

# HOW TO PARTNER WITH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

PART 1

LOCAL ARTS AGENCIES & CHAMBERS OF  
COMMERCE—THE BASICS

**Building catalytic leadership through partnership**





# WELCOME TO PART 1 OF HOW TO PARTNER WITH YOUR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: LOCAL ARTS AGENCIES & CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE— THE VERY BASICS.

**Just as local arts agencies act as voices and conveners for their arts and culture communities, so do local chambers of commerce for their business communities.**

## **But where to start?**

Partnerships between local arts agencies and chambers of commerce generate measurable benefits across the arts, business, and community development sectors. This toolkit is designed as a resource for local arts agencies interested in working together to strengthen their communities. As the first in a three-part series, this 101-level toolkit will cover the fundamentals of why local arts agencies and chambers of commerce should partner, and how to find common ground. It provides examples of successful partnerships, examines how your peers have formed working relationships, and outlines concrete steps and tips for creating basic activations with your chamber, in your community. It will also cover the networks in which chambers of commerce operate and those that serve them, and how to navigate a traditional business environment.



*Special thanks to the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives for contributions to this toolkit.*

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to be used in tandem with our online webinar series entitled, **“How to Partner With Your Chamber of Commerce, Part 1.”** The series is available on ArtsU and includes three pre-recorded sessions. Periodic live sessions will be available for peer learning and support. The Part 1 sessions include:



### **Understanding the Chamber of Commerce Landscape**

In the first session, local arts leaders will gain introductory knowledge of local chambers of commerce, how they operate, their general priorities, opportunities, and challenges. Sheree Anne Kelly, president and CEO of the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, provides a broad overview of the national chambers landscape and tips for engaging with local chamber leaders.



### **Navigating Your Chamber and Business Community**

In the second session, participants will gain insight as to how to best navigate new relationships with the chamber and its business members. Through a moderated conversation with Kelly Johnson, executive director of the Arts & Business Alliance of Eugene, and Brittany Quick-Warner, president and CEO of the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce, attendees will consider how to reach beyond their role as an “arts person” and translate their work and goals into the frame of the business community.



### **Getting Started on a Partnership**

In the third session, local arts leaders will hear about different kinds of basic activations and/or programs they can undertake with their local chamber of commerce to build and deepen their relationship. Participants will hear from Jill McMillan Palm, executive director of the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville, about their partnership with the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and how they work together alongside other municipal partners to produce the Periscope program.

Use this toolkit as an aid to map and understand your own chamber and business community. Use the worksheet at the end of the toolkit as a place to do your own research and add ideas for beginning a partnership with your chamber.

Once completing Part 1 of the series, we invite you to build upon these foundational skills in Parts 2 and 3, both of which include their own set of three on-demand sessions, a toolkit, and periodic live conversation for peer learning.



### **About Part 2: Connecting Social Impact to Arts and Chamber Partnerships**

In Part 2, participants will take the foundational knowledge gained and basic activations from the first series and expand beyond their role as arts leaders into the role of community and economic development partner. Participants will learn about how to identify their own work and assets with their full community and creative ecosystem, and begin to leverage new connections and relationships inside the chamber to address social impact and community issues. Participants will gain fluency in the Arts & Economic Prosperity studies, as well as learn how to use other creative economy research to make their case to their chamber and economic development counterparts.

### **About Part 3: Supporting and Advancing Inclusive Creative Economies With Your Chamber of Commerce**

Further building on the first two parts of this series, participants will consider what they can do in their communities alongside their chambers after building trust and mutual respect. How can local arts leaders navigate policy, politics, resource distribution, access to capital, and economic development opportunities as equal players with their chamber partners? This module will also discuss centering equity and equitable economic development, and solidarity economy principals into the chamber space.

## **HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE THIS TOOLKIT**

- About local arts agencies
- About chambers of commerce
- The arts, business, and partnership
- Getting started
- Activation
- Partnerships in practice
- Case study
- Business and chamber profile worksheet

# ABOUT LOCAL ARTS AGENCIES

Recognizing that every community organizes, utilizes, and activates within different systems and structures, and while local arts agencies (LAAs) are usually prominent as organizers of the arts and culture sector, the information included in this toolkit can be used by any arts group seeking to form a relationship with chambers of commerce.

The nation's 4,500 local arts agencies promote, support, and develop the arts at the local level, ensuring a vital presence for the arts throughout America's communities. LAAs are diverse in their makeup—they have many different names and embrace a spectrum of artistic disciplines. Each LAA works to sustain the health and vitality of the arts and artists locally, while also striving to make the arts accessible to all members of a community. Each LAA in America is unique to the community that it serves, and each evolves within its community—no two LAAs are exactly alike in name, programming, or even mission.

LAAs can have many names but are still considered an LAA. These can include Arts Council, Arts Commission, Cultural Commission, Cultural Affairs Department, Cultural Alliance, Arts Center, Business Committee for the Arts, Arts Service Organization, United Arts Fund; or any creative name that suggests the work they do is similar to those listed above, such as ArtsWave, Allied Arts, or ArtsBuild.

[Learn more about local arts agencies](#) and the ways they are vital to their communities.

## WHY SHOULD LOCAL ARTS AGENCIES PARTNER WITH THEIR CHAMBER?

- Participate as an active member in community and economic development discussions.
- Expand your network, gain business contacts, and participate in new circles of influence.
- Broaden audiences and raise visibility for artistic programs and events.
- Explore the potential for new financial support for local arts agency programs.
- Position yourself as a solution and leader to broad community challenges.

