

Ohio Arts Council: Notable Accomplishments 2006-2009

Three years ago, the world felt like a different place. The economy was strong, unemployment was low and optimism about the future prevailed. In 2006, the Ohio Arts Council (OAC) crafted a strategic plan to invest in Ohio's rich cultural resources while communicating the value of the arts, broadening participation, building partnerships and fostering more vibrant communities. The plan contained short- and long-term targets, and the OAC staff, Board and countless constituents across the state and nation began the work to bring them to fruition. The agency was further bolstered when it received an 11.1 percent increase to the budget at the beginning of the 2008-2009 biennium. The strategic plan provided a flexible roadmap for the support of Ohio's arts infrastructure and enhancement of the programs and services provided by the OAC but, in 2006, no one anticipated the financial challenges that would bring our state and the national economy to its knees. Over the past eighteen months, the OAC experienced severe budget cuts and a variety of other spending controls and restrictions that have affected programming, services and staffing at all levels. Between April 2008 and December 2008, the OAC budget was cut by 20.5 percent resulting in grant reductions in nearly all OAC program areas and the OAC staff was reduced by 22 percent. In spite of these unprecedented challenges, the strategic plan's principal goals and most short-term outcomes were realized. In addition, a variety of new and unanticipated opportunities presented themselves, leading to equally unanticipated new achievements. The OAC proved resilient in the face of one of the most difficult funding environments since the inception of the agency in 1965 and the OAC Strategic Plan 2006-2009 was a key element in maintaining focus and continuing the critical work of support for a strong arts community in Ohio.

As we formally bring to a close the 2006-2009 plan and begin work on a new long-range plan to guide the agency's work, let us take a moment to remember and celebrate the many notable successes and accomplishments – planned and unplanned – the agency and its staff and board made possible in the last three years.

Investing in Ohio's Rich Cultural Resources

- Governor Strickland signed the **2008/2009 biennial budget** in July 2007 and the OAC came through the process with recommended increases from the governor, House and Senate. The total biennial budget for 2008/2009 was \$24,976,322, an 11.1 percent increase from the 2006/2007 budget. This was a great achievement for the agency as these recommendations reversed a three biennia trend of consistent reductions to the agency's budget. The OAC was one of the few state agencies to have received an increase in this budget. It took the hard work of OAC Board members, the executive director and OAC staff, Ohio Citizens for the Arts (OCA) and many others to see the effort to increase the agency's budget come to fruition.
- At the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) panel review of the agency's most recent application in January 2009, the OAC was described as **“a national leader among the state arts agencies and in arts education”** and as an agency **“that works consistently at a high level and is known for its excellence.”** The OAC was vigorously praised for our work with the underserved populations of Ohio, outstanding arts education and

community development programs, successful partnerships with other state agencies, inclusive public planning processes, communication with our constituents and the citizens of the state, and for our staff experience, talent and leadership. The lead reviewer for our NEA grant stated, “Ohio is one of our most populous states with many arts organizations, and the OAC is to be commended for using a modest amount of state funds wisely with big returns across the state.”

- Between January and October of 2008, cross-departmental teams successfully **revised and realigned our grant-making *Guidelines*** in several of our most critical program areas. With assistance from Kelly Barsdate, chief program and planning officer of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), the new *Guidelines* are designed to be easier for applicants and panelists to use and understand, reflect the most current agency thinking on cultural participation and public value, and show clear alignment between each program’s purpose statement, scoring criteria and application questions.
- The number of **organizational applicants to the OAC increased** by roughly 9 percent from the 2006 to 2009 fiscal years. Increases were especially evident in programs designed to serve new applicants and from geographic areas of the state that have been historically underserved. Though ongoing budget challenges have limited the overall amount of subsidy funding available to all grantees, through effective agency communication and staff work, the OAC continues to attract new organizations to apply for public funding to support their work.
- The OAC applied for and received over \$353,400 in federal funds through the NEA from the ***American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009***, leading to the creation of the *Ohio Arts Jobs Preservation Grant* program in April 2009. Despite having very little lead time, staff compiled a thorough application that was reviewed very favorably by the NEA panel. Reaction was especially positive for our plan to reach all geographic areas of the state, create meaningful award sizes that will make a difference in preserving jobs, craft effective communications strategies, and work with the Sustainability program as a target group.

