

Mural, *Queen City Kaleidoscope*, Cassandra Ott & Chuck Tingley, 2025 (Buffalo Convention Center)

Erie County

Cultural Plan

October 2025

GREATER BUFFALO CULTURAL ALLIANCE

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 4
Erie County Cultural Plan Initiatives 5
Why a Cultural Plan for Erie County 6
Chapter 1: Plan Process 10
Chapter 2: Plan Values and Goals 12
Chapter 3: Cultural Conditions Analysis 14
Chapter 4: Summary of Outreach & Engagement 26
Chapter 5: Cultural Plan Priorities 37
Priority 1: Improve Arts Funding and Support Systems 38
Priority 2: Rebuild Communications Support 39
Priority 3: Strengthen Connections for Youth 40
Priority 4: Rebrand as a Creative County 41
Priority 5: Assemble a Cultural Hub 42
Chapter 6: Initiatives 43
Moving Forward: Next Steps 83

Appendix 1: Cultural Conditions Analysis 87
Appendix 2: Key Takeaways from Public Engagement 106
Appendix 3: Highlights from Survey Results 115
Appendix 4: Development of Prioritization for the Cultural Plan 146
Appendix 5: Aligning the Cultural Plan with Survey Results 154
Appendix 6: Long List of Potential Initiatives 156
Appendix 7: Cultural Plan Case Studies 163
Appendix 8: Steering and Advisory Committee Members 167
Acknowledgements 172

Foreword

The genesis for this Cultural Plan first appeared on Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance's radar roughly ten years ago. At that time, we couldn't get enough momentum to push it forward. Three years ago, as the world moved through COVID and as we became Co-chairs of GBCA, Scott insisted that we re-visit the cultural plan to finally make it a reality. We began by researching cultural plans in other cities, counties and regions across the country and discovered that many of those plans helped define civic, foundational, and community priorities for the sector. Ultimately the purpose of many of these plans (including ours) is to provide arts & culture a real seat at the table as our communities evolve and grow.

We recognized that this was a critical time for our sector as we emerged from the pandemic. Our ability to gather people, funding challenges both public & private, the disintegration of media and in particular arts coverage, our ability to interface with cultural tourism and each other so that that entire sector can thrive. How do we create an improved public perception about the value of what we bring to our community? How does this translate into a healthy and sustainable community that we all want to live in? These were the questions that animated and infused our work from the very beginning of this process. Little did we know how fast and furious the challenges would continue to come.

Understanding that people often see the arts in fragmented places, as single squares rather than the full quilt, Artist & Advisory Committee member Edreys Wajed suggested at one of our meetings a thought experiment: Imagine throwing a blanket over the entire arts & culture community and having it go dark for 48 hours. No music, no theater, no readings or poetry, no painting or murals, no museums, art classes or festivals, no photography or film, no pottery, no sculpture…and certainly no dance. Then, imagine, as if coming out of an illness, unveiling it all – to see all at once and in full illumination – what we have and already possess: a magnificent tapestry touching and enriching every life across every mile of this beautiful county.

Working on this Cultural Plan Framework over the past year, we have heeded the advice of physician and founder of Partners in Health Paul Farmer who wrote extensively about what it means to accompany each other on challenging but essential journeys: "First, try to counter failures of imagination. Second, as you seek to imagine or reimagine solutions to the greatest problems of our time, harness the power of partnership. Standing fast is hard work." Ask yourselves who and where we would be without the vital contributions of the artists and cultural organizations that have provided much needed creative outlets and support to adults and to youth, programs and services all across this county, especially to under-resourced communities through all of these recent last years. Even more, we invite you with this project to join us in turning the gaze forward – to imagine together a future of collective flourishing. What this could look like, what role you'd like to play…how might we get there together.

Laurie Torrell & Scott Behrend

Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance Co-Chairs
& Cultural Plan Steering Committee Members

Executive Summary

Erie County boasts a vibrant cultural scene, countless cultural organizations, prominent emerging and established artists, and a thriving creative economy. Throughout its history, the region has demonstrated how arts and culture can serve as both an economic driver and a source of community pride. However, ongoing challenges such as funding gaps and the persistent need for more sector-wide cohesion have created the need for a cultural plan.

Purpose of the Cultural Plan

The Erie County Cultural Plan aims to embed arts and culture into broader civic priorities, including tourism, media and journalism, education, and economic development. It seeks to create an inclusive, resilient, and stronger cultural ecosystem that benefits residents and visitors alike.

Findings of the Cultural Plan

A cultural conditions analysis found a rich legacy of arts and culture in Erie County though participation levels are currently below the median by most metrics of cultural participation amongst peers.

The work ahead, therefore, is to reinvigorate culture for the benefit of the people and visitors to Erie County.

The Cultural Plan outlines 18 strategic initiatives organized under five key priorities. These priorities represent high-level, repeated concerns from the sector and public at large about arts and culture in Erie County. Public outreach included site visits, interviews, focus groups, public meetings, and a public survey with over 1,600 responses. For all our individual differences, input from the community was consistent.

These key priorities show a county that is dedicated to people and community. It is not about fame and fortune, but about connecting with each other, supporting our children, and providing artistic outlets and enriching cultural opportunities to both our residents and visitors.

Implementation and Next Steps

The plan emphasizes actionable steps, including forming an Implementation Committee and fostering partnerships across sectors. Intentionally connecting the arts to workforce development, education, economic development, health, tourism, and more is at the heart of the Plan.

The Cultural Plan calls for a collaborative effort to ensure Erie County's arts and culture sector thrives. Every individual and group is invited and encouraged to join us in achieving the initiatives in this Plan, bringing economic vitality, community cohesion, and cultural enrichment to the region.

Erie County Cultural Plan Initiatives

The initiatives are listed here by community priority. The initiatives are not meant to be consecutive – any initiative or implementation step can be advanced individually, concurrently, or sequentially as resources and opportunities are identified and/or secured.

Improve Arts Funding and Support Systems	Addressing gaps in financial resources, sustainable funding, and capacity building
	*Initiative #3* - Revise local cultural funding processes *Initiative #12* - Explore new funding opportunities and mechanisms *Initiative #17* - Forge partnerships with the for-profit sector
Communications Support	Enhancing visibility through coordinated marketing and storytelling.
	*Initiative #4* - Increase marketing and media awareness *Initiative #5* - Improve arts journalism coverage
Strengthen Connections to Youth	Expanding arts education and engagement opportunities for younger generations.
	*Initiative #13* - Encourage/support accessible youth arts programming *Initiative #16* - Increase collaboration between the arts ecosystem and the school system
Rebrand as a Creative County	Branding Erie County as a vibrant arts hub and fostering geographic connections.
	*Initiative #2* - Increase accessibility to arts and culture events *Initiative #6* - Grow audiences in terms of demographics and geography *Initiative #7* - Enhance Erie County's reputation as an arts and culture destination *Initiative #8* - Enhance access and utilization of artistic facilities and infrastructure *Initiative #18* - Create opportunities to bring the entire community together for the arts
Assemble a Cultural Hub	Establishing a centralized entity to coordinate and support arts and culture efforts across the region
	*Initiative #1* - Increase funding brought to and support in the region *Initiative #9* - Increase collaboration to prevent scheduling conflicts and maximize exposure for diverse programming *Initiative #10* - Advocate for expanded funding criteria *Initiative #11* - Launch a Creative Economy /Non-Profit Cohort Program *Initiative #14* - Professional development and training for artists, cultural workers, and arts educators *Initiative #15* - Designate an existing organization or create a cultural hub entity

Why a Cultural Plan for Erie County

As the most populous county in upstate New York (outside of the New York City metropolitan area), Erie County is home to nearly a million people, and to many museums, galleries, theaters, performance venues, ensembles, artist collectives, and creative businesses, as well as a rich built environment including fine examples of Victorian and early modern architecture. The county's unique location along the Canadian border offers an opportunity to engage and appeal to tourists across the border. The county also enjoys the presence and efforts of professional sports teams, which, while beneficial, tend to overshadow the significant contributions of the arts/cultural sector.



Instagram post used during public outreach explaining why we want a Cultural Plan



Did You Know?

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra has won two Grammy Awards (in 2008 for "Best Contemporary Composition" and "Best Choral Performance" in 2021), and those notables such as journalist/author Wolf Blitzer, actors William Fichtner, Chad Michael Murray, and Jesse L. Martin, musician Rick James, and the band Goo Goo Dolls are from Erie County (among many others). Additionally, the AKG Art Museum was named as one of TIME's "World's Greatest Places" in 2024.

Despite favorable factors and a desirable location, support to and involvement from the creative sector in civic priorities and efforts have been disjointed and limited in scope. A Cultural Plan for Erie County will enable arts & culture to make a greater economic and community-wide impact, in a coordinated, amplified, and expanded approach of applying cultural resources to civic priorities (such as education, tourism, workforce development, etc.), consistent with existing local, county, and regional plans. The American Planning Association finds that "integrating arts & culture into planning processes places community identity at the fore, engages participants more fully, and breaks down barriers to communication across demographic and socioeconomic lines". This document provides a detailed description of the planning process, community priorities, supporting initiatives, and suggested steps for implementation in response to the feedback from artists, audiences, cultural organizations, cultural workers, creative businesses, educators, funders, and the public at large.

For over 40 years, Erie County government has supported arts and culture with generous annual appropriations, capital improvement grants, and ambitious adaptive reuse projects. In 2024, $8.3M was allocated to over 100 non-profit arts/culture organizations. Erie County has also periodically provided capital improvement grants towards improving cultural facilities, with an expanded $11 million in 2022 and 2023. This scope of support is unique in New York State (outside of New York City) and was recognized by the National Association of Counties (NACo) with a 2021 Achievement Award. However, such support, although consistent and valuable, is less than 10% of the sector's revenues and resulting positive impacts.

The Market Assessment prepared as part of this Plan *(see Chapter 3 for additional information or Appendix 1 for full details)* revealed Erie County's best-kept secrets:

- Erie County leads its peer group in attendance at musical performances (with additional data suggesting that free concerts are an essential part of the ecosystem).
- Erie County is at the top of its peer group in per capita employment of independent artists, writers, and performers

And yet the county has not capitalized, nor even acted, on these aspects of the community.

In 2022, not-for-profit arts and culture spending in Western New York (Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, and Niagara Counties) totaled $192 million, generated $381.4 million in economic activity, and 8,221 full-time equivalent jobs (providing $327.4 million in personal income to residents). Sector activity generated $121 million in tax revenues to local, state, and federal governments. Non-local visitors who traveled from outside the five-county WNY Region (9.8% of attendees) spent an average of $88.86. Additionally, 67.1% of non-local attendees reported that the primary purpose of their visit was specifically to attend the performance, event, exhibit, venue, or facility where they were surveyed. (AEP6)1. The economic contributions from our cultural draw are significant. Erie County can only benefit from leaning into our best kept secrets – and encouraging the next generation of creatives.

The Arts and Culture sector provides responsive and affordable training and education in a multitude of traditional and emerging fields. This includes film and theatre production, digital media development, ballet, painting, sculpture, literary arts, lighting design, carpentry, and more. The honed skills provide Erie County's youth (and adults) with options for self-development and a variety of career paths.

In addition to the economic impacts, the arts and cultural sector build community – 40% of responding organizations in AEP6 reported that "during the height of the pandemic, they expanded services beyond arts and culture in order to address urgent community needs such as collecting and donating supplies, donating facility space as a testing/vaccination site, or helping other organizations and individuals apply for pandemic relief and unemployment benefits".[2] Arts and cultural organizations also support residents' and visitors' racial

[1] Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 Report, Western New York: https://www.asiwny.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/NY_WesternNewYorkRegion_AEP6_CustomizedFinalReport.pdf

[2] See source for footnote 1.

and ethnic heritage, and create welcoming spaces for vulnerable, disadvantaged, and/or minority groups. As was found in the Conditions and Market Assessment, recent immigrants are a new source of audiences and artists, adding to the rich fabric of Erie County's culture, bringing in additional cuisines, music, dance, fashion, languages, and more to our melting pot. Erie County's population are 28% people of color, including 12% of people who are Black or African American, 6% Latino, and 5% Asian.

Geographically, many organizations have intentionally moved to the urban core or distressed neighborhoods to better serve their mission, often embarking on the adaptive reuse of existing structures. They also operate and enable public access to historic sites and buildings which are important aspects of Buffalo and Erie County's infrastructure and architectural heritage (some of which are listed or are eligible for inclusion on the State and/or National Registers). Organizations outside of the urban core often maintain historic buildings as well and provide resources, recreation, and enrichment to rural communities. Throughout the county, arts provide activation of parks and other public spaces. According to Americans for the Arts, "neighborhoods with more arts activities see increases in housing, population, and school test scores along with a decrease in crime." and a five-year study of low-income Chicago neighborhoods showed 5-10 percent improvements in each category in neighborhoods with high arts activities.

> *"Erie County has a long history of investing in its unique tourism assets. These assets are already supporting economic revitalization but also have the potential to attract even more new visitors to the region, create jobs across all socioeconomic groups, increase business investment, and spur downtown revitalization efforts... Erie County and its partners will continue working to determine the most appropriate way to ensure funding for the marketing and branding of the Buffalo Niagara region and to maximize the amount of outside revenue flowing into Erie County communities and fueling their growth." Initiatives for a Smart Economy 2.0 (2017) (I4SE 2.0)*

Some of the Initiatives *(see Chapter 6)* in this Plan may seem simple, such as the community-based signage in Initiative #4 or public art in Initiative #7, however, Americans for the Arts found that "an increased presence of art in neighborhoods was correlated with a faster-than-average increase in property values in those neighborhoods" over a 10-year period, and that "art and community development results in greater tax revenues. The downtown Phoenix creativity hub yielded a 105 percent increase in tax receipts, compared to a city-wide decline of 1.04 percent."

We can further amplify benefits such as these in Erie County. The evidence that investing in arts and cultural activity strengthens communities, improves quality of life, and stabilizes and boosts the tax base is well-documented. The intent of this Plan is to enhance the Erie County arts and cultural community through changes and targeted investment to maximize government, philanthropic, business, and community support for the sector, and as well as improve the arts and cultural landscape in Erie County.

While not unique to Erie County, Covid-19 and other societal reckonings across the country, including changing federal administration policies and priorities, have created shifts in philanthropic and governmental support away from arts and culture, raising concerns for the financial stability of the sector moving forward. This shift highlights a need to cultivate an appreciation for the arts in residents across the county from a young age, to position Erie County as a cultural tourism destination, and a place where arts and culture thrive.

Even as the world changes, it remains a constant that arts and culture play a defining role in community building and creating an engaging, deeply rooted sense of place. This plan recognizes the county's rich cultural offerings, the efforts of the cultural sector, as well as the need for more connectivity to further the success of the sector and county.