## WHY SHOULD A CHAMBER PARTNER WITH A LOCAL ARTS AGENCY?

- Build market share, enhance brand, and reach new potential members.
- Address economic, social, and civic challenges through innovative solutions.
- Retain and recruit talent and engage employees through unique experiences.
- Create an environment that fosters connections across cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

# ABOUT CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

[The Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives](#) (ACCE) defines a chamber of commerce as “an organization of businesses seeking to further their collective interests, while advancing their community, region, state, or nation. Business owners in towns, cities and other territories voluntarily form these local societies/networks to advocate on behalf of the community at large, economic prosperity and business interests. Chambers have existed in the US for more than two centuries, with many having been established before the jurisdictions they represent. A business-led civic and economic advancement entity operating in a specific space may call itself any number of things—board of trade, business council, etc.—but for the purposes of this primer, *they are all chambers of commerce.*”

Increasingly, chambers are focusing on how the business community can play a role in solving broader challenges that the community faces, from transportation to workforce to downtown revitalization. Chamber members are dues-paying businesses that collectively elect a board of directors and/or executive council to create policy decisions and set broad goals. Through chambers, member businesses gain access to new networks, professional development opportunities, inclusion in policy conversations, and visibility, all of which enable businesses to promote prosperity in their communities.

ACCE also states that “Chamber missions vary, but they all tend to focus to some degree on five primary goals: Building communities (regions/states/nations) to which residents, visitors and investors are attracted; Promoting those communities; Striving to ensure future prosperity via a pro-business climate; Representing the unified voice of the employer community; and Reducing transactional friction through well-functioning networks. Chambers have other features in common. Most are led by private-sector employers, self-funded, organized around boards/committees of volunteers and independent.”

There are approximately 4,000 chambers of commerce employing at least one full-time staff member in the United States. About one-third of these include economic development corporations and/or tourism and visitors bureaus. These numbers do not include the thousands of volunteer-led chambers, nonprofit business, and civic engagement organizations such as Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis Clubs. It is important to know which entities exist in your community.

## **Structure**

Chambers of Commerce operate almost exclusively as nonprofit 501(c)(6) corporations as defined by the Internal Revenue Service code. Unlike 501(c)(3) charities, they are permitted by law to participate in public policy debates, endorse candidates for office, and lobby on actual or proposed legislation. Some chambers create a 501(c)(3) charitable foundation to support specific parts of their agenda.

## **Service Area & Affinity Chambers**

Chamber service areas are largely defined by their geography, though are rarely defined by any legal jurisdiction.

In many communities, especially more populated ones, often multiple chambers of commerce exist. Affinity chambers serve a specific demographic, its businesses and business leaders, and can include—but are not limited to—Black, Hispanic, Asian, LGBTQIA+, Women’s, Veterans, and Disability chambers.

## **Local, National, and International Chambers**

With regards to state, regional, and national chambers, ACCE states that “local chambers are often, but not always, paying members of their state and national chambers of commerce. This connection is one of voluntary membership and does not extend to control or governance. A significant number of chamber executives also choose to join professional associations of their peers, such as the American Chamber of Commerce Executives, the Western Association of Chamber Executives, State Chamber Executive Associations, or the World Chambers Federation.”

Like the local arts agency landscape, chambers of commerce can connect with state and regional chambers, intersecting on common policy pursuits. Likewise with the local arts field, service and professional development organizations will exist at the state, regional, and national levels, including for affinity chambers.

For example, the [U.S. Black Chambers, Inc](#) “provides committed, visionary leadership and advocacy in the realization of economic empowerment. Through the creation of

resources and initiatives, we support African American Chambers of Commerce and business organizations in their work of developing and growing Black enterprises,” while the [National Black Chamber of Commerce](#) “is dedicated to economically empowering and sustaining African American communities through entrepreneurship and capitalistic activity within the United States and via interaction with the Black Diaspora.” The former primarily serves organizations, while the latter serves community.

There are over 13,000 chambers of commerce globally. In many countries, membership in a chamber is mandatory under national law. This is not the case in the United States. In the U.S., international-facing chambers serve a variety of purposes. Some work to serve foreign-based businesses operating in the United States, while others provide regulatory and trade support for American-owned businesses in foreign countries. For example, the [China General Chamber of Commerce](#) represents Chinese-owned enterprises operating in the U.S., while the [US Arab Chamber of Commerce](#) serves U.S. businesses that export product or provide services to the Middle East.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce acts as the primary voice for business, advocating for pro-business policies at the national level in the United States. It is the world’s largest business organization and primarily focuses on key issues related to tax policy, regulation, trade, and workforce development. Many local chambers of commerce are also members of the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#).

# THE ARTS, BUSINESS, AND PARTNERSHIP

Americans for the Arts believes that encouraging creative thinking and leveraging creative expression in business through partnerships with the arts is essential for building healthy businesses and vibrant communities. Partnerships between arts and businesses provide unique opportunities for business growth and positive community impact.

The pARTnership Movement provides in depth resources and case studies on how to achieve these partnerships. It is based on [8 Reasons to Partner With the Arts](#) and is a framework for the benefits to employees, companies, communities, and to advancing diversity and equity. We encourage you to read through the [Building Partnerships 101 Toolkit](#) for a more in-depth look at each of the reasons and why businesses should partner with the arts.