Communicating the Value of the Arts

- Beginning in 2009, staff successfully launched the **Making the Case** page of the OAC Web site, highlighting success stories from all over Ohio where the arts have been a “part of the solution” and OAC support has been a key ingredient. *The Arts: Part of the Solution* stories focus on a number of important public benefits to Ohio such as development of creativity and imagination, economic development and revitalization, academic excellence through the arts, cultural participation and community cohesion.
- The OAC provides many services to artists and arts organizations and there is great value in having an individual artist appointed to the OAC Board. After extensive communication with the Governor’s Office, Governor Strickland appointed three **artists to the OAC Board** since 2007. Mr. Tom Schorgl was appointed to the Board in July 2007, Ms. Karen Bell was appointed in August 2008 and Mr. Charles McWeeny was appointed in September 2008. In addition, Governor Strickland appointed Sara Jane

DeHoff, Perrysburg, to the OAC Board in May 2009, restoring northwestern Ohio representation to the body.

- The **OAC Riffe Gallery celebrated its 20th anniversary** March 17, 2009. Established as a place for the citizens of Ohio to share, join and be part of the arts, the Riffe Gallery has presented 81 main gallery exhibitions and seven lobby exhibitions since its inception. Seventeen of the 81 exhibitions toured internationally, regionally or in-state. To increase public appreciation and understanding of exhibitions, the Riffe Gallery offers a wide range of learning opportunities including family workshops, school tours, curator tours and an interactive Web site.
- Since the start of the *OAC Strategic Plan 2006-2009*, the OAC has **continued to perform at a high level despite extensive staff turnover** in key leadership positions. Staff members new in their current positions since the plan was launched include the directors of the Public Information Office (Jami Goldstein), Arts Learning office (Jeff Hooper), and office of Grants Administration and Constituent Services (Dia Foley), as well as Deputy Director (Mary Campbell-Zopf) and Executive Director (Julie Henahan). In late FY2005 the OAC began preparing for a leadership transition following the retirement announcement of the agency's long-tenured executive director, Wayne Lawson.

Helping Citizens of All Ages Learn and Thrive Through the Arts

- The Office of Arts Learning organized a series of **five information sessions** in the fall of 2008. Staff from all OAC offices worked together to present an overview of OAC programs, services and updated *OAC Guidelines 2010-2011*; highlight program changes, introduce *Focusing the Light: The Art and Practice of Planning*, a new OAC publication; provide technical assistance on organizational budgets and navigating OnLine Grants Application (OLGA); and provide tips for preparing competitive applications. A representative from Ohio Citizens for the Arts also provided information about various resources available through their organization to support the arts and arts education. The five communities served included Athens, Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo and Cleveland.
- The Office of Arts Learning and Mary Campbell-Zopf provided national leadership for the development of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies' **Research-Based Communication Tool Kit**. The Tool Kit is a comprehensive document that brings together several components that advocates can use at state and local levels. Each component is research-based, drawing on careful reviews and analyses of research literature that confirm, explain and clarify the role of the arts in various significant policy contexts. The sample materials in the Tool Kit, prepared by a working committee of State Arts Agency Arts Education Managers, are meant to be "boilerplate" so that arts advocates can adapt them to their contexts and needs, quickly creating targeted, personalized advocacy messages.
- The need for a comprehensive planning guide for arts professionals and others working in schools and nonprofit organizations at the state and local levels motivated the OAC to develop *Focusing the Light: the Art and Practice of Planning*. *Focusing the Light*

presents a fundamental management strategy that reflects what has been learned over two decades of practice at the federal, state, and local levels into a rich and accessible repository. The project includes a seven-volume set of booklets as well as related online resources including electronic copies of the booklets, worksheets and other tools. The seven-volume series provides those who work in the arts and nonprofits with strategies, tips, and techniques for successful project planning, advocacy and evaluation. It illustrates what is needed to create significant works for communities, secure funding for these initiatives, and evaluate the results.

- The Office of Arts Learning developed new grant guidelines for the Artist in Residence and Arts Partnership programs with criteria that encourages the support of **lifelong learning**. As we move from an industrial age into an information age, there is an increasing emphasis on the flexibility and adaptability of individuals. Education is no longer something that happens from four to 22 years of age; it has become a lifelong process. OAC Arts Learning programs acknowledged the importance of lifelong learning through the redefinition of existing program requirements and by reaching out to organizations and participants of every age from pre-school to senior centers.