The 18 strategic initiatives in this plan provide an opportunity to break down barriers and embed arts and cultural development more deeply in the priorities of various sectors (i.e., business, tourism, education, workforce development) towards a future that is resilient, inclusive, equitable, and highlights the region's artistic and cultural assets.



Hispanic Heritage Council of WNY President Casimiro D. Rodriguez Sr. meets with AEA Consulting and Jacques Planning & Consulting Services during a site visit to share insight and vision for the new Hispanic Heritage Cultural Institute.

Chapter 1: Plan Process

This work was generated by a collaborative effort of Erie County and the Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance (GBCA) and with the support of diverse stakeholders that convened for 14 months from 2023 to 2024.

Through the advocacy efforts of the GBCA leadership, the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning (DEP) was tasked with collaborating with GBCA on a Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) for a grant from Empire State Development's (ESD) Strategic Planning and Feasibility Studies. The 2nd attempt, in 2022, was successful to complete the Erie County Cultural Plan. In the meantime, GBCA also secured grants from Fund for the Arts, Cullen Foundation, and the Robert J. and Martha B. Fierle Foundation, completing the local match with Erie County funds.

Through the County's Requests for Proposals process, the Steering Committee (details below) selected AEA Consulting (AEA), a globally recognized firm specializing in strategy and planning for vital and sustainable cultural projects.

AEA began work in late 2023, immediately contacting stakeholders identified in conjunction with the Steering Committee, arranging site visits, assisting with the setup of the Advisory Committee, and conducting a current conditions and market analysis. This data and reports then informed the more extensive public outreach. Feedback at all levels (one-on-one interviews, focus groups, public meetings, surveys) throughout the plan showed consistent concerns and priorities for the sector, and provided a multitude of potential initiatives.

Project Leadership

Meant to be diverse and inclusive in demographic characteristics from throughout the county and in bringing varied industry and community perspectives to the table.

Steering Committee

Steering Committee Meetings were held monthly. The committee included county staff, Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance leadership, a Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo / Ralph C. Wilson Jr Foundation Arts & Culture Initiative representative, and the Erie County Arts and Cultural Advisory Board representative. The Steering Committee's role was to provide feedback, contribute to public engagement efforts, and generally steer the direction of the Cultural Plan throughout the different phases of the work. (*The detailed list of members can be found in Appendix 7 and on the erie.gov/CulturalPlan website*).

Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee also met regularly through the process, composed of artists, educators, planners, library staff, grantmaker representatives, for-profit arts representatives, non-profit arts representatives, business and economic development representatives. Meetings were held every other month and provided

an opportunity to create deeper engagement at a layer between the Steering Committee and the public. The Advisory Committee was consulted on crucial components of the plan, such as the values and goals, the Public Engagement Strategy, and the overarching priorities and initiatives of the plan. (*The list of members can be found in Appendix 7 and on the erie.gov/CulturalPlan website*).

Chapter 2: Plan Values and Goals

Early in the cultural planning process, the Steering Committee, Advisory Committee, and consultant team developed a set of goals and values to guide the cultural planning process. This work underscored the importance of collaborative and participative processes at all stages, to ensure that the future strategy is rooted in a shared vision.

VALUES OF THE CULTURAL PLAN

A focus on the common good – transcending individual and community-specific aspirations to improve the lived experience of residents and visitors throughout Erie County.

Strengthening supportive, positive relationships – transcending siloes and transactional relationships through genuine respect for and interest in different experiences, viewpoints, and strengths.

Inclusive, collective ownership – facilitating the full presence and participation of historically marginalized voices.

Nurturing trust – inviting meaningful participation and contribution from every individual involved in the planning process.

Transparency and accountability – generous and candid communication among one another and with the broader public about the process, including opportunities as well as limitations.

Open-mindedness – a willingness to explore and revise received wisdom and ways of doing and thinking.

Positivity – uplifting the collective vision towards a more resilient, vibrant future.

Rigor – clarity and care in the expression of our thinking, and a sustained, mindful commitment to all the values here defined.

At their core, these values, and the discussion around them, sought to ensure that the effort put into the process created a plan for the people of Erie County – not just for the government of Erie County, or any other single entity, but to be achieved by community partners from the arts, government, philanthropic, for-profit, and non-profit sectors.

GOALS OF THE CULTURAL PLAN FOR THE ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR

- Facilitate a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the sector's overall value and impact on the economy, civic life, and community wellbeing.
- Create a broad, shared vision of how arts and culture fit into the community, how arts and culture are perceived, and how the sector can be holistically supported – not just financially, but also by having a seat at the table.
- Elevate the entire sector and instill a sense of identity and pride that will help move all in the County towards a collective vision.
- Develop methods for integrating different parts of the sector (creative businesses, funders/foundations, organizations, individual practitioners) across the breadth of cultural disciplines.
- Develop an effective advocacy arm for the sector to weather downturns.
- Integrate equity and intergenerational perspectives throughout the process.
- Foster the ongoing process that addresses inclusivity, provides for generosity and humility, and seeks continued pathways that embrace creative spaces for ideas.
- Align with ever-evolving civic priorities to ensure continued interface with stakeholders beyond the planning process.

GOALS OF THE CULTURAL PLAN FOR THE COUNTY AS A WHOLE

- Facilitate a healthy, stable, and successful cultural sector that is highly valued by residents and visitors alike.
- Document the County's cultural assets and arts and culture ecosystem while transparently sharing existing resources and efforts.
- Create synergies that lead to resiliency within the sector that will allow organizations to weather adversities, such as variance in available funding opportunities or financial down years.
- Develop a set of feasible and actionable items that can be pinpointed and carried out, regardless of future changes in civic administration and funding sources.
- Increase the profile of the region to attract businesses, visitors, and residents further supporting the local tax base

Chapter 3: Cultural Conditions Analysis

AEA prepared an initial existing conditions analysis based on market research, asset mapping, stakeholder interviews and site visits, and desk research in order to have an understanding of the cultural ecosystem in Erie County. More details from the Cultural Conditions Analysis can be found in Appendix 1. Below are key findings based on the research and interviews.

Defining the Cultural Sector: What is included in the Plan?

The three categories below were determined as the boundaries of the "cultural sector" for the cultural plan. *Media and individual artists/makers have been folded into "Creative Economy" in the asset mapping and initial cultural inventory evaluation.* Other assets or categories that emerged throughout the process that are more tangentially related to the cultural sector were considered as part of "support" for core cultural assets and the sector.



Nonprofit cultural organizations



Creative economy



Landmarks & places (Built Environment)



Media



Individual artists & makers

Cultural Inventory: Erie County in Summary

Asset Map

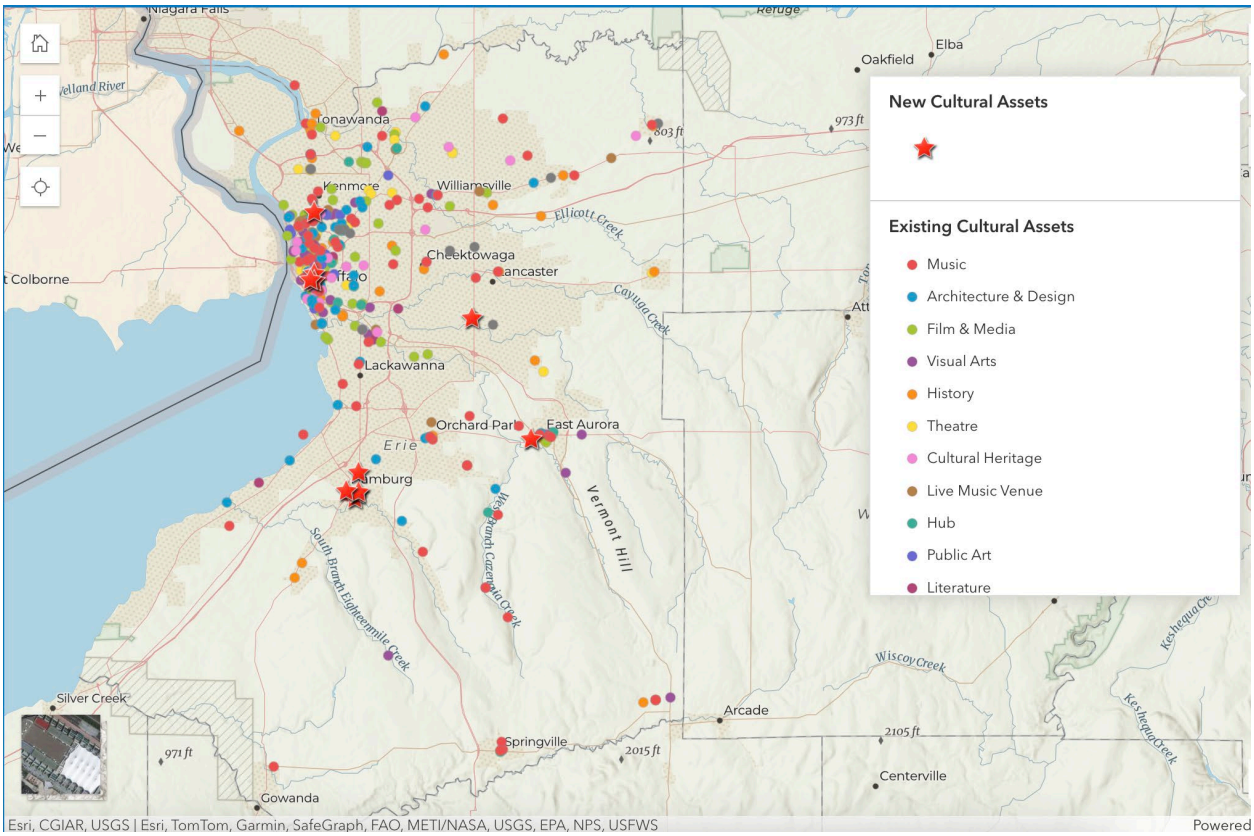
An asset map was created to inventory significant cultural organizations, businesses, and sites in Erie County. The asset map will be used as a tool to guide insights about Erie County's cultural ecosystem, including challenges and opportunities. Its aim is to capture the breadth and depth of Erie County, but it is not comprehensive. The map / inventory was an iterative process. After AEA generated a first draft of the map, Steering and Advisory Committee members have added to it, and community members also contributed to it during public sessions and on the County's website.

Approach

- The map is limited to assets that are primarily part of the arts, culture, and creative industries. *See "Additional Assets that Support Culture".*
- Assets on the map are not tied to past, present, or future funding decisions of Erie County, though arts organizations funded by Erie County are included in the map.
- Individual artists, musicians, and proprietors are not included.
- Funders are not included.
- To capture assets of all sizes, there were no criteria set around staff or budget size.
- Assets that could be categorized in multiple sectors and disciplines were identified by one that is most instrumental to making the program happen. For example, a summer concert in a park hosted by a City/Town falls into the "Government" rather than "Built Environment" category.

AEA initially mapped 476 assets inventoried across 4 sectors and 19 artistic disciplines based on the agreed upon definition of culture. Assets were mapped across the following categories:

Sectors	Cultural Disciplines				
Non-profit Arts and Cultural Organizations	• Architecture • Arts Engagement • Craft • Cultural Heritage	• Dance • Festivals • Film & Media	• History • Hub • Literature • Live Music Venues	• Music • Natural History & Science • Performing Arts	• Performing Arts Venues • Theatre • Visual Arts
Creative Economy Businesses	• Architectural Firms • Arts Retail (independent art or artists/ design-driven retail)	• Fashion • Film & Media • Hub • Dance	• Literature • Live Music Venues • Music • Visual Arts		
Built Environment	• Architecture • Public Art (e.g. murals, sculptures) • Parks				
Government	• Music • Hubs – including libraries				



The most up-to-date version of the map can be found at https://www4.erie.gov/culturalplan/

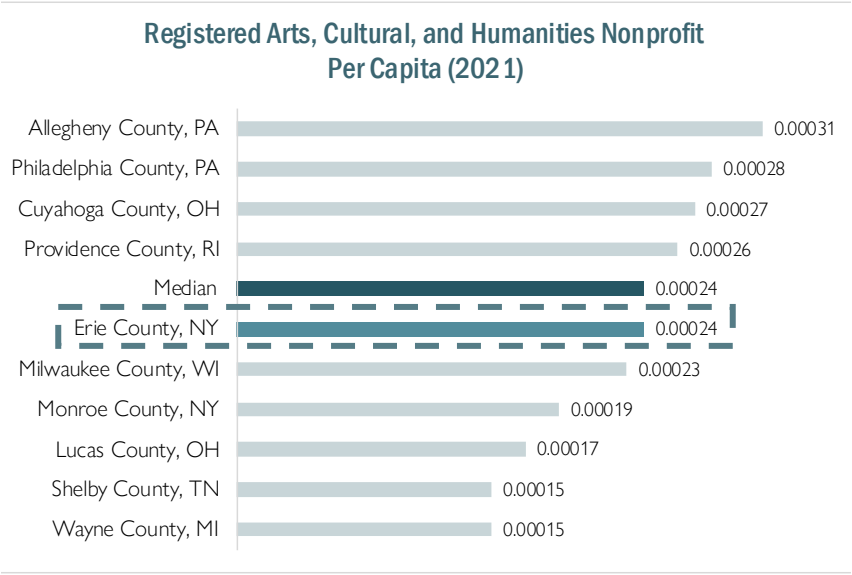
Cultural Assets

To make information useful for developing the cultural plan, benchmarking was used for contextualization, with the following considerations:

- Cultural employment and consumption data compared to peer counties where possible.
- Because the Plan will ultimately focus on impacting the cultural sector, Erie County was compared to its peer counties in cultural participation and employment indicators. Demographic data was compared with New York state and the US overall for 2022.
- To compare Erie County to its peer group, some of its baseline numbers may differ from those in the inventory to retain consistency with peers.
- Consistent, county–level consumer spending and employment data was available for 2021, during which time some organizations were not operating at full capacity due to COVID-19.