**The arts mean business.** Research shows that strong connections between the arts and business create vibrant places to live and work.



**62% of businesses** believe that the arts can help them achieve the objective of improving the quality of life in the community.<sup>1</sup>



**66% of businesses** consider the arts and entertainment as either somewhat or very important for making communities attractive places to work.<sup>2</sup>



**82% of Americans** believe arts and culture are important to the local business and economy.<sup>3</sup>



**52% of Americans** believe that the arts offer creative strategies to address jobs and the economy as a key community issue.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, arts and business partnerships work for consumers, too: **58% of respondents** to the 2017 LaPlaca Cohen study *Culture Track* reported that they feel good about doing business with corporations that support cultural organizations.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Americans for the Arts. 2020. [Business Contributions to the Arts, 2019, Edition 3.](#)

<sup>2</sup> National Endowment for the Arts. 2017. [Rural Arts, Design, and Innovation in America.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Americans for the Arts. 2018. [Americans Speak Out About the Arts.](#)

<sup>4</sup> *Culture Track*. 2017. [Culture Track '17.](#)

**COVID-19 and the need for arts, business, and chamber relationships for relief, recovery, and reimagination.** COVID-19 laid bare vulnerabilities that exist across the business and arts sectors. Since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, chambers across the country have been laser-focused on responding to the crisis and navigating economic recovery. Chambers stepped up to support small businesses in their communities, taking on everything from shop local initiatives to administering small business grants. Chambers took up issues like access to broadband, childcare, and personal protective equipment for frontline workers. Chambers continue to prioritize issues and partnerships that will support long-term economic recovery. Chambers are also advocates for support of the arts. In August 2020, [204 chambers of commerce signed a letter to Congress](#) in support of arts and culture relief. This was a great example of how local arts and chamber leaders can connect for shared purpose in their communities.

**In many communities, these partnerships already exist.** According to Americans for the Arts' [2019 Profile of Local Arts Agencies](#), 58% of local arts agencies facilitate partnerships between the local nonprofit arts community and businesses. As service agencies, local arts agencies often work as the connecting thread between seemingly disparate community partners. Partnerships with local chambers can strengthen mutual goals.

**Chambers of commerce and local arts agencies share common goals, often without realizing it.** We know from the *Arts & Economic Prosperity 5* research that 69% of nonlocal attendees to arts events are there because of that arts event (and spending \$47.57 at local businesses), 41% of local residents would go to a different community in search of an arts experience if one did not exist in their community, and that tourists spend twice as much as their local counterparts in local businesses when attending an arts event.<sup>5</sup> The arts can serve as a vehicle to drive social cohesion, workforce development, tourism, civic engagement, and health and wellness. To learn more about the power of the arts, visit Americans for the Arts' [Arts + Social Impact Explorer](#). Many local arts agencies are already working in similar areas of concern as their chamber.

**There are ample opportunities to continue to build partnerships between arts and businesses.** Data shows that 49% of local arts agencies are engaged in partnerships with a local chamber of commerce or other business services entity, but only 46% of local arts agencies report that the arts are being integrated into comprehensive community planning efforts.<sup>6</sup> Understanding the priorities of both the chamber and the local arts agency will help each party support one another for mutual benefit.

These partnerships are essential to the growth and sustainability of healthy communities in which both business and the arts can thrive. With over 4,000 chambers of commerce in the United States, according to the [Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives](#), the opportunities for collaboration are abundant. Chambers of commerce and local arts agencies have the potential to create dynamic, mutually beneficial partnerships that enable networking and innovation across sectors, foster diversity and creativity in organizations, and contribute to the economic development of local communities.

5 Americans for the Arts. 2015. [Arts & Economic Prosperity 5](#).

6 Americans for the Arts. 2020. [2019 Profile of Local Arts Agencies](#).

# GETTING STARTED

Building a relationship between a local arts agency and a chamber of commerce relies on finding commonality and the biggest areas for achieving shared purpose. The following recommendations are based on the advice of local arts leaders around the nation:

## GATHER INFORMATION

From the perspective of a local arts agency leader, it is important to do your research to prepare yourself to initiate a conversation. Identify values, priorities, or goals that your organization shares with your local chamber of commerce. You can learn about chambers' priorities by:

- Visiting their websites.
- Attending their meetings and events.
- Researching their membership list.
- Becoming a member of the chamber.
- Sitting on chamber committees that address areas of focus other than the arts.
- Having ongoing conversations with chamber members.
- Profiling your chamber and business community using the worksheet included in this toolkit.

Evaluate whether the chamber is the economic development organization for your community. If the chamber is not the formal economic development organization, look at how the chamber has been involved in these issues in the past. Most organic connections with chambers of commerce occur over economic development goals.

### Common points of connection between chambers and arts organizations include:

- Talent retention and recruitment.
- Creating a business-friendly environment.
- Social impact (visit the [Arts + Social Impact Explorer](#) to learn more).
- Attracting and engaging with tourism.
- Improving quality of life.
- Revitalizing neighborhoods.
- Creating cohesion within neighborhoods.
- Fostering community recognition.

**Your “readiness test” is:** If you have a chance meeting with the chamber's CEO at an event, are you ready to make a short tantalizing pitch and request a meeting?