Encouraging and Facilitating Widespread Participation in the Arts

- In the fall of 2008 **the OAC conducted 21 Listening Tour meetings** in seven Ohio communities (Archbold, Chillicothe, Coshocton, East Liverpool, Marietta, Toledo and Youngstown). The Listening Tour will resume this fall 2009 in the following cities: Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Kent, Mansfield and Wapakoneta. Through the tour the OAC staff have sought to discover the aspirations of a broad range of Ohioans, including members of the business community, legislators and people associated with the arts and cultural communities. The tours will serve as a prelude to developing the next strategic plan for 2010-2013 and will inform the second State of the Arts Report (SOAR II).
- Despite four layoffs in April 2008, two early retirements, one resignation (all but one of the positions has been abolished from the OAC roster of full-time employees), and eliminating a contract position – due to state budget shortfalls – the OAC has **continued to operate all grant programs**, hold scheduled events, continue outreach to the field, provide assistance to hundreds of applicants from all over the state, and receive extremely high customer satisfaction ratings from grantees. The OAC lost 22 percent of its staff during the life of this strategic plan.
- Working with Ann Gazelle, an Ohio artist who is blind, the OAC successfully **updated its Web site in 2008 to be as accessible as possible** to people with disabilities. Although maintaining its accessibility is of course an ongoing process, today the site meets the requirements of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) (Level AA) Bobby and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, as well as the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

- Over the past three years the OAC has continued its successful **International Music and Performing Arts in Communities Tour (IMPACT)**, executing five tours throughout Ohio to present international performing artists in community and faith-based venues. Since 2006 IMPACT has appeared in 28 Ohio communities in 19 counties -- including three of the OAC's least-served. Thirty-three artists from five different countries were involved in performances. Over 17,000 community members attended the 31 performances and 68 outreach activities made possible by the tour.
- The OAC conducted **outreach activities in eight underserved counties** in an effort to broaden the reach of OAC programs and initiatives to every part of the state. OAC staff members identified community leaders as well as existing artists and arts organizations; conducted grant workshops and did one-to-one consulting in order to familiarize individuals and groups with available OAC opportunities; targeted special performances and residency activities to area communities through programs such as IMPACT; and arranged pilot Artist in Residence experiences for schools that were unfamiliar with of the OAC Arts Learning programs.

Fostering Vibrant and Healthy Communities through the Arts

- The **first quilt barn trail** in the United States was started in Adams County, Ohio, in 2001 with support from the OAC. Since then, this groundbreaking community arts project has expanded to 19 Ohio counties and at least 22 other states across the nation and in Canada. Recognizing the importance of this grass roots arts process to community development, the OAC collaborated with Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs to conduct and publish in 2008 the study, **Ohio Arts Council Quilt Barn Impact Study: Understanding the Value of the Ohio Quilt Barn Trail**. Using a variety of qualitative research methods, the study was able to document the cultural, social and economic contributions quilt barn trails have made in Ohio communities. The publication also featured a map of each county's quilt barn trail that identified the location and name of each of the nearly 300 quilt barns in Ohio at the time of publication.
- A new **Folk and Traditional Arts staff team was established** with the assistance of renewed competitive funding from the NEA. Guidelines for the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship program and Ohio Heritage Fellowship program were revised and expanded; a major fieldwork project with an emphasis on the identification of Latino traditional artists was completed; two pilot "Folklorist in Residence" projects in underserved areas were supported; and an Ohio Heritage Showcase in partnership with the Ohio State Fair and Cityfolk, a traditional arts presenting organization from Dayton, was launched.
- In 2009 the OAC published an **Annotated Community Development Research Bibliography** citing important, recent research on the economic and social impacts of arts experiences within communities. Used in conjunction with the arts education research and information in the Research-Based Communication Tool Kit, this

bibliography can help citizens make a powerful case for the importance of the arts in their communities.

- In FY2008, the Office of Community Development received a \$20,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), regranted through the Governor's Office of Appalachia (GOA), to facilitate the **Arts-Based Capacity Building Project**. Conducted in the four counties identified by the ARC as “distressed” (Athens, Meigs, Pike and Vinton), the project identified a key arts and cultural organization in each county to receive intensive mentoring and the opportunity to receive ARC matching funds for the OAC Capacity Building grant program.
- Building on its successful 2001 *State of the Arts Report (SOAR)*, the OAC began work in 2008 on a follow-up *State of the Arts Report (SOAR II)*. While still in the early stages of development, *SOAR II* will use established indicators to examine the cultural vitality of Ohio’s communities as well as replicate some aspects of the original *SOAR* to assess what changes have taken place since its completion. Staff is currently in the process of working with AMS Planning and Research Corporation, Fairfield, Connecticut on designing the implementation, analysis and reporting phases of the upcoming work, which will begin in the coming months.