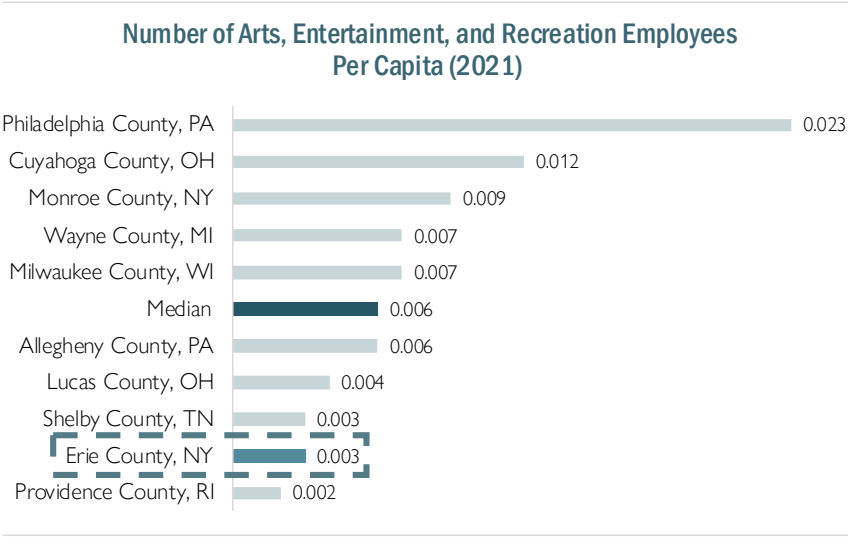
Number of Non-profits in Erie County Compared to its Peers

Comparing the number of all registered arts, cultural, and humanities nonprofits per capita in Erie County to its peers in a standardized manner shows that Erie County is **aligned** with the median of its peer group, not an unusual number of cultural sector nonprofits.[3]



Cultural Employment Indicators

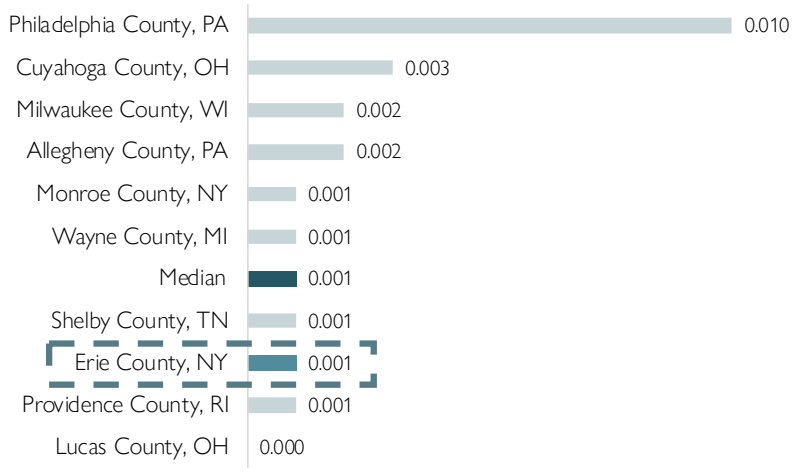
Erie County is near the **bottom** of its peer group in number of arts, entertainment, and recreation employees per capita.[4]



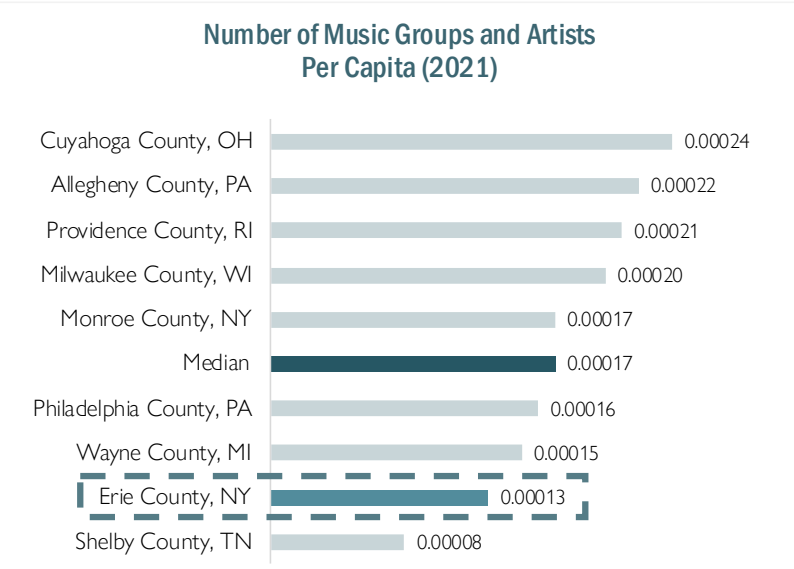
[3] CauseIQ Nonprofit 990 Database.

[4] Simply Analytics, County Business Patterns Summary Data, NAICS Code 71.

Erie County is **aligned** with its peer group median in per capita employment in performing arts, spectator sports, and related industries employment.[5]



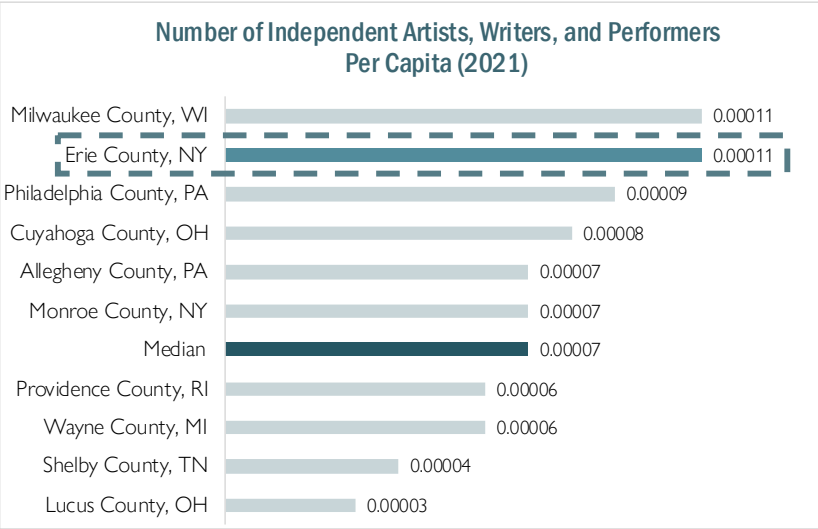
Erie County is at the **bottom** of its peer group in employment of musical groups and artists per capita. This figure represents all musical groups and music artists who are registered as being primarily engaged in this work; it does not capture all people in Erie County who play music and/or are occasionally paid to play music.[6]



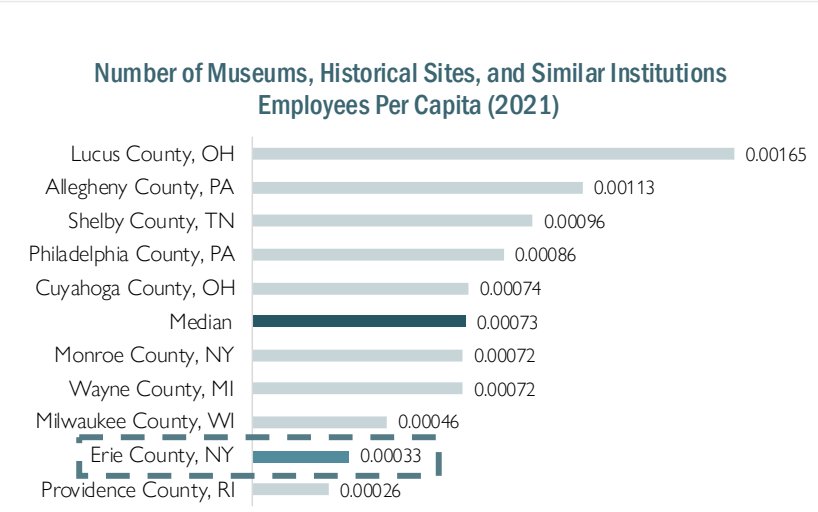
[5] Simply Analytics, County Business Patterns Summary Data, NAICS Code 711.

[6] Simply Analytics, County Business Patterns Summary Data, NAICS Code 7113.

Erie County is at the **top** of its peer group in per capita employment of independent artists, writers, and performers. This suggests that individual artists are an important area of focus for this plan. This figure represents all independent artists who are registered as being primarily engaged in this work; it does not capture all people in Erie County who write, perform, or make art; or those who occasionally do so.[7]



Erie County is at the **bottom** of its peer group in the number of museums, historical site, and similar institutions employees per capita.[8]



[7] Simply Analytics, County Business Patterns Summary Data, NAICS Code 7115.

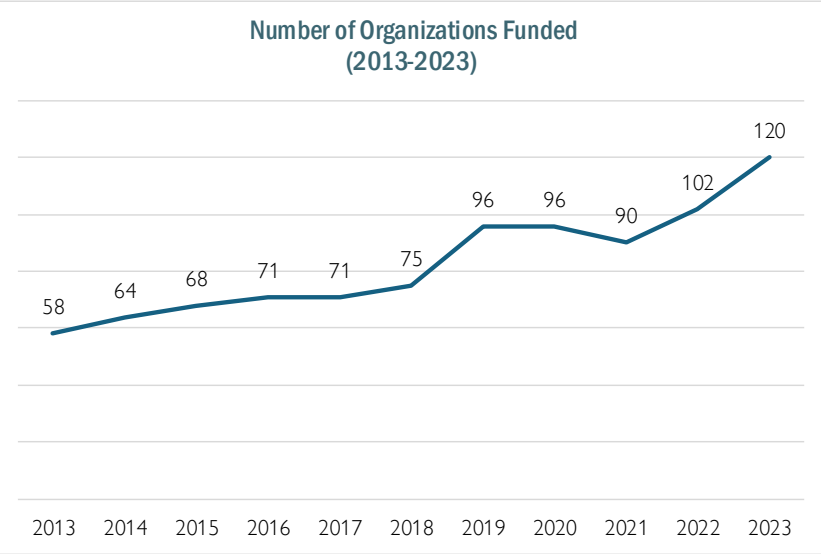
[8] Simply Analytics, County Business Patterns Summary Data, NAICS Code 712.

Cultural Participation[9]

- Erie County is below its peer group median by most metrics of cultural participation.
- However, with 9.6% of its population having attended a music performance in 2021, Erie County leads its peer group and is above its median (7.1%). This suggests that live music is a key component of Erie County's cultural ecosystem. Further, that Erie County leads in attendance but is lower in spending on performing arts (including concerts), suggests that free concerts are an important part of the ecosystem.
- Erie County is at the top of its peer group in per capita employment of independent artists, writers, and performers. This suggests that individual artists are an important area of focus for this plan. This figure represents all independent artists who are registered as being primarily engaged in this work; it does not capture all people in Erie County who write, perform, or make art; or those who occasionally do so.
- 11% of Traveler Spending is on Arts & Culture.

Erie County Cultural Funding & Resourcing

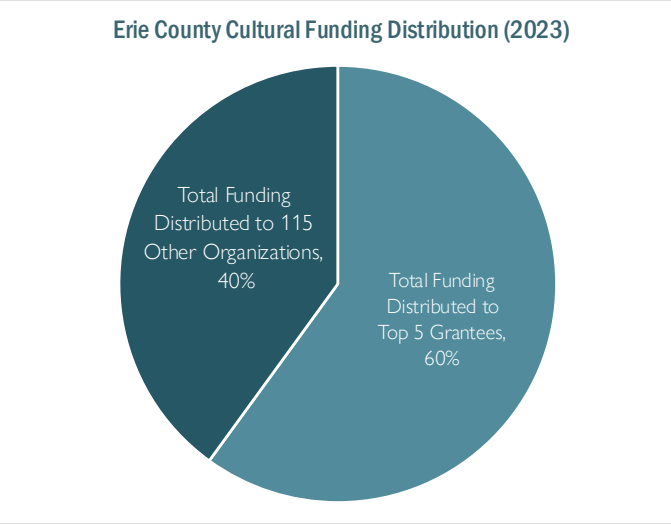
In the past decade, Erie County funding for arts organizations overall has increased, even when accounting for inflation (7%). In 2023, Erie County distributed $7,801,690 in funding to 120 groups. In the past decade, the number of organizations Erie County funds has increased by 106%.[10]



[9] Simply Analytics, MRI Simmons Local Market Data and Consumer Expenditure Estimates.

[10] Erie County Budgets, 2013-2024. All budget figures are Erie County reported Actuals, except for 2023, which is Erie County's Adjusted Budget for Cultural Funding, published in 2024. Allocations do not include Capital Awards.

Funding is relatively concentrated: 60% of Erie County funding is allocated to 5 non-profit organizations. The City of Buffalo has not fulfilled recent cultural funding commitments and does not contribute to the cultural sector as generally expected from a city of its size.



Erie County does not have a central music sector promotion / service organization or agency, despite high audience participation and number of assets.

- Music (particularly free concerts), Cultural Heritage, and History organizations are key drivers of culture in rural areas.
- Creative economy businesses are largely located in Buffalo, with very few in rural areas.
- Architecture and Design landmarks, businesses, organizations, and workforce training programs are numerous and represent an important pillar of Erie County's cultural ecosystem in driving tourism and in fomenting collaboration within the sector.
- There are several organizations that fulfill some aspects of what is desired for a cultural "hub" in Erie County: Fund for the Arts, Arts Services, Inc., Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance, Frontline Arts, and Nonprofit Support Group (NSG).

More findings can be found in Appendix 1.

Impact of Arts & Culture in Erie County

Key Findings: **Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 Report** (AEP6), February 2024

A primarily quantitative study by Americans for the Arts, drawn from 2022 data, found[11]:

- Arts & Culture generated $381.4 million in economic activity in the (5 county) WNY region during 2022 – $192.0 million in direct spending by arts and culture organizations, an additional $189.4 million in related audience spending. This economic activity supported 8,221 jobs, provided $327.4 million in personal income to residents, and generated $121.0 million in tax revenue to local, state, and federal governments.
- 90.2% of the 4.2 million nonprofit arts and culture attendees were residents, and 9.8% were nonresidents (from beyond the WNY region), demonstrating strong regional audience participation alongside room for significant growth in the tourism market, within which 67.1% of attendees reported the primary purpose of their WNY visit was "specifically to attend the performance, event, exhibit, venue, or facility" and of whom 54.7% were first time attendees (compared to 27.9% of local attendees).

Among the study's overarching recommendations:

- AEP6 seeks to reposition the Arts & Culture sector – in Western New York as elsewhere – as a vibrant industry and economic engine, rather than an expendable charity, while also emphasizing the social benefits the sector provides in terms of community engagement and well-being.
- AEP6 also advocates for critical funding conversations about BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and ALAANA (African, Latinx, Asian, Arab, Native American) organizations receiving fair and proportional financial support in the face of a 2019 AFA report that found "among local arts agency grantmaking organizations, the largest 16% of grant recipients (by budget) received 73% of the dollars awarded."

[11] Americans for the Arts (with support from Art Services Inc.), Arts & Economic Prosperity: The Economic & Social Impact Study of Nonprofit Arts & Culture Organizations & Their Audiences in Western New York, February 2024. (145 organizations of 573 eligible participated from the WNY region (Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, and Niagara), participation rate 25.3%.). See also: UB Regional Institute, Impacts of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Phase 1 and Phase 2: The Futures), 2018 and 2021 (respectively).

