

## COMMUNITY CULTURAL PLANNING **Development and Design To Meet Local Needs**

By Craig Dreezen, Ph.D., Director, Arts Extension Service

*Celebrated musician Isaac Stern said, "If nobody wants to go to your concert, nothing will stop them." This applies to why community cultural planning is so important: simply knowing what your community's artistic and cultural resources are or could be is not enough — you must also understand your community's needs and know what it will support.*

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### WHAT IS COMMUNITY CULTURAL PLANNING?

Cultural planning is a community-inclusive fact finding and consensus building process that identifies cultural resources and community needs, and then plans policies and actions in response.

Cultural planning works best when it benefits the larger community — be it the municipality, county, district or region — instead of just a single organization or constituency. The cultural planning process is typically led by a temporary and broadly-representative citizen steering committee, usually appointed by local government. This committee does research and gathers relevant information, and convenes public meetings to enable artists and arts administrators, educators, business and political leaders and other members of the community to identify cultural and civic needs and opportunities.

Once community issues are identified, a plan of action is developed, which aims to encourage artists, strengthen nonprofit cultural organizations and apply cultural solutions to community problems. The most inclusive cultural plans contain the concerns of mainstream urban and regional planning and apply the arts and culture to tourism, urban design, downtown revitalization and economic and community development. This is illustrated by Tacoma, Washington's plan "to examine our culture as the way we express ourselves through visual and performing arts, history, ethnic heritage, neighborhood life, and the design of our city."<sup>1</sup>

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Craig Dreeszen is an educator, consultant and writer who works nationally in arts organizational development and planning, community arts and education planning, program evaluation and community cultural planning. Dr. Dreeszen provides planning and policy formulation, program evaluation, training, organizational development and meeting facilitation solutions for not-for-profit organizations, foundations and public agencies. He is director of the Arts Extension Service at the University of Massachusetts, a national professional continuing education and arts service organization that connects arts and communities through learning. There he leads a team of staff and associates in teaching and consulting, research and publishing on behalf of artists, arts organizations and communities. He earned his Ph.D. in planning and his M.Ed. in organizational development at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

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#### THE EFFECT ON THE COMMUNITY

Local arts agency directors have reported many positive effects on their community as a direct result of cultural planning:<sup>2</sup>

- ★ Increased and improved programs and services in response to needs identified.
- ★ Improved communications and cooperation between arts groups.
- ★ Better integration of the arts into the community, increasing both visibility of artists and arts organizations as well as the larger civic community's awareness of the potential of arts and culture to contribute to community and economic development.
- ★ Improved public access to the arts and an increased audience base for arts activities.
- ★ Improved cultural facilities.
- ★ Increased or sustained levels of public and private funding for the arts during a period when national trends showed a reduction in arts funding

Now well established as an effective method for leaders to identify and resolve needs, community cultural plans are used by many local leaders across America to integrate the arts into community development:

- ★ In Denver, Colorado, cultural planning was so well integrated into the city's overall comprehensive planning that two of the city's 10 long-term goals dealt with issues of aesthetics and cultural development. Improving the arts in Denver was seen as a means to improve the city's quality of life and competitive position.
- ★ In Roanoke, Virginia, the cultural plan recommended arts and culture as a way to enhance the region's quality of life and to serve as "an integral part of regional economic development."
- ★ In Rapid City, South Dakota, the cultural plan prescribed arts programs and services to empower the American Indian community to preserve its culture and develop the economy.
- ★ In Shreveport, Louisiana, planners sought to improve the city's image by using the arts to revitalize downtown and the waterfront, reduce

crime, protect the environment, celebrate community diversity and similarities and improve education. The Shreveport plan urged citizens to "share in our diverse cultural heritage celebrating not just who we are, but what we can become."

These cultural plans integrate the arts into the local social, economic and political context. They build support for the arts and improve communities.

#### PROFILES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLANS

There are as many kinds of cultural plans as there are communities that have done them. Some communities only require a simple cultural assessment; others need specific issues addressed or to focus only on a particular district.