Sustaining and Cultivating Strategic Partnerships that Broaden Support for the Arts

- During the last several years the Riffe Gallery has continued to cultivate a significant, long-term **partnership with Ohio Government Telecommunications (OGT)**. Since 2002 OGT has documented the Riffe Gallery exhibitions through video. Recently, OGT assisted the Riffe Gallery in expanding its Web site through *Spotlight: Riffe Gallery* that includes images and artist bios from past, current and upcoming exhibitions, and a media archive.
- Several **professional development workshops** have been held for OAC staff, Council Board members and Ohio Citizens for the Arts Board members in 2008 and 2009. Kelly Barsdate, Jonathan Katz, CEO of NASAA and Tom Birch, legislative counsel of NASAA have all participated in workshops focused on advocacy, strategic messaging and legislative contact. Workshops helped attendees learn to make the strongest case possible about the ways the OAC’s work contributes to the economic and educational health of the state.
- The OAC continues its strong **partnership with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE)**. Along with the Ohio Alliance for Arts Education (OAAE), the OAC and ODE have worked together on **every major policy issue related to arts education since the early 1970s**. The OAC/ODE/OAAE collaboration has brought Ohio recognition as a national leader in the field and has resulted in the award of hundreds of thousands of dollars of grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education and the NEA as well as from national and regional foundations. Recent efforts have included the development of the Fine Arts Academic Content Standards; organizing and implementing a Summer Institute for School Leaders 2004, and periodic research on the status of arts education in

Ohio's school districts to better understand the status of arts education in Ohio's schools since 1989.

- The OAC participated in the formation of the **Committee for Arts and Innovative Thinking (CAIT)**, a statewide arts advisory group sponsored by ODE. The purpose of the committee is to promote and advance the arts in the lives of all Ohio students through strategic actions, communications and policy recommendations. Through CAIT, OAC and ODE are developing a coordinated approach to expanding opportunities and making the arts basic to preK-12 education.
- In response to repeated requests from communities for information regarding the restoration or operation of historic theatres, the OAC developed the **Historic Theatres and Opera Houses Initiative advisory group** beginning in 2006. The ongoing partnership includes Heritage Ohio, the Ohio Cultural Facilities Commission, the Ohio Historic Preservation Office, Preservation Ohio and representatives from historic theatres. This group hosted several meetings for staff and board members of historic theatres and opera houses to assess their facility and professional development needs.
- Begun in 1994, **the Ohio River Border Initiative (ORBI)** is a partnership between the OAC and the West Virginia Commission on the Arts that serves arts organizations and artists in the 21 counties in Ohio and West Virginia that touch the river. Since 2006, ORBI has funded 59 projects through its annual grant program for a total of \$130,625. During this period, ORBI also funded 12 first-time applicants, demonstrating its success in generating new connections across the Ohio/West Virginia border. In 2008, ORBI also developed a new Accessibility Mini-Grant program in response to an identified lack of funds to support accessibility upgrades.
- Since 2006, the OAC has expanded its **partnership with VSA arts of Ohio (VSAO)** in order to meet mutual goals. So far this partnership has resulted in two workshops for artists with disabilities funded by the NEA as well as the development of a Career Workbook for artists with disabilities and the agencies that serve them. Other accomplishments included the development of a database of artists with disabilities and the resources available to them, updating accessibility resources on the OAC's Web site and convening an artists with disabilities advisory group. In 2007, VSAO created an Artist Services Coordinator position with funding from the OAC Capacity Building program; Derek Mortland, *2009 Governor's Awards in the Arts* winner, serves in this capacity, providing services to both VSAO and OAC.
- Since 2007, the OAC has awarded grants through the **American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius** program, an NEA initiative designed to acquaint Americans with the "best of their cultural and artistic legacy." During that time the OAC has partnered with seven different Ohio arts organizations in five different cities to reach an estimated 894,064 citizens to date through public programs and educational activities.