Key Findings: Upstate NY's Creative Spark, October 2023[12]

A primarily qualitative, descriptive study of trends and conditions by Center for an Urban Future (CUF) found:

- "Employment in the arts and culture sector across upstate New York surged 35 percent from 2009 to 2019, nearly 10 times the overall rate of employment growth upstate (4%) and three times the growth rate of the healthcare sector (12%). This employment boom occurred in nearly every corner of the state, with striking arts sector job growth in Buffalo (59%)" and "in spite of declining levels of public investment in the arts across upstate New York."
- With respect to Erie County, which is lauded for its sustained support of Arts & Culture, "The problem is that more arts groups are now competing for these funds: according to Mariely Ortiz… in 2023 there were 107 different organizations that applied for funding, up from 67 in 2014 – a 63 percent increase." CUF goes on to say, "Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the arts sector in Buffalo, however, is an inequitable distribution of resources."
- CUF advocates (principally to NY State) for fuller recognition of the latent possibilities in Arts & Culture funding and for their integration into economic development initiatives: "[T]he under-the-radar arts sector has provided a much-needed economic jolt and created new opportunities for inclusive growth. By better integrating the arts into NYS economic development planning [including the REDCs, DRI, and Market New York – in addition to investing in stronger arts infrastructure like arts councils and arts districts], policymakers have an opportunity to build on recent momentum and lay the groundwork for a more vibrant, sustainable, and equitable economy."

Among the study's overarching recommendations particularly germane to Erie County are:

- Make the arts and culture sector a centerpiece of statewide economic development planning.
- Invest in place-based arts infrastructure, including arts councils, arts districts, and other arts service organizations.
- Ensure that New York State's ambitious housing plan includes housing for artists.
- Develop infrastructure to provide shared 'back office' services for small arts organizations.
- Generate new, dedicated revenues for the arts at the county and city levels.
- Put artists to work promoting, strengthening, and supporting their communities.

[12] Center for an Urban Future, Upstate's Creative Spark: How the Arts Is Catalyzing Economic Vitality Across Upstate New York, October 2023.

Market Assessment

The Market Assessment included a variety of demographic, economic, consumer, and tourism indicators and trends as well as key assets, resources, policies, initiatives, and organizations that contribute to Erie County's cultural ecosystem.

Specific findings can be found in Appendix 1.

Key Issues & Opportunities Based on Research and Findings

The emerging understanding of Erie County's cultural life is one that is active and vibrant. While Buffalo and Erie County face challenges that are common to many midsize American metropolitan areas, especially those in the Rust Belt – longer-term population declines and a need for renewed economic development – arts/culture can play a significant role in helping residents feel pride in their county while attracting new residents, businesses, and tourists to an exciting and creative region.

To help accomplish this, we've highlighted these potential key areas:

- **Defining Buffalo and Erie County's "cultural story"** – Despite Erie County having a strong arts and cultural life, as evidenced by its high numbers of independent artists as well as its more established cultural organizations – there is no individual or entity that has led a coordinated effort to serve as storyteller and/or marketer for the benefit of the arts & cultural sector as a whole. An effort through this process and beyond to define a cohesive cultural "story" – both realistic and aspirational – may help convey the power of arts and culture: breaking down barriers, promoting greater inclusion, supporting health & wellness (especially as young people and older populations fight loneliness), and/or delivering economic benefits.
- **Developing paths to funding and resources** – While Erie County's governmental funding of culture has increased in the past decade, other investments in the cultural sector have declined recently. More established organizations have seen the impact of recent shifts of focus for foundations and major donors like The John R. Oishei Foundation and The Western New York Foundation to other social causes, limiting direct financial support for the cultural sector. Meanwhile, smaller and emerging organizations have not historically had many of those opportunities. These resource limitations not only create direct operational challenges, but they have also led to a greater sense of competition and tension between organizations, creating obstacles for greater collaboration as they vie for more limited funding. Funding from the City of Buffalo – which contains most of the local arts/culture entities – has been inconsistent with no designated process or fund, and reallocation of funds earmarked for arts/culture redirected to Council Member discretionary spending. Additionally, the Buffalo Art Commission is limited in scope – by the City's Charter, allowed only to acquire or maintain City-owned public art. No other entity or program exists within the City government to support the arts and cultural sector.
- **Elevating new groups of audiences & artists** – While Buffalo and Erie County's population has declined when looking at a longer trajectory (like many prominent industrial regions of the 20th century),

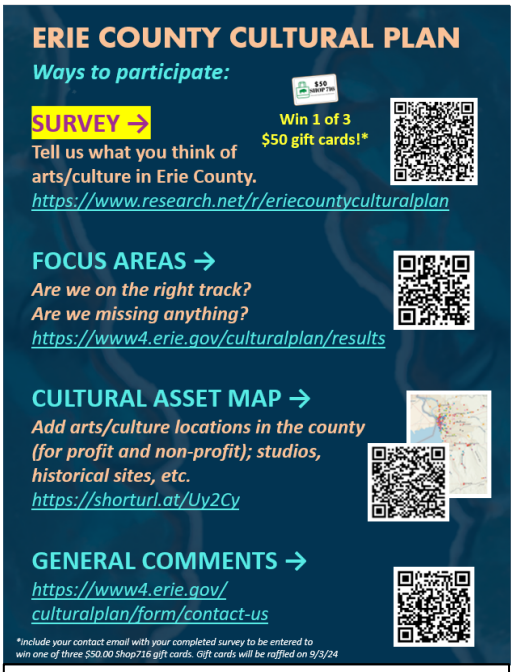
Erie County has seen recent population growth, in particular via an influx of immigrants that has picked up since 2010. These new residents to Buffalo present an opportunity for audience building, new creators, and the development of new cultural assets over the next 10-20 years. Establishing pathways to engage these groups will also help make outcomes from the sector's work more equitable.

- **Addressing growing affordability concerns in the County, especially for artists and creative businesses** – One of the draws for many artists and creators in Erie County is the relative affordability of work and living space. As the county charts its future course, it should consider how to maintain affordable housing, studio space, rehearsal space, etc. It has been well documented that artists who occupy low-income neighborhoods or forgotten business districts eventually transform them into vibrant, sought-after areas. Ironically, these same creative, artistic individuals and groups are often squeezed out due to rising rent and real estate prices, leading to gentrification. Safeguarding the creative community means providing affordable housing and workspaces.

Chapter 4: Summary of Outreach & Engagement

One important result of a successful planning process is a shared understanding of the ambitious goals that recognize the unique character of the County's people and their environment.

Engaging Erie County residents and stakeholders was the most important component of the Cultural Plan's development. The public engagement process provided an opportunity for the community to inform and provide feedback to the planning process through focus groups, public meetings, pop-up events, and a survey. The Cultural Plan website – http://erie.gov/CulturalPlan – was also continuously updated to keep the community informed on the status of the project with documents from the consulting team, information on survey results, upcoming engagement events, and the Asset Map. The outreach and engagement process are detailed below, in Appendix 2, and in the Public Engagement Report.



Quarter page flyer used during public outreach encouraging participation and feedback

Site Visits

In December 2023 and February 2024, AEA Consulting, with contracted local partner Jacques Planning & Consulting Services (JPCS) conducted 25 site visits to cultural sites across the County (*the list can be found in the Appendix 2*). This allowed further understanding of the perspectives of arts and culture organizations, funders, creative businesses, artists, and other stakeholders.

Key takeaways from the site visits included:

- **Interest in exploring shared administrative resources between cultural organizations**. Many of the organizations AEA spoke with pointed to a lack of internal resources such as accounting, finance, and other administrative services, which unfortunately adds to the already heavy load on limited staff and/or volunteers. The idea of identifying a way to share these types of resources came up in various conversations. This need also extends to individual artists who require these same services.
- **A need for continued capacity building.** This work would help to strengthen staff and volunteer skills in other areas so that they do not have to rely on external firms for the work (e.g. marketing). In addition to this, educating the field on how to make a case for investment in the arts or how to align with other philanthropic priorities was mentioned. This should also include peer-learning opportunities.
- **Concern that investment by foundations that have traditionally supported the cultural sector is declining.** All organizations mentioned the recent shift of focus for foundations and major donors like

the John R. Oishei Foundation and The Western New York Foundation to other social causes. This change in philanthropic priorities limits the funding available for the cultural sector. Organizations observed that the loss of funding strains their operations and creates a competitive, tense environment among them, as they now must now vie for a smaller pool of financial support.

- **The sector needs to tell a more cohesive story.** Despite Erie County's abundance of art and culture, not all non-profits can execute compelling advertising and promotions to grow awareness and attract audiences. There is power in the arts and breaking down barriers through storytelling.
- **There is a lack of media coverage for the arts** as well as a comprehensive arts and culture calendar. As a result, public awareness of upcoming events is diminished, dampening appreciation for the vibrant quality of what is offered. Ample media coverage and critical reviews educate and inform would-be attendees from inside and outside the area. Without media coverage, it is especially challenging for medium and small organizations to compete with big advertising campaigns and the noise on social media when trying to attract potential audiences.
- **Working with the City of Buffalo and Buffalo City Schools for youth programming is often complicated** and sometimes even impossible.
- **Lack of reliable transportation.** Some organizations expressed that the lack of public transportation hurts attendance, hampers programming, and makes it challenging to grow audiences and community impact. This is particularly relevant with regard to youth programs and meeting residents where they are.

Insights from the site visits informed the vision of the plan and the themes that would eventually serve as the plan's priorities.

Public Engagement and Interviews

The Public Engagement Strategy for the cultural planning process was built on previous efforts to maintain ongoing communication with key cultural stakeholders and the broader public. These strategies aimed to provide an array of opportunities for public involvement in the cultural planning processes, including public engagement sessions, pop-ups, focus groups, and a survey. These initiatives all intended to inform, engage, collaborate, and identify both challenges and opportunities for enhancing the arts and culture sector. The public engagement process collected input from diverse sectors, including arts and culture, business, education, tourism, government, and philanthropy, to better understand community needs.

Public feedback was collected through:

- The public comment form embedded in the project website (https://www4.erie.gov/culturalplan/);
- Public comment surveys (online and hard copies);
- Written comments and questions posed in the public meetings; and
- Typed or transcribed comments and questions posed in the hybrid virtual meeting.

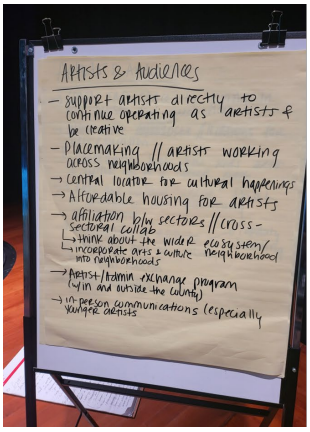
Public Meetings

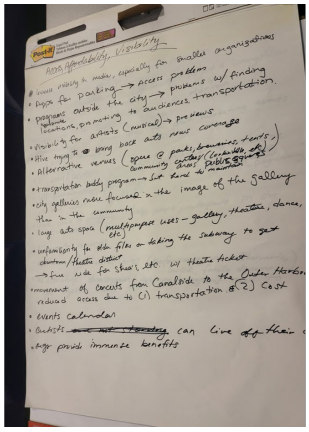
As part of the plan's development, the project team and the County hosted three public meetings at locations across the county, two in-person public meetings and one hybrid public meeting, during the week of June 22nd, 2024.

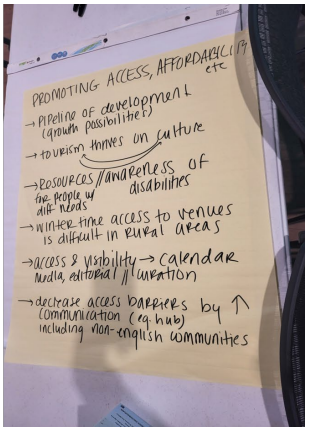




Facebook event banner (above) and flyer (right) inviting the public to the meetings







Pictures of notes captured during the public meetings

Key takeaways from public meetings included:

- **Need for a hub organization to serve as a central location for support, coordination, advocacy, and marketing**. This hub could potentially hire full-time professionals as resources to be shared among organizations. (Key conditions for pursuing the hub idea would be to avoid redundancy, avoid adding to aggregate budgets, and demonstrate that the initiative adds efficiency without more layers of administration and bureaucracy.)
- **A need to advocate for funders to recognize the real costs of doing business**. It should emphasize the need for funders to understand that insisting on operations being carried out on a shoestring budget – for example at 10% of the actual cost – is unrealistic and unsustainable.
- **Integrating tourism and cultural planning** was seen as an opportunity to increase visitors and address key issues, such as the loss of 1,000 hotel rooms and the shrinking convention market.



Public meeting held at Torn Space Theatre on June 25, 2024 facilitated by AEA and JPCS

- **The need to engage micro-organizations, artists, and artist collectives to get their input.**
- There is an opportunity to **elevate the perceived value of arts and culture** by showcasing their profound impact on Erie County residents. This includes emphasizing the importance of institutions such as science centers, zoos, and major museums, particularly in educational and community outreach efforts, ensuring they are recognized and prioritized beyond purely economic metrics.
- **The County's role and involvement should be clearly defined** in achieving the future vision.
- The **value of hiring staff / personnel** to be responsible for this plan's implementation.



Public meeting held at Clarence High School Lecture Hall on June 26, 2024 facilitated by AEA and JPCS.

Pop-Up Events

The project team hosted a pop-up event at Elmwood Village ArtFest to provide project information to the general public, promote the public comment period, and administer the public comment survey. Printed material advertising the public comment survey and asset maps were also distributed at other events and festivals across the city (Wing Fest, Pappy Martin Jazz Festival among others), and general information fliers were also dropped off at various locations. (*The full list can be found in Appendix 2*).

Focus Groups

Meetings were conducted to gather input based on specific topics, scale, or sectoral affinities across the County. The focus groups included: Artists, Arts Education, Creative Economy, Frontline Arts Organizations, Funders, Media and Regional Economy, Large Cultural Organizations, and Small Cultural Organizations. *(More details for each group can be found in Appendix 2)*.