## REACHING OUT

As a local arts agency, once you have determined that you would like to work with your local chamber of commerce and have some ideas as to what intersections there might be between the two organizations, consider the following:



**Review your current contacts.** Are any of your colleagues or patrons part of your local chamber?



**Look at the chamber staff list.** Determine who oversees the work in the intersection areas that you have identified and reach out to them to schedule a call or meeting.



**Use your network.** If the chamber doesn't have a staff member that oversees intersecting work, think of a contact in your network with the least degree of separation. Do any of your colleagues, patrons, or board members know the chamber staff? Using your research to find common ground, identify a contact who is already a believer of your work and understands the value of leveraging the arts.



**Reach out.** Send an email or call the contact you identify to set up a meeting.



**Prepare for the conversation.** Consider who else you might include in a meeting or call that is also a champion of your work and either has a connection to the chamber or can share why your agency is an important relationship.



**Plan what you want to say ahead of time.** Use the [Business Speak](#) and the [Building pARTnerships 101](#) toolkits to find out more about how to speak with business leaders and chambers of commerce about the arts.



**Use our on-demand training sessions.** This toolkit includes three on-demand webinars with presentations by arts and chamber leaders. The information in the recordings will provide some additional guidance on starting these relationships.

Your local arts agency and your local chamber of commerce have distinct missions. Be strategic in how you portray your organization and goals in relation to those of the chamber of commerce as you begin to build a relationship. Though you may have gathered assumptions about mutual points of interest, it's important to approach conversations as listening sessions. These relationships can be long lasting, ever evolving, and potentially cover many areas of community impact. Keep in mind that priorities of each organization may not match immediate needs and/or goals, but working towards a future vision is valuable.

A local arts agency can be the missing link between community and economic development, and the public/private partners that exist in non-arts spaces. Identify areas where there is a lack of connection between major stakeholders in your community and don't be afraid to occupy that space. Successful partnerships have emerged from local arts agencies who orient themselves as a point of connection between the chamber of commerce, arts organizations, city government, and local colleges and universities. Both entities have valuable assets; both tangible and intrinsic. Use your conversations as an opportunity to discover what assets can be exchanged for maximum mutual benefit.

## THINGS TO AVOID

There are a few things that will likely be less successful as you begin these relationships. Here are some considerations and things to avoid:

-  **Making it all about money.** Don't assume that chambers and their business members exist purely for sponsorship and donations. Though businesses may have a different bottom line, their concerns are broader than cash. Walking into a conversation with a direct ask or expectation for money will close doors and inhibit opportunity for future partnerships.
-  **Having an expected outcome.** Though you may have a specific need or goal, keep an open mind about unforeseen possibilities. If you are only interested in your own goal, the opportunity for deeper and broader impact fades.
-  **Not seeing the long game.** We are in the relationship-building business. If you are simply focused on one 'win' with your chamber, or a short-term program, you may miss the chance to develop a long-term and meaningful partnership that can grow and evolve with time.

## MAKE IT YOUR GOAL TO BECOME AN IMPORTANT, EQUAL, AND TRUSTED PARTNER WITH YOUR CHAMBER.

This will not happen at the outset, but a long-term investment will have great returns.

**THE ARTS & BUSINESS ALLIANCE OF EUGENE HAS SERVED AS THE POINT OF CONNECTION BETWEEN FIVE LOCAL INSTITUTIONS: CITY OF EUGENE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON, LINN-BENTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE, EUGENE CASCADES & COAST, AND THE EUGENE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE. ITS GOAL IS TO COORDINATE AND STRENGTHEN THE EFFORTS OF THE PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND NONPROFIT CULTURAL SECTORS, AND FOSTER HIGH-LEVEL CIVIC LEADERSHIP IN SUPPORT OF ARTS AND CULTURE.**



## RESEARCH

Research is a powerful tool to support the case for a chamber/local arts agency partnership. There is a wide variety of research on the benefits of business partnerships with the arts, economic impact of the arts, creative industries, and local arts and culture production. The following resources are a good place to start.

### **Arts & Economic Prosperity 5**

This study features national data collected by Americans for the Arts, localized reports for participating communities, and an online calculator for those who want custom data.

[Full Report](#)

### **Business Contributions to the Arts**

The 2019 edition of this study, published by Americans for the Arts, highlights trends and information as to why businesses support the arts.

[Full Report](#)

### **Creative Industries Report**

Published by Americans for the Arts, and using Dun and Bradstreet data, this study highlights the size and scope of arts-based businesses across the country. County and legislative district-specific reports are available as well.

[Full Report](#)

### **Arts and Culture Production Satellite Account**

Published by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, this report highlights the economic impact, contributions to GDP, output, employment, and compensation of the arts and culture sector in the United States.

[Full Report](#)

### **Culture Track**

An ongoing LaPlaca Cohen research study of the changing behaviors of cultural audiences.

[Full Report](#)

If you are interested in pursuing the development of research in your community, Americans for the Arts offers customized [Research and Survey Services](#).

## ACTIVATION

Take small, early steps to identify and/or establish programs and activations that demonstrate measurable changes. Choosing the best project means finding one that matches your capacity and promotes the shared values between the local arts agency and chamber of commerce. The best program is one that is mutually beneficial.