#### SIX COMMON TYPES OF PLANS

1. **Comprehensive community arts and cultural plan**  
Community-wide plan that includes areas such as arts, humanities, ethnic cultures, festivals, historic preservation, social service, public areas, economic and community development.
2. **Community cultural assessment**  
Comprehensive identification and analysis of a community's cultural resources and needs, but without an action plan.
3. **Specialized arts or cultural assessment**  
Assessment of a specific factor, such as economic impact, feasibility for a fundraising campaign or facility development, market research, etc.
4. **Comprehensive community or state assessment with agency-specific plan**  
Community-wide needs assessment, but with a plan specific to the sponsoring arts agency.
5. **Specific-issue cultural plan**  
Community-wide plan focused on a single arts discipline or cultural development issue.
6. **Specific-district cultural plan**  
Plan focusing on a specific geographic location within a community (downtown or neighborhood).

THREE LESS COMMON TYPES OF PLANS

- 1. **Community arts plan**  
Municipal or county-wide plan focusing on artists, arts organizations, audiences, arts education, funding and facilities.
- 2. **Regional cultural plan**  
Plan for multiple municipalities or counties.
- 3. **Cultural component of municipal/county general plan**  
Arts and culture are integrated into the body of a city or county master plan.

THE FIVE-STEP APPROACH

In spite of a diversity of approaches to cultural planning, most plans commence with assessment and conclude with planning. The most effective plans employ a five-step process:

- 1. Pre-planning: evaluating the need and readiness for planning and getting organized
- 2. Community assessment
- 3. Goal-setting and plan writing
- 4. Implementation
- 5. Monitoring and evaluation

Sometimes the first step (pre-planning) and last step (monitoring and evaluation) are disregarded. Plans without pre-planning tend to be unfocused or a burden on the managing agency, and plans without evaluation tend not to get implemented. Often plans undertaken solely to fulfill funders' requirements also omit implementation. It is extremely important that there is adequate preparation for planning and appropriate attention to monitoring and implementation. This will make it more likely that the energy and funds expended in cultural planning will achieve their intended results.

TWO CASE STUDIES  
RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA

OVERVIEW

Rapid City, located at the edge of the Black Hills in central western South Dakota, has 54,500 residents.

THE PLAN

*Many Voices*, Rapid City's cultural plan, was completed in September 1993. As the title suggests, many people participated in creating a community plan that "confirms the fundamental importance of education, the necessity for multicultural understanding, the need for cultural facilities, the importance of artists and arts and cultural organizations, and the benefits of a quality, attractive environment."

The process followed the recommended pre-planning, assessment, goal-setting and implementation steps. A team of consultants advised the Rapid City Arts Council, co-chairs from the American Indian and Anglo-American business communities, a broadly representative "Leadership Circle" and task forces that carried out the planning.

RAPID CITY'S CULTURAL PLANNING PROCESS

Pre-Planning

- October 1991:** Fund raising and planning to plan.
- September 1992:** Assessment meeting. Cultural resources, needs and opportunities and critical issues of planning identified.

Assessment

- October-December 1993:** Interviews, focus groups, phone surveys reach 500 people. Assessment findings confirmed and clarified; task forces identified.
- January 1993:** Assessment retreat and write report. A task force for each of the seven issues is charged to recommend solutions.
- February 1993:** Leadership Circle study assessment report and appoints seven task forces. Each meets four or five times. Writes goals, objectives, strategies on each issue and objective.

**March 1993:** Task forces meet to recommend draft goals. Consultant facilitates meeting to reach consensus on goals.

**April 1993:** Leadership Circle meets in planning retreat. Consultants write first draft, which is then revised by leaders.

**May-June 1993:** Leadership Circle approves of the plan. The plan is drafted.

**August 1993:** The plan is designed and printed.

**September 1993:** The plan is presented to the city, schools, arts groups and news media. The plan becomes the basis for new public funding support for facilities and resolution of some key community needs.

### Implementation

The implementation of the plan is ongoing. The arts council leads in implementation, monitoring and advocacy to fund plan recommendations.

### SUCCESSFUL ACTIVITIES

Planning was stimulated by the need for a coordinated approach to cultural facility development. The planning enabled the cultural community to establish priorities among competing facility proposals and helped organize effective political action to secure sustained funding for cultural facility development. Three years after the plan was published, much of the plan had been implemented. Among the achievements:

- ★ The cultural community joined a successful campaign that established a new designated sales tax fund to stimulate tourism.
- ★ A new technical production, storage and rehearsal facility was constructed due to \$100,000 raised from the new designated sales tax fund.
- ★ A major new natural history and American Indian Museum, the Journey Museum, was opened with help from the sales tax fund.
- ★ A Black Hills Artists Network, which sponsored artists workshops, was established and created a mural.
- ★ A driving tour book on public art in Rapid City was published.
- ★ A method for arts leaders to advise the city's funding of cultural organizations was formalized.
- ★ Regular program reports from cultural organizations to the local school board were organized.
- ★ The school board adopted increased arts credit requirements for graduation.
- ★ 1994-96 funding from the city was secured for cultural plan implementation.