Key takeaways from the focus groups included:

ARTISTS Support and training as entrepreneurs, increasing awareness of artists' work and viability as a career	**ARTS EDUCATION** Lack of awareness for the work and value brought through arts education for youth, the economy, and quality of life; greater support and appreciation needed from the community and schools
CREATIVE ECONOMY Contributing to quality of life but unsupported; challenges with large scale presenters that take dollars out of the local economy	**EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS** Student wellbeing and achievement are top priorities; interest in further partnering with arts/cultural organizations but lack process
FRONTLINE ART ORGANIZATIONS Lack of true collaboration from larger organizations and involvement from smallest organizations; low compensation, benefits, and program funding to effectively conduct the work needed	**FUNDERS** Large number of organizations are competing for same resources; existing organization should become hub; prior capacity building efforts unsuccessful, need to incentivize
LARGE CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS Need for a cultural hub; simpler funding applications that recognize the value of different organizations	**MEDIA REGIONAL ECONOMY** Desire for more coordinated and funded marketing plan / campaigns

SMALL CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

Applications should be simple and adaptive to the organization; non-monetary assistance and support is needed; young people must be included but conditions must improve to be able to make a life from the work



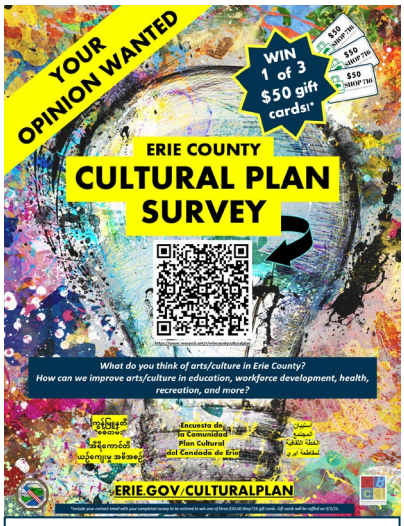
Mary Beth Debus of Program Savvy Consulting conducting a Frontline Arts Buffalo Focus Group at Arts Services Inc

Survey

The survey contained four variations: General Survey, Cultural Workers, Creative Businesses, and Artists. Demographics questions, questions around missing arts and culture offerings in Erie County, and suggestions for the plan were consistent across all four versions. Additional questions for each category were tailored based on the target group. To prevent double counting, respondents were asked to select the category they aligned with most before continuing the survey. The survey was also translated into the three most spoken minority language: Spanish, Arabic, and Burmese.

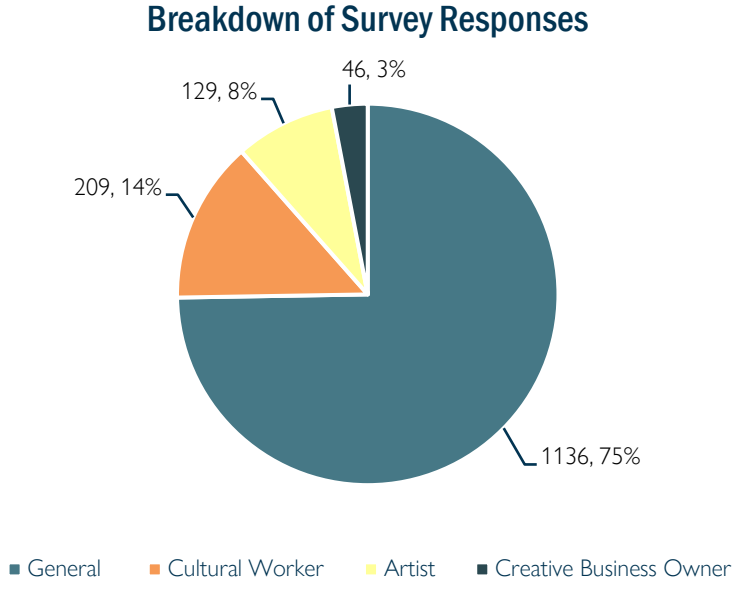
A total of 1,681 survey responses were collected during the public comment period (June 12th – September 3rd, 2024).

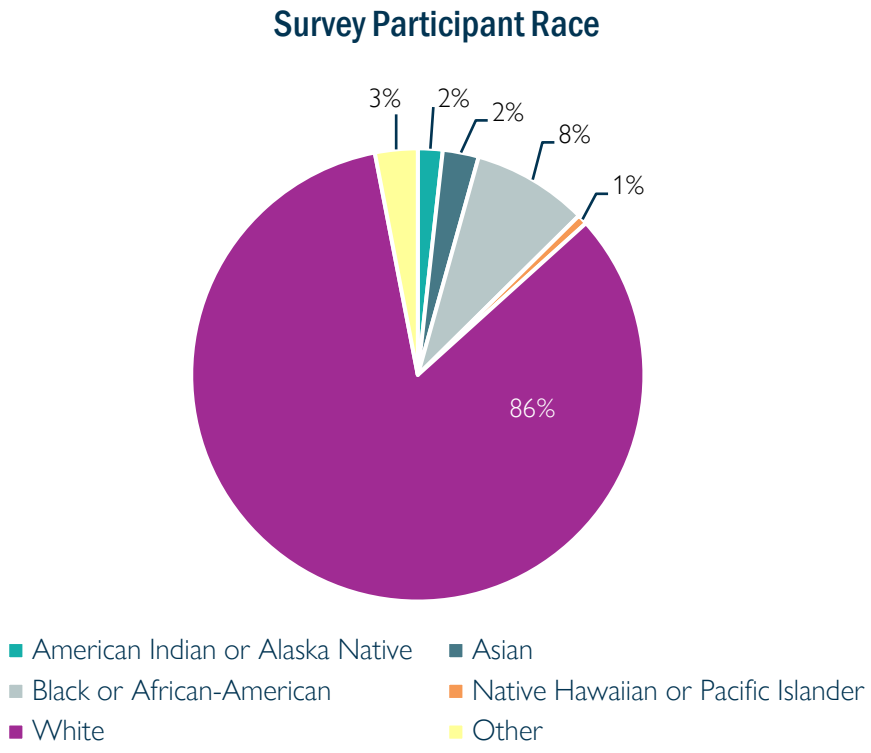
Below is a brief overview of the demographic characteristics of respondents. More findings by type of respondents (general, creative business owner, artists, and cultural workers) can be found in Appendix 3.

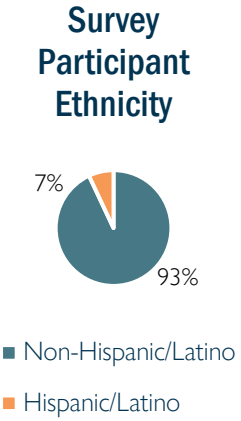


Survey poster and flyer used in social media, at arts venues, shopping streets, and events.

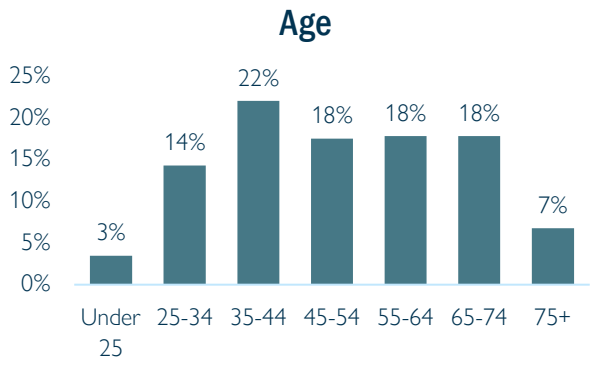
The majority of respondents completed the General survey, followed by Cultural Workers, Artists, and Creative Business Owners.

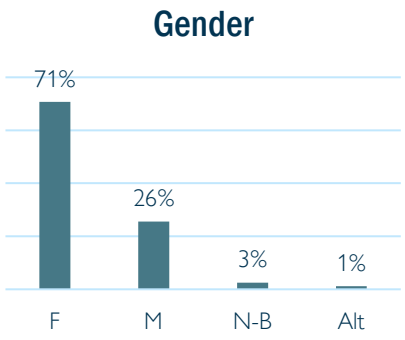




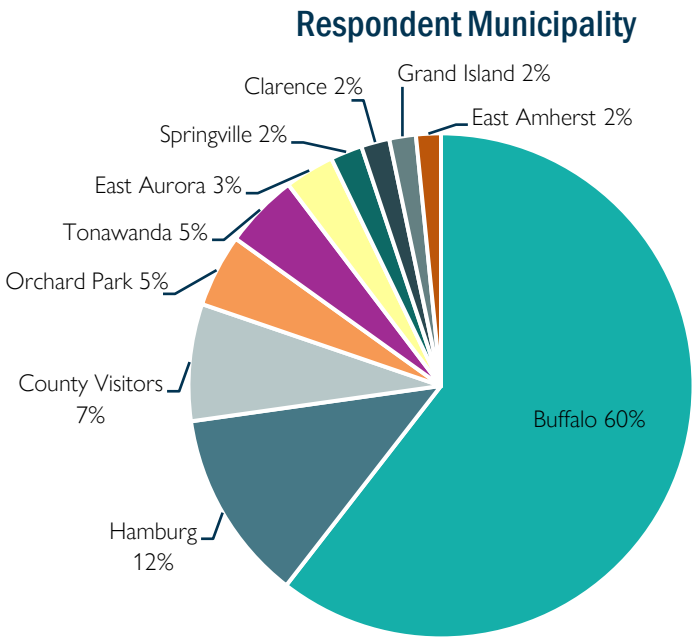


The majority of respondents were white, non-Hispanic females, ages 35-44. We also received significant input from adults ages 35 to 74. White, middle-aged females tend to respond to surveys with greater frequency than other demographics. 31% of respondents reported children in the household (respondents were asked to consider the children's interest and activities when completing the survey as well as their personal involvement).





The majority of respondents that completed the survey are from Buffalo, followed by Hamburg, visitors to the county, and Orchard Park. Note: the survey was only marketed in local media and events.



General takeaways from the survey included:

- Requests for a range of services and support, including more activities for youth and greater funding for arts programs in schools.
- A need for one central resource with information on cultural events across the county and increased media coverage.
- Greater accessibility of events into rural communities and more public art works in historical areas across the county were also identified as a need.
- Increased support for diverse and emerging talents in the arts is needed.

The Survey Questions and Response Report can be found in the Public Engagement Report.

Key Issues & Opportunities Based on Public Input

- **Capacity building and developing shared resources** – Many of the organizations the consultant team spoke with – particularly smaller groups – pointed to a lack of internal resources in areas such as accounting, finance, and other administrative services. This lack of capacity means administrative and back-office work must be handled by a limited staff (or volunteers) who are already stretched thin. At present, many rely on external firms for the work, but this can be costly. Building up staff capacity through shared training and learning might provide an opportunity for efficiencies and for investment that expands impact. Another alternative that was discussed by several organizations was developing a structure to share administrative resources between cultural organizations. In addition (and aligning to the above), a shared education for the field on how to make a case for investment in the arts or how to align with other philanthropic priorities was also mentioned. This should also include peer-learning opportunities with other regions and/or organizations.
- **Addressing access, particularly ensuring reliable transportation** – Some organizations engaged during the interview process or site visits expressed that a lack of public transportation impacts programming and hampers residents' ability to attend events. The transportation obstacle can be especially pronounced in rural areas and is particularly detrimental to efforts aimed at connecting youth to enriching cultural programs.
- **Expanding visibility & influence for arts and culture** – With cutbacks in local media, there is a lack of coverage for the arts in Buffalo; neither is there a comprehensive arts and culture calendar. While the "CYOA Buffalo" (Choose Your Own Adventure) newsletter has made an attempt to remedy this, a more systematic collaboration might provide broader benefits to the sector.
- **Cross-sector leadership and a seat at the table** – Some interviewees noted a sense of being siloed, and challenges in accessing support from the City of Buffalo and other local municipalities (though that was not a significant challenge at the state and county levels). Ensuring that visionary people – of all ages, races, backgrounds, etc. – have leadership roles in the sector and access to broader decision-makers around Erie County, including government, business, community support organizations, etc. was called out as a priority.

Chapter 5: Cultural Plan Priorities

Development of Initiatives and Ranking

From the outreach process detailed Chapter 4, an initial longlist of 79 potential initiatives were defined *(see Appendix 5)*, covering various themes, such as capacity building and funding needs. The list was then narrowed down by systematically applying tags to identify the most essential community-driven needs mentioned by the participants in the public engagement sessions:



This helped pinpoint where different needs overlap and differ. Using this method, the community's priorities coalesced into:

- **Improving Arts Funding and Support Systems**
- **Rebuild Communications Support;**
- **Strengthen Connections for Youth;**
- **Rebrand as a Creative County; and**
- **Assemble a Cultural Hub.**

These embody the areas of need and opportunity for Erie County's cultural sector for the next 5 to 10 years. The priorities are outlined below in more detail, and Chapter 6 delves into the implementation phase, outlining detailed steps for the identified initiatives, metrics of success, and potential partners that can be key to the implementation of the plan.

Priority 1: Improve Arts Funding and Support Systems

Initiatives focused on improving and exploring new funding mechanisms, corporate/organization, and artist support and development, and overall capacity to improve financial and collaborative efforts.



What We Heard

As seen at each step of the process, lack of capacity and resources (time, money, staff, know-how, etc.) is felt throughout the sector.

Artists feel they lack appropriate compensation for their work, adequate facilities to live and/or work, and appropriate education or technical support as entrepreneurs. *(See more in the survey summaries at Appendix 3)*

Non-profit organizations, many of which are fully volunteer, struggle to avoid burn out. Each volunteer, employee, or contractor wears multiple hats to implement their mission, with little time or aid in conducting the developmental activities necessary (planning, long-term financial support development, grant writing and management, etc.) to carry on the organization. Reporting requirements and implementing best practices are also difficult as they often require costly technical expertise (attorneys, accountants, grant writers, etc.). Even the larger organizations, with dedicated staff to specific areas, note burdensome and limiting grant processes.

Creative businesses (for profit arts, some overlap with artists, above) noted lack of affordable storefronts as well as business-friendly policies and support. They also noted limited incentives and programs for businesses, along with limited exposure.

Initiatives #3, 10, 12, 17

Priority 2: Rebuild Communications Support



Efforts to improve marketing and communication strategies to connect with and engage new and existing audiences. These initiatives focus on enhancing visibility and raising awareness of the vast cultural offerings in the County and facilitating effective communication through various media and outreach efforts.

What We Heard

There seems to be little knowledge or information on arts and culture happenings, including little social media coverage, which contributes to a lack of a cohesive narrative around the vast arts and culture offerings across the County.

Over the past couple of years, news coverage on arts and culture events has been rapidly decreasing, including arts reviewers/critics.

There should be a bigger communications initiative about what's going on in the region; there should be a comprehensive marketing plan.

Some non-profit organizations across the County noted that they lack marketing plans or budgets impacting their visibility and people's awareness of their programs. This is particularly challenging for smaller cultural organizations that already have limited budgets in general.

Initiatives #4, 5

Priority 3: Strengthen Connections for Youth

Initiatives focused on youth, encompassing school programs and arts education, aim to expand creative outlets for recreation and well-being while nurturing the next generation of artists, cultural workers – from traditional roles like photographers, painters, sound technicians, and architects to emerging fields such as digital media, game design, and 3D modeling – as well as cultivating future audiences.



What We Heard

While not limited to Erie County, arts education is the first to be slashed from school budgets, leaving a gap that arts education organizations have to fill with very limited resources. In Buffalo in particular, making inroads with the school district can also add to the challenge as that makes it difficult to provide the most vulnerable children in the County with arts experiences and skills that they may not get elsewhere.

Students and youth who live in more rural areas of the County have limited transportation options or challenges that limit exposure to arts and culture activities, especially if schools are not providing field trips or access to these normally.

