

Key Takeaways from Focus Groups

Media/Regional Economy Focus Group

- Opportunities
- Any dollar that is given to culturals should come with a commitment to marketing.
 - There should be a bigger communications initiative about what's going on in this region; there should be a comprehensive marketing plan.
 - Focus on younger audiences, 40 and younger. Introducing them to us as well as us to them.
 - There should be greater investment into visitor readiness across the hospitality industry in terms of what we all uniformly need to know.
 - There should be an internal campaign for residents too, just like there is Visit Buffalo Niagara, there should be a Live Buffalo Niagara.
 - Is there a chance that Erie County could have someone, some department specifically devoted to culture?

The need for a convening body is clear.

There should be a dedicated funding source for culturals (e.g. tax schemes etc).

- Challenges
- What's missing is the marketing for all of it. No matter how great it is, if you don't tell people about it, it doesn't matter.
 - Media habits do not change. There is not a knowledge base across generations. Among younger groups, e-mail is trusted. You have to market to younger audiences.
 - Funding, collaboration, and leadership—these are the issues.
 - The State Consolidated funding application (ESD) is a good idea, but the timeline of the application, announcements, paperwork, and the time it takes to fulfill requirements is not kind to applicants.
 - The politics of the funding situation needs revision.



Key Takeaways from Focus Groups

Arts Education

- Opportunities
- The plan needs to increase buy-in from the community to see the importance of what this part of the sector does.
 - Arts Educators should do a big reframe and shift the narrative about how they talk about what they do and their impact
 - Because there is not investment in young people and in giving them what they need, we are actually doing a disservice to the larger local organizations who will have fewer and fewer quality cultural workers and less audiences to appreciate their work.
 - If there was more buy-in from school administrations, not just BPS, but across the county, we will increase audiences over time, as well as have more positive impacts.
 - This plan should have impact stories; Unless we find a way to utilize the data and share the incredible impact stories that are already here in a way that is really accessible to people who are not already bought in, we won't succeed.

- Challenges
- Arts educators are simply filling in for what schools should be doing.
 - If arts just keep getting cut more and more, how do students even know we are here?
 - There is a perception amongst funders that 10-15 large organizations offering arts education are doing the same thing these smaller organizations are doing.
 - Folks are generally underpaid and working multiple jobs.
 - There is a huge issue in the broader community with understanding the value that the arts bring.



Key Takeaways from Focus Groups

Creative Economy

Opportunities

- Collaboration, not competition should be the focus amongst performing arts promoters and across different disciplines.
- One thing the county could do is create tax incentives for people who are really driving the community forward; for example, tax incentives for for-profit cultural entities that are important and visible and keep things going.
- Someone needs to decide where the priorities are. The answer may be a trade group that would consolidate interests and petition the government for support.
- There is a need for recognition that the for-profit community makes a great contribution and is often working along the lines of non-profit work (at least some).
- VBN focuses on outside visitation, but what about the residents? How do we effectively recognize (and reward) improvement in quality of life for residents?



Challenges

- We need to avoid duplicative efforts for publications addressing the arts to get the same information. How do we focus the efforts on one?
- We need to protect the venues in the region from the taking-over of cultural activities by Live Nations and others. We need to make sure that the economic impact these locals are bringing to their community are coming back to support them.
- We can't just protect what's here; we must ensure we're nurturing the up and coming.
- The real thing to wrap your head around in largescale planning is geography—and our area is extremely spread out for the density/population it has. And the narrative somehow has to pick up on that as an asset. Otherwise, people in different places start fighting with each other over the same resources.

Key Takeaways from Focus Groups

Large Cultural Organizations

Opportunities

- There should be an overarching entity. WNY? ASI? GBCA? There is a need for a cultural hub.
- Cultural funding process should be remade so that it better aligns with the different value propositions that different kinds of organizations provide to the community. Everyone shouldn't be held to the same exact sort of accountability.
- Figure out more of an organizationally individualized, multi-year process that would be difficult one time(or periodically)but would subsequently flow more smoothly from year to year.
- Establish a shared format for grant applications that does not require organizations to recreate the wheel or produce new data aside from audited financial statements, budgets, 990s etc.

Challenges

- County, City, State all need to fund their part, as happens more smoothly elsewhere. Bed taxes elsewhere work well—not just a check you get but something you apply for two years in advance.
- Recognition of operating costs should be advocated for.



Key Takeaways from Focus Groups

Small Cultural Organizations

Opportunities

- What an organization offers and what its context is should be part of the funding equation Even if its not more money, what else can be offered to help?
- There should be a way to streamline funding applications.
- This plan should be about increasing the perception of value in what we do in arts and culture, which includes addressing the lack of awareness and communication.
- There should be better coordination so we could, as a sector, provide full-time work to people and avoid conflicts in schedules.
- Millennials and Gen Z should be targets for ecosystem.
- There should be an Office of Cultural Affairs in Buffalo.

Challenges

- People working at these type of organizations are often doing five other jobs and lacking resources.
- Organizations have invested in people they don't want to lose but are competing with rising salaries that outpace what they can offer.
- There is a disconnect in the perception of value between general consumers and the funding community.
- Should there be conversations around sunseting organizations?
- If we aren't a good place for artists to make their careers with the full range of what's expected [media interest], then they're going to leave.
- In order for a plan like this to work, it would need substantial staffing.