As membership organizations, chambers of commerce boost membership by advancing unique opportunities for their members that other business alliances cannot offer. Creating programs and events with local arts agencies such as networking and employee engagement opportunities for local businesses are a great way to do that. Local arts agencies are often looking for new audiences or areas of the community with whom they can engage. How can existing programs and opportunities be aligned? How can an activation act as a signal boost for both partners?

**ArtsinStark** of **Canton, Ohio**, started a community arts festival called First Fridays in 2007. After communicating festival visitor data to the chamber, ArtsinStark was able to establish the potential for more substantial collaborations in the future.

**ARTSINSTARK APPROACHED THE CANTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE WITH HARD DATA ABOUT THE FIRST FRIDAYS THAT DEMONSTRATED EARLY GROWTH IN VISITOR TURNOUT. AFTER REVIEWING THE NUMBERS, THE CHAMBER OFFERED ARTSINSTARK SEVERAL BUILDINGS IN DOWNTOWN CANTON FOR CONVERSION INTO STUDIOS AND GALLERIES, STARTING WHAT WOULD EVENTUALLY BECOME THE CANTON ARTS DISTRICT.**

**ROBB HANKINS, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
ARTSINSTARK | CANTON, OH

**Here are some examples of projects local arts agency leaders recommend:**

- A networking happy hour that brings together chamber members and arts organizations (and/or artists) that offer arts-based employee training programs.
- Listing chamber members in an arts directory or festival brochure.
- Participation in a chamber keynote or panel program that ties the arts to any of the areas outlined in the [Arts + Social Impact Explorer](#).
- Working through the chamber and its members to add arts elements to corporate events.
- Arts-based programming that draws tourism and boosts small business focus days.
- In-kind or monetary sponsorship of arts-based initiatives that increase community recognition.
- Create an arts liaison position or arts committee at your chamber.
- Invite chamber staff or leadership to serve on grant panels or business awards programs.
- Participate in chamber events and leadership opportunities, such as traveling with a municipal delegation to represent your community in economic development meetings.

**CHAMBERS ARE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES TO OFFER THEIR MEMBERS. IT IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF CHAMBERS TO BRAND THEMSELVES WITH ARTS GROUPS IN ORDER TO CREATE THOSE OPPORTUNITIES.**

**LAURA BRUNEY**

ARTS & BUSINESS COUNCIL OF MIAMI | MIAMI, FL

## **EXTRA TIPS FOR LOCAL ARTS AGENCIES**



**Be proactive.** Being proactive about connecting with your chamber is a necessary step in establishing shared values and promoting the message that you are looking for a mutually beneficial relationship.



**Communicate consistently.** Without regular meetings and discussions, a connection cannot be sustained. Reach out as often as appropriate, even if it is just a quick phone call to give updates, catch up, or listen and learn about the motivations and activities of the chamber as often as possible.



**Tell your unique story.** Combine your use of data with the story of your organization. Share anecdotes that embody your organization's culture, mission, aspirations, and desire to be an integral part of the community.



**Try, try, and try again.** Do not be surprised if a chamber of commerce turns you down. Not every chamber is willing or has the capacity to partner with local arts agencies at a given moment. However, be determined and keep trying. Continue to maintain contact and attend chamber events, as that will build the foundation necessary for a future partnership. Many successful partnerships have formed only after multiple attempts to find the right shared values at the right time.

**CHAMBERS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONS ARE OFTEN VERY INVOLVED WITH "SITE SELECTORS" FOR BUSINESSES. MANY HOST ANNUAL EVENTS TO PITCH THEIR CITY TO SITE SELECTORS. FIND OUT WHO ORGANIZES THOSE EVENTS AND MAKE SURE THE ARTS ARE BOTH PART OF THEIR MESSAGING AND PART OF THE EXPERIENCES DURING THAT EVENT. THE ARTS LEADERS CAN HELP MAKE SURE THAT MESSAGE IS AUTHENTIC AND COMPELLING. THIS IS A GREAT WAY TO DEMONSTRATE VALUE BACK TO THE CHAMBER, TOO.**

**MEREDITH BADLER, DEPUTY DIRECTOR**

COLORADO BUSINESS COMMITTEE FOR THE ARTS | DENVER, CO

## PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE

The previous sections highlight the benefits of and strategies for forming partnerships between local arts agencies and chambers of commerce, and the best practices for doing so. Below are examples of successful partnerships from across the country.

### NETWORKING & RECOGNITION EVENTS

Networking events between arts organizations, artists, and businesses are popular collaborations between local arts agencies and chambers of commerce. Young Professionals, Employee Resource Groups, or Emerging Leaders networking events are great opportunities for business leaders to connect with the arts.

In **Eugene, Oregon**, the **Arts & Business Alliance of Eugene** facilitates an annual Arts After Hours event, which is attended by over 20 arts organizations and 300 individual participants as a way to encourage exchange between business professionals and arts organizations. This event now includes “pulse” activities, or interactive arts experiences, so that arts groups can show more of their work as chamber members participate on site.

In **Taos, New Mexico**, the **Taos County Chamber of Commerce** holds monthly networking events at various locations, including many local arts and culture facilities, such as the Taos Center for the Arts, KTAOS Solar Center, the Harwood Museum of Art, and the Taos Art Museum. The chamber also hosts and produces a live summer concert series in partnership with arts organizations, businesses, and community organizations from the entire Northern New Mexico region.