Stakeholders and public input pointed to limited youth and student participation in existing programs, some due to a lack of awareness of what is available and others due to costs.

Arts educators are often underpaid and working multiple jobs, making staff retention a challenge.

Stakeholders noted that because students and youth are not being invested in, they are not being cultivated, trained, and positioned to become future artists, musicians, and cultural workers, negatively impacting cultural organizations in the future.

Initiatives #13, 16

Priority 4: Rebrand as a Creative County

Change the perception of both residents and tourists, positioning the area as an arts and culture destination. Creative County encompasses all initiatives focused on enhancing the region's reputation for arts and culture. This includes creating geographic connections across towns and villages that make up the County and improving access to the arts and culture programs and activities.



What We Heard

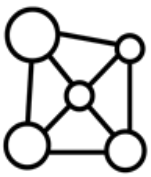
Residents, funders, and public entities don't understand the value that arts organizations provide. Highlighting and communicating the value that the arts create for their communities, and how that ultimately shapes the region.

General feeling of siloed organizations and groups; stakeholders noted the opportunity of creating more unity and collaboration through County-wide initiatives that showcase the region's rich cultural offerings.

Buffalo and Erie County are often associated with professional sports, overshadowing the region's vibrant arts and culture sector. Limited visibility and marketing further contribute to the arts being overlooked.

Initiatives #2, 6, 7, 8, 18

Priority 5: Assemble a Cultural Hub



Similar to a Department of Culture or an arts council, the "Cultural Hub" is a proposed entity to coordinate the county's arts and culture sector. This hub aims to streamline efforts and create more and better opportunities for organizations, artists, and creative businesses. It would serve as a central point for coordination, support, and advocacy as it develops, ensuring a cohesive approach to enhancing the region's cultural landscape.

What We Heard

While there are a few existing organizations that are focused on sector advocacy or providing shared services, such as Arts Services Inc. (ASI) and the Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance (GBCA), their limited funding, staffing, and resources make it challenging for them to serve the whole County equally and to provide the necessary services the sector is lacking.

Throughout the process, arts organizations noted that they lack technical support in areas such as accounting, bookkeeping, grant writing, and marketing, among others. Because their funding is already stretched, being able to share services with other organizations, especially between small ones, may facilitate and alleviate these challenges.

Buffalo and Erie County are often associated with professional sports, overshadowing the region's vibrant arts and culture sector. Limited visibility and marketing further contribute to the arts being overlooked.

Advocacy is a key concern across the sector, with organizations often feeling they must push for funding and arts-related policies on their own. While existing advocacy groups do their best with limited resources, there's a clear need for a more unified and centralized effort to represent the entire region.

Throughout the process, stakeholders noted that there is no centralized place with information about existing grants, public and private, within the County and beyond. Smaller organizations without grant writers or development staff do not always know how to fill out applications or what sources of funding are available for them.

Initiatives #1, 9, 11, 14, 15

Chapter 6: Initiatives

Scoring

Once the priorities were identified, the list of initiatives was refined. The next step was to prioritize them, determining which should be addressed first and where to focus initial efforts to streamline the implementation phase. Four criteria were used to evaluate the potential initiatives that will address the priorities of the cultural plan. These categories include impact, cost, complexity, and timeline.

The criteria were weighted so that impact and feasibility metrics have equal weight. Cost was given a 2x weight, complexity a 1x weight, and timeline a 1x weight – thus, impact was given a 4 weight.

	Criteria	Definition
Impact	**Impact** ***(4x weight)***	• ***High Impact***: Increases the visibility of the sector, helps it reach new audiences, and contributes to the strengthening and capacity building of organizations in the County. • ***Medium Impact***: Addresses some issues in the sector, but not the top priorities or affects a limited part of the sector. • ***Low Impact***: Limited/relevant to a specific group of organizations, does not pertain to wider audiences, or does not elevate the sector in a significant way.
Feasibility	**Cost** ***(2x weight)***	• ***High Cost***: Would ideally have dedicated staff/personnel, and/or include capital costs. • ***Low and Medium Cost***: Operational costs such as website design, marketing and communications, translation costs, transportation support, event production, etc.
	Complexity ***(1x weight)***	• ***High Complexity***: Involves a variety of stakeholders or significant resources. • ***Medium Complexity***: Requires some new partners or additional resources. • ***Low Complexity***: Leverages existing resources and partnerships or can be easily achieved/implemented with existing resources.
	Timeline ***(1x weight)***	• ***Long Term***: 5+ years • ***Medium Term***: 3-5 years • ***Short Term***: < 2years

Each initiative was scored against specific criteria on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 indicating the worst score (low impact or high cost) and 3 indicating the best score. Impact, Complexity, and Timeline were scored qualitatively. To assess "cost," each overarching initiative was analyzed by breaking it down into key action items and estimating their costs. The cost scores range from 1 to 3, with 3 indicating no cost and 1 indicating estimated high costs.

In order to estimate the cost of the initiative, it was broken down into the likely steps needed to implement it. This included the costs of organizing a festival or major event, providing transportation support, event production, and marketing and communications. The approximate costs of each step were then calculated using various public data and benchmarks. A score was assigned to each initiative based on the estimated

total costs. A worst score of 1 would represent a high cost involving, for example, hiring personnel or consultants for additional studies, or capital costs.

Additional details on the scoring system can be found in Appendix 4.

List of Ranked Initiatives

The initiatives are listed in the following pages from most impactful and feasible to more complex. The initiatives are not meant to be consecutive – any initiative or implementation step can be advanced individually, concurrently, or sequentially as resources and opportunities are identified and/or secured. Additionally, the potential implementation strategies in the following pages should expand and evolve to address the situation and opportunities to progress the Initiative at the time of implementation.

A list of potential partners has been included – organizations, agencies, and other entities currently known to be working to address the same concerns as the initiative. These lists are not all-encompassing.

As a community plan, any organization, business, or individual is invited to participate in the implementation of each initiative.

It is recommended that efforts to advance the plan priorities or any of the initiatives provide a report to the Implementation Committee to track progress. More on the Implementation Committee is on page 46.

Initiatives Index

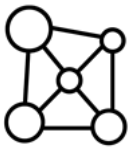
0.Create an Implementation Committee 46
1.Increase Funding and Support in and Brought to the Region 47
2.Increase accessibility to arts and culture events 49
3.Revise Local Cultural Funding Process 51
4.Enhance Visibility for Arts Through Marketing and Media Awareness 53
5.Improve Arts Journalism Coverage 55
6.Grow Audiences in Terms of Demographics and Geography 57
7.Enhance Erie County's reputation as an arts and culture destination 59
8.Enhance Access and Utilization of Artistic Facilities and Infrastructure 62
9.Increase Collaboration Between the Arts Ecosystem 65
10.Advocate for Expanded Funding Criteria 66
11.Launch a Creative Economy/Not-for-Profit Cohort Program 67
12.Explore New Funding Opportunities and Mechanisms 69
13.Encourage/Support Accessible Youth Arts Programming 71
14.Create and Promote Professional Development and Training Opportunities for Artists, Cultural Workers, and Arts Educators 73
15.Designate an Existing Organization or Create a Cultural Hub Entity 75
16.Increase Collaboration Between the Arts Ecosystem and the School System 77
17.Forge Partnerships with the For-Profit Sector 79
18.Create Opportunities to Bring the Entire Community Together for the Arts 81

0. Create an Implementation Committee

As a first step to enable future work, the Steering Committee will create and cede control to an Implementation Committee tasked with spearheading the implementation of the Cultural Plan. This Committee will aim to include organizations that have already been making advancements in this work and/or are crucial partners. Decision-making representatives from various sectors (government, philanthropy, business, and more) will be invited to launch such committee and begin the coordinated action of this plan. Having an Implementation Committee lead this work will ensure that the plan has an accountability mechanism and that there is continuity and ownership of its progress across different stakeholders. Duties of the Implementation Committee will include, but not be limited to:

0.1	To seek and leverage monetary and non-monetary resources in support of the implementation of the Plan.
0.2	To advise upon and support the implementation of the Plan in alignment with the identified strategic priorities and needs of the community.
0.3	To advocate for and represent the Plan in professional settings beyond Board participation, as appropriate.
0.4	Establish practices and policies in support of the arts sector.
0.5	Track reporting and success measures for advancement of the Plan priorities.
0.6	Form committees and/or working groups as needed to operationalize the implementation of the Plan

1. Increase Funding and Support in and to the Region



The funding landscape is shifting, with changes from local funders and national administrative changes. As a result, non-profits now face greater competition for existing grants or must adapt their work to align with other social issues that funders prioritize. Additionally, public and private funding has often favored larger cultural organizations, while smaller ones – which may need the support most – struggle to access these resources. This is partly due to a lack of tools, time, or training needed to identify and apply for grants. There's a clear opportunity not only to increase funding and support within and beyond the region but also to equip cultural workers with the skills and resources to navigate funding processes and engage directly with funders.

1.1	Develop a Grants and Resources How-To website: Compile a comprehensive database of grants and funding opportunities available for arts organizations, individual artists, arts educators, and creative businesses. Include step-by-step instructions for applying, hyperlinks to the program's application forms, FAQs, funding guidelines, contact information, and clear timelines for application reviews, decision-making, and feedback. Include tutorials and resources such as webinars or videos. Facilitate the connections to existing material and resources or produce webinars, videos, and other educational materials to guide users on how to apply for grants effectively.
1.2	Advocate with Funders and Grantmakers: Present and advocate with funders and foundations to ensure clear information and feedback on funding process and address the concerns brought forth during the Cultural Plan process.
1.3	Provide Training and Resources for Applicants: Increase and expand access to educational resources, including grant writing workshops and one-on-one coaching, to help applicants understand and navigate governmental and private grant requirements, processes, and management. Promote use of BoardStrong for non-profit board training.

Priority Score: 96%

Success Metrics

- An increase in the number of applicants to targeted grants, and an increase in the response rate of participants (grantees) in feedback surveys.
- Grants awarded, with additional measure of grants from outside the county
- Website visitors

1.4	Facilitate Face-to-Face Networking Events: Organize in-person networking events that facilitate direct interaction between funders and organizations to enhance relationships and mutual understanding.
1.5	Explore means to provide shared grant writing services for more complex grants, including technical support for smaller organizations and individual artists.
1.6	Establish a Feedback and Improvement System such as an annual survey.

Potential Partners: Erie County, Frontline Arts Buffalo (FAB), Arts Services Inc (ASI), Funders, Nonprofit Support Group (NSG)

2. Increase accessibility to arts and culture events



Public input gathered through surveys and meetings highlighted accessibility as a key challenge for arts organizations across Erie County. This includes physical accessibility – such as transportation, ASL interpretation, and accommodations for disabilities – as well as expanding access to arts and culture remotely through live streaming and digital offerings. There's a valuable opportunity to improve access by partnering with organizations already serving people with disabilities and supporting non-profits in becoming more inclusive. Enhancing accessibility would not only benefit the community but also strengthen Erie County's identity as a Creative County.

2.1	Take inventory of existing accessibility accommodations offered and available from venues, businesses and organizations, which may help identify any gaps/needs.
2.2	Establish Connections with Disability and Social Services Organizations: Partner with People Inc. in WNY and ECOPD to directly reach and engage disabled populations.
2.3	Partner with ECOPD to create a set of recommendations for arts organizations on how to adjust their operations to be more accessible, including print and digital media.
2.4	Partner with ECOPD to offer access to essential services, such as ASL interpreters, to assist arts organizations when needed.
2.5	Encourage arts organizations to offer live streaming or recorded versions of events to provide access to individuals who are house-bound or face mobility or mental health challenges that prevent them from attending in person.
2.6	Facilitate the availability of, or provide specialized training for, staff and volunteers to ensure they are well-equipped to assist individuals with various disabilities, fostering a

Priority Score: 95%

Example Success Metrics

- Count of accessible accommodations provided in a sample of events: Track the number of events offering at least one accessibility feature (e.g., ASL interpreters, wheelchair access).
- Increase in outreach efforts measured by the number of joint events or programs conducted with these organizations (e.g., 3 joint events per year).
- Percentage of requests for ASL interpreter assistance.
- Number of training sessions conducted for staff and volunteers, aiming for at least 4 training sessions per year.

	more inclusive, understanding, and supportive environment at events.
2.7	Support the improvement of organizations' web and physical sites for accessibility.
2.8	Develop a Feedback and Evaluation mechanism.

Potential Partners:
Erie County Senior Services, Erie BOCES, Erie County Office for People with Disabilities (ECOPD), People Inc., WNY Independent Living, Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service (NFRRS)

Example Success Metrics
(continued)

- Increase the response rate of arts organizations and participants in feedback surveys.

3. Revise Local Cultural Funding Processes



The cultural funding processes in the region should better reflect the diverse value that different types of organizations bring to the community, especially when it comes to larger versus smaller entities. A one-size-fits-all approach to accountability doesn't meet the sector's varied needs. Additionally, there's a need to streamline funding applications to make the process more accessible and efficient. When it comes to local public funding, the community expressed support for creating dedicated, sustainable funding mechanisms for cultural entities (see case studies in Appendix 7). These efforts align with the broader goal of improving arts funding and support systems, ensuring resources are distributed more equitably while strengthening the region's cultural ecosystem.

Erie County

3.1	Integrate relevant Plan recommendations into grant applications to leverage County programs in support of the Cultural Plan; applicants could be asked to address if they advanced any of the priorities or initiatives to further the Cultural Plan. Consider adjusting scoring and funding based upon advancing the recommendations of the Plan.
3.2	Improve distribution of funding for more equitable impact in the non-profit cultural sector.

Foundations

3.3	Integrate relevant plan recommendations into grant applications to leverage existing programs in support of the Cultural Plan; applicants could be asked to address if they advanced any of the priorities or initiatives to further the Cultural Plan. Consider adjusting scoring and funding based upon advancing the recommendations of the Plan.

Priority Score: 94%

Example Success Metrics

- Percentage of funders agreeing to pilot multi-year funding.
- Percentage of small and minority-led organizations reporting that the new criteria are fair and accessible.
- Percentage of organizations reporting improved funding access after the first full year of implementation.

3.4	Advocate for Multi-Year Funding: Engage with funders and policymakers to advocate for the implementation of multi-year funding processes. Emphasize the benefits of multi-year commitments.
3.5	Acknowledge Organizational Differences in Application Criteria: Work with grant funders to create application criteria that reflect differences in size, mission, and contributions among organizations.
3.6	Advocate for general operating support and support for creative businesses/artists where possible

Potential Partners
Erie County, GBCA, FAB, City of Buffalo, Fund for Arts, and other foundations across the county

City of Buffalo

3.7	Advocate for the City's consistent involvement in the support of the area's arts and cultural sector. Support could include consistent, designated financial support program for artists, businesses, and/or organizations; technical assistance for small businesses and non-profits; fee or tax waivers and exemptions for arts/culture events; and other support within the City's control.

