heritage organizations, have powerful partnerships and programs, albeit in specific schools or districts. County-wide efforts that also look at the interests of older students and young adults are part of defining a strategy for arts and cultural engagement in the coming decades. The aging cohort of baby boomers also represents an opportunity to engage this group in arts and cultural opportunities as audience members and for personal expression.

NEXT STEPS

The Steering Committee's review of this document in January will provide important guidance to the consultants about how to use these considerations as the framework for goals and strategies for the arts and cultural plan. The community meeting being held on the same day will provide additional important feedback. You are invited to circulate this report to other interested County residents who can send their feedback directly to us at marc@wolfbrown.com. Additional feedback on the Critical Issues Report should be received by the consultants on or before January 11, 2009. All of this information – along with our completed research – will be important for refining the issues and developing the goals and strategies of the plan, which will be presented to the Steering Committee and the community later in the winter of 2010.