In **Colorado Springs, Colorado**, the annual Business+Arts Lunch is presented by the **Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region** and the **Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce & EDC**. The annual Lunch features eclectic live performances on multiple stages, local art for sale, delicious food and drink, and multiple awards for leadership at the intersections of business and creativity.

The Lunch honors diverse collaborations and stories of arts and business “intersecting” in the Pikes Peak region in mutually beneficial ways.

### CO-MARKETING & BRANDING

An easy activation with a chamber is to market each other’s activities and events. Restaurant weeks, concerts, festivals, or tourism-specific campaigns. Using the [Arts & Economic Prosperity 5](#) research can assist with providing concrete data to accompany the intrinsic value of the arts.

In **Eugene, Oregon**, the **Arts & Business Alliance of Eugene** also works with the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce to produce an arts guide, which is used by the chamber to attract new businesses and lists all the arts groups that participate in the annual Arts After Hours event (listed above).

In **Lakeport, California**, the **Lake County Arts Council** shares publicity of the arts through public calendars. They attend meetings with the Lake County Chamber of Commerce and share the newest arts events in the area. If a project is being planned and art is involved, the chamber contacts the Arts Council and asks for participation and/or consultation.

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

Concerts, art fairs, small business shopping days, and gallery crawls are just a few examples of programs co-hosted by local arts agencies and chambers of commerce, and each offers the opportunity for members of the arts and business communities to connect, network, and share ideas.

In **Danbury, Connecticut**, the **Danbury Cultural Commission** was engaged with the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce and the CityCenter (an economic development district) to have them assist with producing Make Music Day (an international day of music on June 21, 2020).

In **Kodiak, Alaska**, the **Kodiak Chamber of Commerce** annually sponsors a fisheries trade show (fisheries is the primary industry in their community), a new component of which is a fashion show highlighting functional work wear for catching and processing fish, as well as fisheries-themed clothing. The Kodiak Arts Council has partnered with the chamber by engaging artists in creating fisheries/marine-inspired wearable arts as signature pieces for the trade show.

In **Boulder, Colorado**, the **Boulder Chamber** has a volunteer Arts Liaison position. As Boulder has the eighth largest concentration of artists in the country, it is no surprise that strong programming through the chamber has supported a bustling arts community. The chamber's work in advocacy has helped with the passage of a sales tax that has raised \$8 million for venues and public art. The city has also identified the chamber as an ally in four of eight strategies of its cultural plan. To date, the chamber regularly hosts:

- Symposiums, such as one hosted with the Urban Land Institute, discussing the economic impact of the arts and spatial development.
- After-hours networking events that promote the arts.
- Holiday Star Lighting, an annual holiday event hosted by the chamber, supported by holiday card sales featuring the artwork of a local artist commissioned by the chamber.
- A week-long celebration of the arts started in 2014, which brings together businesses, artists, city government, and the chamber.
- Participation in and support of the launch of a new group that promotes arts philanthropy.

In **Binghamton, New York**, the **Broome County Arts Council** saw an opportunity to work with their chamber, Visit Binghamton, while they were in the midst of a re-branding effort. By reaching out, having conversation, and exploring where different interest groups of the tourism branch of their chamber and the arts intersect, the cultural alliance began working with [eatBING](#), a consortium of 24 restaurants in downtown Binghamton. The cultural alliance worked with the consortium to list all 24 restaurants on the back of the First Friday gallery brochure to drive business for local restaurants. It's a simple collaboration that goes a long way for two entities that are central to the city of Binghamton's city plan: tourism and arts.



## COMMITTEES AND BOARD POSITIONS

Chambers and economic development agencies may have subcommittees based on specific industry groups or community interests. There may also be space on the board for an arts representative.

In **Aurora, Colorado**, the **Aurora Chamber of Commerce** has a standing Arts + Business Connection Committee, which includes both arts and businesspeople. The committee is dedicated to demonstrating the value of integrating the arts as a business tool and highlighting the various mutual benefits and partnerships between arts and business.

## CREATIVE & LEADERSHIP EXCHANGES

These are programs in which local arts agencies send skilled artists to businesses to help them imbue their business work with creative practice. A creative exchange program can be built from previous successes in networking and community events and symposiums. Chambers often produce speaker series, TED-style talks, thought leadership events, or regular industry-specific roundtables. These can come in the form of leadership development seminars, roundtable discussions, webinars, and information sessions.

In **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**, the **Arts + Business Council of Greater Philadelphia** created the [CreativeXchange](#) leadership program, which consists of four sessions that partner creative thinkers and artists with business leaders to teach skills that can be applied to their sectors. These lessons focus on using the creative process to drive innovation in the workplace.

In **Denver, Colorado**, **Colorado Business Committee for the Arts** Executive Director Christin Crampton Day recently traveled to Dallas with the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp (MDECC) as part of their Chamber LEX (Leadership Exchange) program. The visit included the Mayor of Denver and 160 business and civic leaders.

In **Marion, Ohio**, the **Marion Area Chamber of Commerce** facilitates a community nonprofit executive director council for sharing insights, resources, and support. The [Palace Cultural Arts Association](#) director is a member of that council. The chamber facilitates networking activities, and the Arts Association uses those events to connect with business leaders. They are partnering on a community coalition to streamline efforts to move the community forward on multiple fronts. The Arts Association voice adds to the tourism conversation led by the convention and visitor bureau.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ADVOCACY

Chambers and economic development agencies are deeply involved in community and economic planning, both short- and long-term, and often in tandem with municipal and regional government. Cultural planning processes, advocacy, business attraction, and talent retention can all be areas in which LAAs can intersect with their chambers.