All

3.8	Monitor and Evaluate the New Process: Develop an evaluation to assess the success of the improved funding models over time.

4. Enhance Visibility for Arts Through Marketing and Media Awareness



Enhancing marketing and media awareness is key to boosting the visibility of Erie County's arts and culture sector. Throughout the process, stakeholders have mentioned that with cutbacks in local media, there is a lack of coverage for the arts in Buffalo; neither is there a comprehensive arts and culture calendar. Efforts should focus on developing a comprehensive marketing plan, engaging younger audiences, and investing in visitor readiness to make the region more welcoming to tourists. Additionally, internal campaigns can build local pride and participation, while dedicated staff, a convening body, and sustainable funding would strengthen collaboration and long-term growth. Addressing challenges like limited marketing, complex funding processes, and political factors is crucial to positioning Erie County as a vibrant cultural destination.

4.1	Develop a Comprehensive Cultural Events Landing Page: Create a user-friendly page that serves as a central guide to cultural events in the county. Include: A calendar of events with updated listings; Information on all galleries, studios, and art stores; A section for user-generated content where residents can contribute information about local arts happenings; Features that allow for easy navigation and searching.
4.2	Increase local awareness of Arts/Cultural offerings: Develop and regularly update a database of cultural organizations, including contact information, types of events, and offerings that becomes the definitive go-to for old and young alike. This may help audiences find programs and organizations to find volunteers and staff. It may also help to reduce duplication of efforts/proliferation of redundant organizations.
4.3	Work with Visit Buffalo Niagara to integrate arts and cultural destinations and branding into existing regional and local tourism marketing.

Priority Score: 94%

Example Success Metrics

- Achieve a targeted percentage increase in arts and culture visibility and engagement across media platforms, measured by combined social media, website traffic, and media mentions within the first year.
- Completion of a comprehensive database containing at least 100 cultural organizations within 6 months, with quarterly updates.
- Availability of the landing page in 3 key languages spoken in the community within 6 months.

4.4	Partner with advertising companies for in-kind advertising: Collaborate with advertising firms to secure donated ad space for arts and culture projects. This can include: digital ads (social media, websites); physical ads (banners, billboards); a focus on High-visibility locations (airports, transit stations).
4.5	Ensure accessibility of information and translate to different languages.
4.6	Coordinate learning and development opportunities to improve owned media, SEO (search engine optimization), brand marketing, and content strategies for digital (online channels like websites, social media, text/SMS, and email to reach customers) and traditional marketing (offline channels like TV, radio, print, and billboards).
4.7	Forge Strategic Partnerships for Joint Promotions: Partner with other cultural organizations, local businesses, schools, and community organizations to cross-promote cultural events and initiatives.
4.8	Monitor and Evaluate Marketing Campaign Effectiveness: Track and analyze the performance of marketing campaigns and promotional activities. Evaluate metrics such as website traffic, social media engagement, and ad reach to measure success and identify areas for improvement.

Example Success Metrics
(continued)

- Secure at least 5 in-kind advertising partnerships with local firms within the first year.
- Increase number of participants in the outreach program, aimed at specific demographics.
- Increase the percentage of partnerships and the retention rate for ongoing collaborations.
- Increase the response rate of participants in feedback surveys.

Potential Partners:

Visit Buffalo Niagara (VBN), media partners, corporate partners, municipal partners, block groups, Erie County, Step Out Buffalo

5. Improve Arts Journalism Coverage



Throughout the process, artists, community members, and arts organizations have consistently highlighted the lack of arts journalism and critical coverage of arts and culture across diverse media outlets. This gap limits awareness, recognition, and meaningful dialogue around the region's creative work, making it harder to build broader audiences and foster a deeper appreciation for the arts. Expanding opportunities for arts coverage – along with investing in training and promoting arts journalism – will be key to enhancing the county's cultural profile and raising awareness of its rich artistic offerings.

5.1	Develop a contact list of reporters who focus on arts and culture in Erie County, including grassroots or new publications, to include them in press releases and event/program coverage invitations to be utilized by the arts sector.
5.2	Create an alliance and a plan to support new/grassroots publications and other communication channels that will enhance critical coverage of arts and culture throughout the county.
5.3	Form Alliances with Blogs, Influencers, and Non-Traditional Media: Build partnerships with influential blogs, social media influencers, and non-traditional media outlets that focus on arts and culture. Leverage their platforms to reach diverse audiences and enhance the visibility of arts content.
5.4	Develop Social Media Campaigns under the Creative County Brand: Launch targeted social media campaigns as part of the Creative County brand to engage residents and potential visitors with arts and culture content. Use a mix of posts, videos, and interactive content to increase engagement and raise awareness.
5.5	Partner with local colleges and universities to implement an affordable training program or internships where possible with arts organizations for emerging arts journalists and marketing students.

Priority Score: 92%

Example Success Metrics

- Achieve a targeted percentage increase in arts and culture visibility and engagement across media platforms, measured by combined social media, website traffic, and media mentions within the first year.
- Increase the response rate of participants in feedback surveys.

5.6	Support Diverse Voices and Perspectives: Ensure that the content produced represents a wide range of voices and perspectives within the arts community. Promote coverage of underrepresented artists, cultures, and art forms.
5.7	Develop or facilitate the availability of training to assist artists, organizations, and businesses in learning how to achieve results with public relations, advertising and marketing strategies. They might learn how to maximize awareness and attendance by utilizing both paid and unpaid opportunities with traditional media outlets as well as digital marketing strategies and opportunities.
5.8	Encourage arts and cultural organizations' combined efforts to increase media coverage, multiple organizations participating or coordinating shared themes or similar events to increase coverage (small theatre weekend, art gallery week, etc.)
5.9	Monitor Trends and Adapt Strategies: Keep track of emerging trends in arts journalism and media to adapt strategies accordingly. Stay informed about new platforms, technologies, and audience preferences to maintain relevance and effectiveness.
5.10	Establish a Review and Evaluation Process: Create a system to review and evaluate the quality of arts journalism and content produced. Gather feedback from audiences and stakeholders to assess the impact and effectiveness of the coverage.

Potential Partners:

Media partners, VBN, GBCA, and other initiatives

Example Success Metrics (continued)

- Monthly social media engagement metrics including increase of followers, impressions and clicks – as well as monthly tracking of the reach and engagement (likes, shares, comments) of arts and culture content shared by influencers and blogs. Number of critical arts articles, reviews, or videos produced and published.
- Number of training workshops conducted for emerging journalists, and participation rate in training programs.

6. Grow Audiences in Terms of Demographics and Geography



Erie County is home to a diverse and growing community, encompassing people of all ages, backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses. Immigration over the past decade has been a key driver of this growth, making recent immigrants an essential audience and valuable contributors to the region's cultural ecosystem – both now and in the decades ahead. However, public engagement efforts revealed significant barriers to participation in cultural activities, including transportation limitations, admission costs, physical accessibility challenges, and a lack of multilingual resources. To ensure all residents – including those in rural areas and non-English-speaking communities – have equitable access to cultural programming, efforts need to be made to not only bring diverse audiences to cultural programs but also to expand the reach that arts have across the county.

6.1	Assist arts organizations in translating their event descriptions, marketing materials, website content, and social media posts into key languages spoken by residents (e.g., Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin). Ensure that both digital and physical promotional materials are accessible in multiple languages.
6.2	Work with ROC, local libraries, schools, and community centers in rural neighborhoods to host arts events. For example, pop-up performances, mobile art workshops, or traveling exhibitions to towns outside of the urban center. The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and Shakespeare in Delaware Park have successfully done so and may be resources for other organizations on how to do so as well.
6.3	Collaborate with NFTA to provide free or discounted transportation options for visitors and residents traveling to cultural assets. This would enhance accessibility, particularly during winter months when travel can be challenging for rural areas. This could include a themed bus route similar to the Parks Adventure themed bus that

Priority Score: 89%

Example Success Metrics

- Percentage increase in attendance from targeted demographic groups.
- Increase in data participation.
- Percentage increase in the number of organizations participating in the Cultural Access Pass, along with annual growth in new users and retention rate. Monitor the number of actual experiences made possible because of the Pass and the participating arts/cultural organizations, e.g., number of pass-holder individuals with at least *(continued)*

	would promote arts events on public transportation and offer discounted fare options for event attendees.
6.4	Collaborate with Erie County's Live Well campaign to enhance access to arts events and programs as part of their efforts to improve health outcomes for children, seniors, and working families.
6.5	Increase scope, capacity, and/or awareness of Art Services Inc.'s Arts Access Pass, a program that provides free and low-cost cultural opportunities, and transportation, to individuals or families who receive income-based public assistance in WNY. Include flyers at income-based public assistance offices and media.
6.6	Create specific marketing campaigns for different demographic groups. For example, use radio ads in Spanish, social media ads targeting younger residents, and flyers in community centers and newspapers for seniors. Tailor the message and outreach method to resonate with each group's interests and preferred communication channels.
6.7	Implement Feedback and Evaluation Systems.

Potential Partners:
GBCA, Rural Outreach Center (ROC), Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA), arts organizations, senior centers, community centers, libraries, veteran organizations, and

Example Success Metrics
(continued)

one "arts experience" over 12-month period.

- Number of events catering to diverse age groups.
- Number of rural community events held annually.
- Percentage increase in use of discounted fares over time.
- Use social media insights to track engagement (e.g., click rates, likes, shares).
- Increase the response rate of participants in feedback surveys.

7. Enhance Erie County's Reputation as an Arts and Culture Destination



Despite Erie County having a strong arts and cultural life, particularly through its high numbers of independent artists and its more established cultural organizations – there is no individual or entity that has led a coordinated effort to serve as storyteller and/or marketer for the benefit of the arts & cultural sector as a whole. Buffalo, in particular, is often primarily associated with the Buffalo Bills, overshadowing its rich cultural offerings. Through this process and beyond, there is an opportunity to craft a cohesive cultural narrative – one that is both authentic and aspirational – to highlight the transformative power of the arts. A well-defined cultural story can help break down barriers, promote inclusion, support health and wellness (particularly for older populations facing social isolation), and demonstrate economic impact. Additionally, by elevating Erie County's identity as an arts and culture destination, strategic marketing efforts can attract more cultural tourists and workers, and showcase the diversity of artistic programs and institutions across the region.

7.1	Integrate arts/cultural assets and events more explicitly and intentionally into existing and future Visit Buffalo Niagara and I Love NY tourism marketing, including the marketing of existing districts and corridors (such as the "African American Heritage Corridor", "Museum District" and "Springville Art Crawl")
7.2	Explore the creation and branding of other arts and culture areas or districts in Erie County. Ensure the branding reflects the county's cultural diversity and heritage.
7.3	Expand on the free "Mural Walk" tours to highlight opportunities for visitors (and residents) to enjoy particular artistic and cultural interests. This may include the development of a Cultural Passport or similar initiative.
7.4	Develop a compelling marketing campaign aimed at both local residents and tourists to increase awareness of the county's cultural assets. The campaign should highlight

Priority Score: 87%

Example Success Metrics

- Number of partnerships formed between tourism boards, cultural organizations, and local businesses.
- Completion of a cohesive branding plan for the "museum district" within a set timeframe.
- Successful implementation of joint initiatives coordinated by the team, with a target number collaborative marketing or event efforts launched in the first year.

	local arts organizations, festivals, artists, and projects, positioning Erie County as a vibrant cultural nexus.
7.5	Launch a campaign specifically focused on local artists, emphasizing their expertise, creativity, and contributions to the community. Promote their work through various mediums (social media, local TV, print ads), helping residents notice and appreciate local artists as valuable professionals and entrepreneurs in the fabric of the county.
7.6	Work with the Film Commission, VBN, and Invest Buffalo Niagara to highlight the comparative affordability and resources available in the area to creatives outside the county.
7.7	Collaborate with tour bus companies to expand services and include "cultural bus tours" for tourists that highlight the region's diverse cultural locations, museums, art galleries, and public art installations. Start by inviting travel agencies to bring busloads of tourists and offering them curated itineraries (such as those offered by the non-profit Explore Buffalo).
7.8	Collaborate with cultural organizations, the City Arts Commission, and the County's Art in Public Places board to enhance creative placemaking projects and generally support placemaking initiatives. Focus on high-visibility locations like waterfronts, parks, and public squares, enhancing the aesthetic and cultural appeal of the region.
7.9	Invest in Infrastructure and Signage for the "Museum District" and other branded areas: Allocate funds for signage, wayfinding, and infrastructure improvements within the newly branded cultural districts, making it easier for tourists and residents to navigate the cultural

Example Success Metrics (continued)

- Number of impressions generated by the marketing campaign, aiming for 100,000+ impressions across social media, print, and other advertising platforms.
- Number of travel agencies participating in cultural tours.
- Number of riders using discounted/free transportation (data provided by NFTA).
- Number of creative placemaking projects completed.
- Number of wayfinding signs installed.
- Increase the response rate of participants in feedback surveys.

Potential Partners:

Visit Buffalo Niagara (VBN), media partners, corporate partners, municipal partners, block groups, Erie County, Step Out Buffalo.

	attractions in Erie County (e.g. the Allentown and Black Rock communities recently added wayfinding signage).
7.10	Feedback and Evaluation Mechanism: Establish a system to collect visitor data and feedback from both local residents and tourists on their experience with the cultural district, tours, and events. Use this data to improve future tourism campaigns and cultural offerings.

8. Enhance Access and Utilization of Artistic Facilities and Infrastructure



A thriving arts and culture sector requires not just creative talent but also the spaces and infrastructure to support it. While Erie County has a range of artistic facilities, many remain underutilized, inaccessible, or lack long-term plans. By strategically leveraging partnerships, reimagining shared spaces, and implementing policies that encourage affordability and accessibility, the county can ensure that artists and cultural organizations have the resources they need to create, collaborate, and grow. Repurposing community spaces for creative use and adopting creative business-friendly policies will strengthen Erie County's cultural ecosystem, making artistic spaces more available, adaptable, and affordable.