- ★ The Rapid City Arts Council was named the public art advisor to City Council.
- ★ Considerable progress has been achieved on native American goals including: the awarding of federal and foundation grants for staff and program funds; a native American planning retreat; a new Native American Advisory Circle; a new full-time Native American staff member for the Arts Council and 10 arts projects either completed or underway.

## SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

### OVERVIEW

Shreveport, a city of 200,000, is a petroleum center that also relies upon arms manufacturing and the medical industry. The city has a proud artistic tradition, home to blues great "Leadbelly" and classical pianist Van Cliburn.

### THE PLAN

Shreveport represents one of the most dramatic success stories of cultural planning. The Shreveport cultural plan, *The City and the Arts: Making Connections*, was one of the first that consciously positioned the arts as a partner in its community's economic and community development.

A 1987 bond issue that would have financed an arts center, zoo and other city improvements was defeated. The proposed arts center was perceived as benefiting only a fraction of the community. In 1990, Shreveport Regional Arts Council (SRAC) director Pam Atchison returned from a conference of the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (now Americans for the Arts) determined to show "community benefits through the arts" rather than continuing to seek "community support for the arts."

The SRAC board of directors initiated a year-long grassroots cultural planning process. With funding from the National Endowment for the Arts Locals Program, a steering committee was recruited which represented Shreveport's racial, economic, educational and artistic mix. Civic organizations and city departments, including the Metropolitan Planning Commission, were involved from the start.

The resulting cultural plan, which incorporated the arts as strategies to achieve the city's goals, was adopted as a component of the Master Plan for the City of Shreveport. The plan guided the growth of the arts and resulted in partnerships with civic organizations, including the Downtown Development Authority, the Council of Governments, the Convention and Tourism Bureau, and the city's Human Relations Committee.

Shreveport's plan was administered by the Shreveport Regional Arts Council and overseen by a planning steering committee. Issue-based task forces met to recommend goals and actions.

#### Highlights of the process:

- ★ A day-long planning retreat was held to identify critical issues and determine preliminary recommendations.
- ★ Task force members critiqued the draft plan by role-playing the viewpoints of four critical groups: city council, tax payers, a community group advocating funding for competing uses and an NEA grants panel.
- ★ The plan was published as both a pamphlet for wide distribution and a comprehensive 217-page bound document.
- ★ A 25-member, mayor-appointed Community Cultural Plan Advisory Council met monthly to oversee the NEA implementation grant and ongoing evaluation.
- ★ The Advisory Council, five discipline-based arts advisory panels, city department heads, and the arts council board met twice a year in day-long retreats to evaluate achievements and set backs and make recommendations to adapt the plan.
- ★ These evaluations were distilled into the 1995 plan addendum with detailed strategies and specific actions in an implementation plan for marketing, public art, downtown art, neighborhood arts residencies, rural outreach, arts in education and a financial plan for Shreveport Regional Arts Council.

The public has supported the implementation of the Community Cultural Plan with a tangible vote of confidence, dramatically increasing funding for the

Shreveport Regional Arts Council, whose budget grew from \$400,000 in 1992 to \$1.8 million in 1996/97. City and state funding have quadrupled in the six years since the plan's publication. City funding went from \$97,000 in 1991 to \$440,000 in 1997. State funding went from \$20,000 to \$125,000; private sector funding for the arts council increased from \$100,000 to \$350,000; and school board spending on arts education went from \$37,000 to \$75,000 during the same period.

In Shreveport, much of the cultural plan has been implemented by individual artists. Over a three-year period, \$1.6 million was awarded to artists through public art commissions, Downtown Neon Saturday Night performances and exhibitions, school and neighborhood residencies, summer art camps and individual project grants.