As the city of **Ocala, Florida**, seeks to enact its arts and culture master plan, the **Marion Cultural Alliance (MCA)**, Ocala's local arts agency, is working with the chamber to make the case and advocate with the business community for public funding of the arts. MCA participated in an economic development site visit to Lexington, Kentucky, to understand how [LexArts](#) and the city's public and private partners are working together to increase support of the arts. The Ocala Metro Chamber and Economic Partnership is now forming a committee of business leaders to research other public funding of the arts models across the country to inform their decisions of what options will make sense for Ocala. Using the Arts & Economic Prosperity research, MCA has been able to show the diversity of Ocala's economic pie, with arts and culture contributing a significant slice. MCA and the chamber are working together to have MCA be the meeting point between the city's master plan, the tourism and development plan, and the arts and culture master plan.

In **Springfield, Missouri**, the **Springfield Regional Arts Council** is a member of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce and is also a part of the Springfield-Metro Partnership. This group collaborates to host several events during Missouri's legislative season (January-May) to advocate for a variety of issues. They create a shared legislative priorities list for both the state and federal policy makers, host a cocktail reception in their capital city, and a couple of legislative breakfasts. They participate in chamber committees where appropriate and generally nurture a positive working relationship. Over the years, the Arts Council has become the go-to place to start if the arts are needed or involved. Whether they are the organization to help or make the connection with another arts organization, it has established a strong connection with their chamber.

In **Boston, Massachusetts**, the **Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce** acted as the lead writer, organizer, and communicator on three sign-on letters fielded to chambers of commerce across the country, encouraging Congress to support arts and culture in their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021.



Photos by Tiffany Bessire, courtesy Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville

## CASE STUDY

# ARTS & BUSINESS COUNCIL OF GREATER NASHVILLE

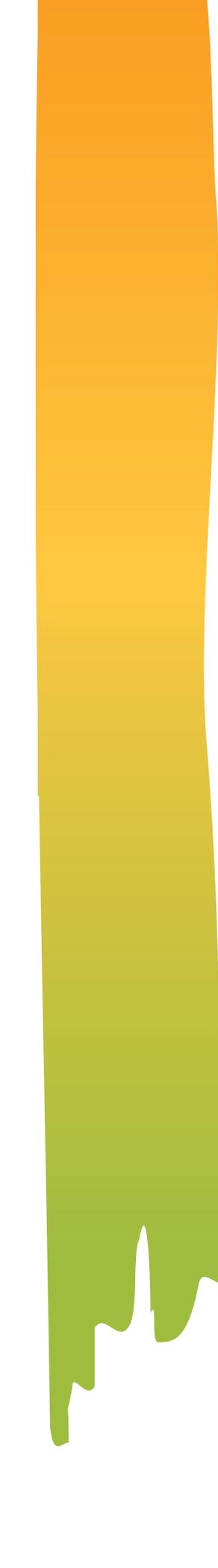
by Jill McMillan Palm, Executive Director

**At the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville**, we know that a strong sector of creative businesses will enhance the overall economic profile of the Greater Nashville area. A thriving arts community attracts businesses to our region; makes for a healthy, happy population; and creates strong, innovative solutions to social, business, and civic challenges. Therefore, we aim to create mutually beneficial partnerships between and among individual artists, arts nonprofit organizations, for-profit creative businesses, and a broad spectrum of business and civic partners. Through these partnerships, we provide the direct services, key opportunities, and vital education necessary for a thriving, sustainable creative economy in the region.

As economic development and private-sector partnerships are an integral part of our mission, we constantly survey the business landscape to understand how the Arts & Business Council can develop relationships that provide value in support of our mission. By knowing the landscape of our community,

it's easier to understand everyone's roles, priorities, assets, and potential partnership opportunities that are out there. One of the easiest ways to build relationships is to get to know your local Chamber of Commerce. Chambers of Commerce are valuable networks of businesses and professionals working together to build a healthy economy and improve the quality of life in a community. Here in Nashville, our Chamber's mission is to create economic prosperity by facilitating community leadership.

Over time, the Arts & Business Council has been developing a deep relationship with our local Chamber. In addition to being a member and paying our annual dues, our staff frequently takes advantage of the Chamber's programming—including business networking mixers, informational events, posting our events on their community calendars, sending press releases about our relevant programs and events to their team, and inviting their team members to our major events. This kind of participation and involvement is



low-hanging fruit and a great place to start a relationship. It's an easy and important way to get to know the Chamber and its members, and we've found a lot of value in other business partnerships with people we have met through Chamber events. That long-time relationship building set the stage when the time was right for a larger opportunity.

In 2012, the Arts & Business Council was doing some strategic planning work for the organization and as a part of this strategic work, we realized that Nashville's community of artists and makers was growing at an especially rapid pace. We were seeing artists shift away from traditional day jobs into creative enterprises, and they faced new challenges that come with running a small business. Though there were several resources for other types of small businesses across the Nashville area, there were no sequential programs that provided a core business foundation for artists. These business skills were, and still are, critical to the success and growth of Nashville's creative economy.

