

Public Policy and Engagement Workgroup

Result: Artists and arts and culture groups will organize a larger collective voice to: (a) shape public perception; (b) advance public resources; and (c) address inequities in access, opportunities, and engagement. In addition, artists and arts and culture groups are partners at community decision-making tables.

We will **measure the effectiveness** of this work by:

- (a) Increase in participation at “leadership tables” by diverse members of this network;
- (b) Improved public perception of the value of arts and culture in Milwaukee increases via public survey;
- (c) Increase in public funds for arts and culture overall and increase in funds for racially diverse artists and neighborhood-based arts and culture organizations; and
- (d) Increase in diverse public participation in arts and culture.

Desired Strategies and Results by July 1, 2020:

1. Campaign for increased public support of the arts through a grass tops (board members and patrons) and grass roots (combined audiences) advocacy effort;
 - *A COVID-19 related campaign for public funding launched in May 2020;*
 - *Since May, over 5,000 letters written to state and elected officials by members of the public.*
 - *Results: \$40 M in additional state arts and culture funding*
 - *Results: \$700K in additional county funding*
 - *Results: \$0 in additional city funding*
2. Organize boards and patrons of all member groups to provide grass tops advocacy;
 - *We have begun this work over the last year and are continuing.*
3. Develop arts and culture leaders to bring their skills, experience, and perspectives to Milwaukee leadership tables and initiatives.
 - ***Not started:*** *Imagine MKE will have begun program to prepare and place arts and culture leaders with community initiatives and organizations.*

Background on Strategies

Artists and arts and culture groups seek two-way engagement with our community. Artists and arts and culture groups have skills, insights, creativity, and passion that can be assets to any community initiative, organization, or problem-solving table. And a thriving arts and culture community is increasingly important to attract and retain businesses and talent to our city.

Also, Milwaukee receives a dearth of public funds for arts when compared to similar cities, and Wisconsin ranks 50th of 50 states in public support for arts. There is a need for local government leaders, civic and business leaders, and the public to prioritize investing more in Milwaukee’s arts and culture. Such investments will have huge cultural, social, and economic impacts. We will make sure that any funding mechanisms are equitable and benefit diverse artists and groups.

To create strategies, we gathered data on the economics of arts and culture in Milwaukee and public support for arts versus other cities. We also looked at past narratives about support for arts in Milwaukee and best practices from other cities.

2019/2020 Update on Strategies

In FY 20 (2019 – 2020), the work group focused on two tracks - developing the longer-term strategy about public support for arts and culture and addressing the then current discussions among elected and civic leaders about development of new local taxation to include arts and culture in that conversation.

As the new Imagine MKE staff leadership came in the 3Q of 2019, discussions with city, county and state leaders suggested that a carve out in the proposed increase in sales tax would be a non-starter. On the one hand, it was unlikely to pass and on the other, and on the other, the budget issues confronting the county and city were incredibly vast.

The work group pivoted to develop a public policy framework for arts and culture. This document would: outline policy opportunities that the city and county had to develop a more arts and culture friendly posture, serve as the compelling narrative about how arts and culture improve quality of life and can support other public benefits like health and safety, and be a way for policymakers to quickly understand our sector's priorities and public funding priorities/criteria:

- Doesn't only support county-owned buildings;
- Supports increased access to arts and culture for diverse populations;
- Benefits diverse nonprofit arts and culture organizations, and also includes funds for diverse individual artists;
- Includes commitment to expose locals and visitors to diversity of arts and culture experiences;
- Supports the preservation of spaces, economy that allow artists to live, create, and experiment;
- Supports mechanism to export city's arts and culture.

At the March 2020 workgroup meeting, the group centered on a public policy framework that would outline proposed policy directions or specific policy proposals:

Creating Vibrant Public Spaces

- Public performance, Chapter 108
- Historic preservation
- *Public health requirements/COVID-19*

Growing More Public Resources

- Sales Tax
- Funding for School
- Non-profit ticket tax
- Film Tax Credit

Building a Strong Creative and Cultural Workforce

- Living wage
- Healthcare

Connecting our Local Identity (Development)

- Cultural Clusters/Neighborhood development

Businesses (How do businesses better engage?)

Then, later that week, COVID-19 hit and our work shifted to focusing specifically on getting more funds to arts and culture groups and individual artists through the federal relief bills and other private resources.

2021 Outlook on Strategies and Results

With the IMKE organizational focus on the impact that Arts and Culture has on health and public health outcomes, the public policy workgroup has an opportunity to align its “blueprint” with the narrative of improving the health of Milwaukee’s artists and arts and culture organizations.

A short-term result (by March 2021), could be to finish a draft of the public policy framework with artist and arts leaders input, and then over the spring/summer, work to gain city and county supporters for the document and network support at the grasstops and grassroots levels.

Workgroup cross-pollination

The Marketing and PR Workgroup can support the work of this group by (1) developing a brief, compelling, data-driven case about the social and economic impacts of arts and culture, and the opportunity costs of doing nothing; and (2) helping create a merged database of patrons and audiences to deliver messages that shape the narrative about the importance of arts and culture to Milwaukee region.

The Support for Artists Workgroup can support organizing and developing policy proposals for the workgroup to include in the policy blueprint.

The Neighborhood Partnerships Workgroup can support developing and vetting community and neighborhood development policies.