#### SUCCESSFUL ACTIVITIES

The results of the cultural plan's implementation have been impressive:

- ★ A mayor-appointed Public Art Task Force recommended public art projects for 13 sites as part of a \$12.5 million downtown street improvement bond issue.
- ★ The Arts Council hired a full time Public Art Director.
- ★ A Public Art Ordinance is in development.
- ★ Four permanent art islands on Texas Street were installed to showcase the large scale work of four contemporary local sculptors.
- ★ Sculptors worked with inner-city neighborhood residents to develop public art that helped define neighborhood boundaries, enliven the streets, reclaim a park, and to memorialize victims of tragic violence.
- ★ Five large scale downtown murals are scheduled to be completed by the end of 1997.
- ★ Arts programming was the catalyst to revitalize a declining downtown and waterfront that will lead to a permanent arts district. The central program is Downtown Neon Saturday Nights, a monthly arts showcase featuring local artists using downtown streets and storefronts as their stage. Programs include curate and temporary exhibitions, window art installations, hands-on art

**RESOURCES**

*Americans for the Arts*  
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consultants and has  
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*Community Cultural  
Planning Work Kit*.

*The Arts Extension  
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aes@adminiumass.edu  
Publishes and distrib-  
utes the *Community  
Cultural Planning  
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tains a study collec-  
tion of cultural plans  
and lists of communi-  
ties which have com-  
pleted cultural plans.

areas, street performers, a youth stage, theater in a temporary black box stage and craft vendors.

- ★ Four new permanent art galleries have been established downtown.
- ★ Five new dining and drinking establishments that feature performance and/or art exhibitions have come into existence downtown.
- ★ Artist live/work space is being developed in an abandoned downtown warehouse.
- ★ Artist residencies in video, printmaking, theater and visual arts were established in three Shreveport neighborhoods.
- ★ A writer was commissioned to produce a play, *Invasion of the Community Snatchers*, to provide community members a way to express themselves about the affects of drugs, gangs and crime.
- ★ The Louisiana *Used Again* program was developed to educate children and adults about recycling and environmental protection through art installations and landscapes.
- ★ Numerous public art projects have been developed for Shreveport neighborhoods, including banners, mural, sculpture, books of poetry, drawings and photographs.
- ★ A new Beautiful Barrels project placed artists with neighborhood children in five areas to design, paint and use 50 new trash barrels.
- ★ Arts in education has evolved into comprehensive arts education programs committed to the total education of children and adults.
- ★ Shreveport's educational programs were awarded the "Governor's Art Award for Educational Excellence."

**COMMUNITY READINESS CHECKLIST:  
ARE YOU READY TO BEGIN PLANNING?**

1. Is political support for cultural planning likely? *Would the mayor, county commissioner or city manager endorse the planning and issue a formal invitation for people to join the steering committee?*
2. Will planning participants reflect the community's diversity? Can you avoid the pitfall of asking the social and economic elite to speak for the whole

community? *Authentic planning requires input from large and small cultural organizations, various ethnic groups, educators, businesses, and community groups. The most thorough plans sample opinions of arts advocates and non-attendees.*

3. Are funds available to pay the costs of planning? *Is there interest from local government, business, and private funders in cultural planning?*
4. Is it likely that funds can also be raised to implement planning recommendations?
5. Is there support for planning from the community's arts and cultural leaders?
6. Is there a capable, willing agency with enough staff time and management capacity to act as administrative and fiscal agent for the planning process? *You'll need a fiscal agent for planning funds, desk, filing system, phone, mailing address, access to photocopier, and administrative support.*
7. Do you have access to local research and planning expertise (city planner, university faculty, etc.)? *If not, you may need to rely more on consultants.*
8. Have there been positive community experiences with planning? *Positive results from a successful economic development, historic preservation or recreation plan helps. Conversely, unsatisfactory experiences with other plans hinders additional planning.*
9. Can you answer the question, "Why do we want to do a cultural plan now?"

**CONCLUSION**

Community cultural planning can be an effective tool to strengthen the cultural community and apply cultural solutions to community problems. The process often results in increased funding for the arts, more programming for the public, and new partnerships of community leaders that support the arts. Cultural planning, however, should not be entered into without careful forethought. It is hard work, and takes time and money. There are risks of unrealistic expectations, inadequate funding, and unfulfilled objectives. It's not always a panacea, but with adequate planning, execution, and follow-up, cultural planning can make the arts an integral part of your community.

**ENDNOTES**

1. City of Tacoma, Cultural Resources Division, 1993.

2. Dreezen, Craig, 1994 *Remaining Community: Community Cultural Planning in America*, Dissertation, University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

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