The Arts & Business Council has been providing education seminars and workshops on a broad variety of business-related topics to artists since 2006, so we knew our expertise in training artists was a key asset. However, to truly address the gap, we needed partners with additional expertise on entrepreneurial skills, small business training, working with communities, and building a strong economy.

After surveying the landscape, we identified several key partners that shared our goals: our local arts agency; a nonprofit that connects entrepreneurs with resources to create, launch, and grow businesses; the Mayor's Office of Economic and Community Development; and the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce.

This group found immediate consensus around the importance of retaining artists, as well as attracting more artists to Nashville. During a half-day planning retreat, the five organizations assessed the current landscape of the creative community, reviewed current trainings being offered, identified gaps and additional needs, and made commitments to continue the conversation and contribute time and resources to filling the gaps.

Next, the Arts & Business Council surveyed the creative community to test the assumptions from the retreat about the need for business training for artists. More than 300 artists responded to the survey and identified "entrepreneurial" skills as the #1 resource needed to sustain their creative businesses. With this confirmation, the coalition outlined their specific partner roles and formally joined forces to launch [Periscope: Artist Entrepreneur Training](#) in spring 2014.

Periscope is an annual, application-based training program that empowers working artists to see their artistic vision through an entrepreneurial lens. The curriculum teaches artists the entrepreneurial skills

they need to develop innovative strategies for organizing, planning, and sustaining their creative careers. Periscope is now in its eighth year, and by the end of 2021, 172 artists will have graduated through the program.

So, how did we accomplish all of this? Through ongoing conversations with the program partners after the initial planning retreat, we began to define roles, set timelines and budgets, and build a draft plan for the program.

The Arts & Business Council serves as the backbone organization and leads development of the program, including logistics and fundraising. We also contribute arts expertise to develop the curriculum and help translate it for a creative audience. The Entrepreneur Center provides expert entrepreneurial training, curriculum customization, and workshop space; Metro Arts provides funding for Artist Group Leaders to facilitate small group learning and helps to develop evaluation tools to track outcomes; The Mayor's Office provides recognition of the importance of artists to our local economy with media opportunities; and the Chamber helped to develop the brand for the program and provides access to the Chamber's resources for traditional small businesses.

These strategic public-private partnerships allowed us to ground our work in both the creative and business sectors and maximize each of our strengths resulting in a much more robust program than Arts & Business Council could have developed alone. As the program has developed or different individuals have joined the partner organizations, we have had to reevaluate and renegotiate the roles and

responsibilities among the partners. It's also been important to evaluate the partnership and collect feedback from the partners, as well as those we're serving.

With the Chamber specifically, we know that this program helps them market Nashville to the rest of the world for business relocation and development, tourism, and more, by ensuring that we have strong artistic and cultural infrastructure for years to come. From their involvement as a partner with Periscope: Artist Entrepreneur Training, the Chamber has a direct pipeline of materials and media opportunities to tell the story of Nashville's creative economy and how the city supports its art and artists. Recognizing that this is a long-term strategy for our organization, as well as for the community as a whole, we have prioritized communication and collaboration among the partners to make this a mutually beneficial relationship that supports the individual programs and goals of each participating organization.

*The Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that leverages and unites the unique resources of the arts and business communities to create a thriving, sustainable, creative culture in Greater Nashville. We accomplish our mission through seven main programs: Volunteer Lawyers & Professionals for the Arts, Periscope: Artist Entrepreneur Training, Fiscal Sponsorship, Education for the Creative Community, Creative Exchange, Creative Advantage, and Arts Board Matching, among many other resources and opportunities.*

For more information, visit [ABCNashville.org](http://ABCNashville.org) or contact 615.460.8274.

# WORKSHEET

# BUSINESS & CHAMBER COMMUNITY PROFILE

Please complete the following information as best you can about your business community and your chamber(s) of commerce.

This information is for your own personal and organizational work. It is designed to help create a more comprehensive picture of the business networks in your community, who leads them, and to illuminate potential places for alignment.

## INDUSTRIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

List the primary industries and economic drivers in your community. Who are the largest businesses or primary industry influencers? (Check with your State Department of Commerce, which may track county-level data.)

## BUSINESS NETWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONS

List the business service organizations and agencies in your community. Think of chambers and affinity chambers, economic development agencies, tourism and visitors bureaus, Main Street organizations, civic organizations like Rotary Club, and others you can think of that convene, service, and advocate for business. Are there trade organizations that represent the largest industries in your community? Can you identify their service area(s)?

### **WHAT BUSINESS COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES ARE HAPPENING?**

Using your list of organizations from above, list any activities that take place that could be an opening to participate or start a partnership. Does the chamber have subcommittees? Do they have an arts person on their board? What events do these organizations produce and where do they produce them? Do they hire entertainment or invite speakers? Do they have any special partnerships with other associations like restaurants, retail, or hotels (think of sectors that are positively affected by the economic impact of the arts)? Are they community or culturally specific?

### **PEOPLE IN YOUR NETWORK**

Looking at your list of industries, influencers, and business organizations, who do you know? Are there members of your board that are active in a chamber or civic club? Do you have patrons who are industry leaders? List them here along with their connection to your organization.

### **YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHS AND ASSETS**

Think about your organization’s strongest offerings and the assets you bring to your audience. List activities, connections and networks, products or outputs, or any future-facing ideas that could be interesting to a potential business partner.