8.1	Recommend that a detailed maintenance plan be included for current public art projects and facilities on public or private property, ensuring their sustainability, upkeep, and proper use. Identify the resources and partnerships needed for ongoing support. Integrate maintenance of works into agreements with Artists.
8.2	Establish Partnerships with local Colleges and Universities: Form partnerships with Western New York colleges and universities to leverage underutilized spaces, equipment, and expertise for capacity building and rehearsal spaces.
8.3	Partner with public spaces for shared use: Collaborate with local libraries, community centers, senior centers, and similar locations to create shared rehearsal spaces or a community-based "warehouse for the arts." This would provide affordable spaces where artists can work, rehearse, and experiment across disciplines (existing examples include the recording studios and 3D printers at the Central Library).
8.4	Identify underutilized venues (e.g., community halls, theaters, or private spaces) and promote their use for arts-related activities. Explore incentives or create programs

Priority Score: 87%

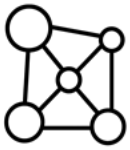
Example Success Metrics

- Percentage increase in artists and organizations taking advantage of underused resources or spaces, targeting a specific percentage growth in utilizing shared or underutilized venues within the first year.
- Develop a facilities and space utilization plan within a defined time frame.
- Number of partnerships with colleges, universities, libraries and community centers.
- Develop zoning and policy recommendations within a defined time frame.

	that encourage venue owners to share their spaces with artists.
8.5	Create a long-term plan focused on providing affordable spaces for emerging artists to practice and showcase their work. Ensure this strategy is incorporated into the next cultural plan, with clear timelines, goals, and metrics for success.
8.6	Develop Zoning and Policy Recommendations for Art Spaces: Work with local government to establish zoning to encourage the development of affordable live/work artistic spaces, as well as street-level or street-front retail spaces in mixed use buildings. This may include explicitly allowing artists as home businesses. Implement through the Erie County NYS General Municipal Law (GML) 239-m reviews and Erie County planning assistance.
8.7	Work with Chambers of Commerce to encourage micro-business friendly policies among municipalities and developers/commercial space owners.
8.8	Explore the options for cultural programming and events to take place at existing community spaces to reduce overhead needed only for ongoing storage and/or administrative spaces instead of each organization needing its own performance or programmatic space.
8.9	Research the feasibility of having artists in residence within government units and in project steering committees.
8.10	Encourage the inclusion of artists and cultural workers in municipal boards.
8.11	Implement a Feedback and Evaluation System: Develop a mechanism to gather feedback from artists, organizations, and facility users about their needs and experiences. Use

	this data to continuously improve the infrastructure and ensure it meets the community's evolving demands.

9. Increase Collaboration Between the Arts Ecosystem



Erie County has a thriving cultural scene, but a lack of coordination among organizations often results in overlapping events and missed opportunities for collaboration. This challenge is partly due to the absence of a centralized programming calendar that provides a clear, unified view of cultural activities across the county. Establishing a county-wide arts calendar – potentially managed by a Cultural Hub – would help streamline scheduling, reduce conflicts, and make it easier for residents and visitors to fully experience the region's cultural sector.

9.1	Develop a working group and/or system to minimize scheduling conflicts/overlaps that divide audiences with similar interests. This may also help to increase collaborations between compatible events. This can assist venue owners in renting out vacant locations, dates, or underutilized spaces (this may be creative businesses, non-profits, or public buildings), and event producers would have an overview of conflicting events.
9.2	Combine existing event calendars into one definitive resource: an easy-to-use, exhaustive calendar any resident or visitor to the county can access to explore current offerings. It should also allow for filtering by date, time, nearness, audience age, cost, and art/cultural category. Promote through social media, local media outlets, and community partners.
9.3	Establish a feedback and evaluation system where both arts organizations and attendees can provide input on the functionality of the calendar and suggest improvements.

Potential Partners:

GBCA, ASI, VBN, Step Out Buffalo, arts organizations, theaters and venue owners.

Priority Score: 87%

Example Success Metrics

- Increase the number of calendar users by analyzing website insights and metrics to identify user behavior and engagement patterns.
- Number of organizations listed in the directory.
- Increase in events listed on the calendar.
- Rate of conflicts identified by the system.
- Number of collaborative events initiated.
- Increase in public awareness of the calendar.
- Increase the response rate of participants in feedback surveys.

10. Advocate for Expanded Funding Criteria



Cultural organizations – especially smaller ones – have historically relied on programming-focused grants, leaving them with limited flexibility to cover essential operational costs. Feedback from the public engagement process highlighted the need to broaden funding criteria to support a wider range of expenses, ensuring the sustainability of these organizations. Additionally, there is an opportunity to expand eligibility beyond 501(c)(3) nonprofits to include art collectives, individual artists, and other creative entities that contribute to the region's cultural ecosystem.

10.1	Advocate for the inclusion of overhead costs (e.g., rent, salaries, utilities) in grants from public and private sectors.
10.2	Advocate for funding and support programs for individual artists, small collectives, and minority-led initiatives that may not have 501(c)(3) status from the business and philanthropic sectors.
10.3	Engage with Foundations and Grantmakers to create guidelines and metrics to evaluate the effectiveness and equity of their grantmaking processes. This can help funders understand how their criteria and practices affect different communities and organizations. Require, as the NYS Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) does, consistency with local and regional plans.
10.4	Educate groups and collectives on the benefits of fiscal sponsorship as a short-term option to access greater funding streams
10.5	Establish Evaluation Metrics and Feedback Mechanisms.

Priority Score: 82%

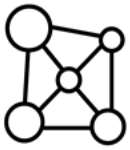
Example Success Metrics

- Percentage of grants covering overhead costs and/or targeting individual artists or minority groups.
- Number of partnerships formed with foundations, public agencies, and private donors.
- Increase the response rate of participants in feedback surveys.

Potential Partners:

GBCA, ASI, arts organizations

11. Launch a Creative Economy/Not-for-Profit Cohort Program



Many of the organizations engaged during the cultural planning process – particularly smaller groups – pointed to a lack of internal resources in areas such as accounting, finance, and other administrative services, adding to the already numerous tasks being taken on by limited staff. At present, many rely on external firms for the work, but this can be costly. Building up staff capacity through shared training and learning might provide an opportunity for efficiencies and for investment to expand its impact. Another alternative that was discussed by several organizations was developing a structure to share administrative resources between cultural organizations.

In addition, there's a desire for more opportunities to connect small organizations with larger entities for capacity building, knowledge sharing, collaboration and support through networking events and other types of gatherings.

11.1	Create Mentorship and Administrative Exchange: Develop a program that pairs organizations with larger staffs and consultants/contractors with smaller organizations to provide mentorship and administrative support.
11.2	Leverage Erie County and existing funding to incentivize participation in the program and support the collaborative efforts, for example extra points or funding for advancing the recommended action.
11.3	Expand and Support New Shared Resources Initiatives: Develop a system that links organizations with freelancers to reduce efforts in accounting, HR, IT, and other administrative functions. (Current examples include ASI's bookkeeping service).
11.4	Facilitate and connect to existing resources outside of the arts and cultural sectors (i.e., Small Business Development Center at Buffalo State University (SBDC), Service Corp of Retired Executives (SCORE), etc.). Promote the program to organizations through targeted marketing to ensure broad awareness and participation.

Priority Score: 82%

Example Success Metrics

- Track the number of mentorship pairings established each year.
- Percentage of participating organizations utilizing shared resources.
- Attendance numbers and participant feedback for each workshop.
- Increase the response rate of participants in feedback surveys.

Potential Partners:

GBCA, ASI, creative economy businesses

11.5	Organize Workshops where subject matter experts and larger organizations provide lectures and training to other organizations and creative entrepreneurs, offering opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange.
11.6	Encourage collaboration or working groups on common projects or topics, such as the DEI Support Group and similar initiatives, using successful models from cultural organizations.
11.7	Establish Evaluation Metrics and Feedback Mechanisms.

12. Explore New Funding Opportunities and Mechanisms



While Erie County's government funding for culture has grown over the past decade, overall investment in the cultural sector has recently declined at both public and private levels. To ensure long-term sustainability for the sector, there's a need to identify new funding opportunities and mechanisms that provide consistent support. This includes raising awareness of the sector's impact, advocating for innovative funding models, and securing additional resources from state and national sources beyond the County.

12.1	Research Best Practices and successful implementations of public funding programs in other regions to understand their frameworks, outcomes, and potential challenges. Present the proposed funding models to elected officials and decision makers, highlighting their positive impact on the arts sector and community at large.
12.2	Partner with policymakers to create legislation or policy frameworks that enable public financial support, ensuring these align with local legal and economic structures.
12.3	Advocate for recurring municipal support, particularly from the City of Buffalo.
12.4	Research and secure funding opportunities within the private sector.
12.5	Collate and make available resources and assistance for diversifying earned and donated revenue streams. Include learning and development opportunities for business coaching, management accounting, and creating a robust fundraising plan.
12.6	Public Awareness Campaign: Develop a comprehensive public outreach strategy to raise awareness about the benefits of new funding opportunities, focusing on their

Priority Score: 79%

Example Success Metrics

- Completion of a best practices report with recommendations.
- Percentage of elected officials expressing support for proposed funding models.
- Increase in municipal financial commitments.
- Number of cultural organizations receiving business coaching or training in fundraising and revenue diversification.
- Increase in the number of Erie County-based organizations and artists applying for state, federal, and private grants.

	role in strengthening the arts and cultural landscape and ancillary effects on civic priorities.
12.7	Increase support for organizations and artists in application processes for state and federal public funding, and national or international private funding.
12.8	Increase multidisciplinary applications (e.g. dance for health, art for economic development, etc.) to access new funding sources.
12.9	Establish Evaluation Metrics and Feedback Mechanisms.

Potential Partners:

Public (local, state, federal agencies) and private entities (foundations and other grantmaking organizations).

13. Encourage and Support Accessible Youth Arts Programming



Cultivating the next generation of artists, leaders, and audiences requires meaningful youth engagement in arts and culture. However, many young people face barriers to participation, including limited access, awareness, and relevant opportunities. To address this, Erie County can expand hands-on arts education, support after-school programs, and integrate the arts into areas like mental health and workforce development. Stronger partnerships with schools, universities, and community groups can improve access, while youth-focused marketing can help create more engagement opportunities.

13.1	Encourage the participation of youth in arts administration: Include young leaders to help design, produce, and implement programming, ensuring it remains youth-driven and relevant by including arts/culture non-profits in internship and community volunteering programs
13.2	Inventory the education and training programs currently available and offered in Erie County to identify gaps in availability, access, and type/artistic disciplines.
13.3	Explore the creation of a Cultural Passport: Investigate the feasibility of a cultural passport that allow students to visit cultural organizations with their families as part of their education, enhancing hands-on learning opportunities outside of school hours.
13.4	Support existing arts classes & group activities focused on hands-on creative experiences for teens and children after school.
13.5	Partner with health organizations to explore programs for Millennials, Gen Z, and Gen A that incorporates arts with a focus on mental health and well-being.

Priority Score: 78%

Example Success Metrics

- Increase in youth participation across all programs, with a target of 10% growth annually in enrollment or attendance.
- Retention rate of youth participants from year to year, aiming for 85% retention across programs.
- Increase in the number of arts organizations involved in youth programming by 10% annually.
- Number of events attended using discounted fare services.

13.6	Increase accessibility for cultural events by bringing art directly to youth through community-based festivals, pop-up art installations, or performances where youth gather (e.g. skateparks, malls, etc.) and through social media.
13.7	Foster collaboration between community organizations, school partners, and arts organizations that can host or deliver the programming, leveraging their spaces, expertise, and resources in support of the broader cultural plan.
13.8	Explore partnerships with local university/college art departments, focusing on student engagement through knowledge exchange via workshops, volunteering, and outreach.
13.9	Facilitate youth participation in events and programming: Provide family event passes or pricing, giveaways to encourage participation, and explore partnerships with local transportation services to reduce access barriers for youth participants. This could be accomplished with partnerships/sponsorships.
13.10	Seek funding (public and private) for youth-specific audiences from non-arts funders (e.g., workforce development, mental and physical health, economic development, etc.) to increase the interaction of art into public priorities and open additional funding resources.
13.11	Develop a youth-friendly marketing and advertising strategy that leverages social media, influencer partnerships, and community outreach. Focus on platforms and channels that resonate with younger audiences, such as Instagram, TikTok, and local youth networks.
13.12	Feedback & Evaluation Mechanisms: Develop systems to gather feedback from participants and stakeholders through surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

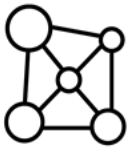
Example Success Metrics
(continued)

- Increased diversity of participants, measured by the number of underrepresented groups involved in youth programming.

Potential Partners:

BestSelf, Erie BOCES, school districts, arts organizations, artists, and more

14. Create and Promote Professional Development and Training Opportunities for Artists, Cultural Workers, and Arts Educators



Throughout the public engagement process, artists, cultural workers, arts educators, and creative business owners emphasized the need for more training opportunities focused on technical and operational skills. Partnering with existing organizations, businesses, and universities could help establish workshops and professional development programs, including mentorships, fellowships, and "Grow Your Own" initiatives to cultivate internal talent and address sector fragmentation.

14.1	Review existing, local and other, training programs for applicability for professional development and training for artists, cultural workers, and art educators.
14.2	Address Training Gaps: Coordinate with existing training and development programs to address artists' and cultural workers' needs, covering essential business skills, grant writing, and soft skills. Potential partners/programs include the Small Business Development Center at Buffalo State University, SCORE, the Women's Business Center at Canisius College, and WEDI Buffalo.
14.3	Develop a structured mentorship program connecting experienced artists with emerging talent and cultural workers. See ASI's Springboard Fellowship for an example
14.4	Partner with local universities to provide and offer access to additional resources and certifications.
14.5	Support and organize professional development workshops for arts educators and teaching artists that encourage networking and learning. This could include an annual conference or other type of convening event. See Erie BOCES' Arts in Education efforts.

Priority Score: 78%

Example Success Metrics

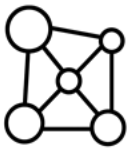
- Increase in participation in professional development programs.
- Completion rate of training programs.
- Number of fellowships created.
- Number of mentorship pairings established.
- Number of partnerships established.
- Participation rate in workshops.
- Engagement metrics for promotional campaign.
- Increase the response rate of participants in feedback surveys.

14.6	Work with small business incubators, chambers of commerce, and business centers to participate in and promulgate the efforts above to aid creative businesses.
14.7	Create a system for collecting feedback and evaluating the impact and success of these programs.

Potential Partners:

GBCA, ASI, Nonprofit Support Group (NSG), unions and trade associations, universities/colleges, Erie BOCES, Northland Training Center, and more

15. Designate an Existing Organization or Create a Cultural Hub Entity



The planning process underscored the need for a central entity – whether by expanding the mandate of an existing organization or, the less preferred alternative, establishing a new one – that can unify and advocate for the sector, strategically identify gaps, and coordinate efforts to strengthen and sustain the region's cultural ecosystem. This hub would be responsible for implementing the Cultural Plan, overseeing key initiatives, and strengthening collaboration across the arts, local government, and the business community. It would also support marketing efforts under the Creative County brand and host sector-wide forums to ensure ongoing engagement and impact.

15.1	Create an Implementation Committee made up of key stakeholders from the arts sector, local government, and the business community to provide guidance and advocacy for the hub. *(See Initiative 0)*
15.2	Develop the Administrative Backbone: Development of the Hub will require staff and space whether creating a new organization or elevating an existing organization as the Hub.
15.3	Take on Implementation of the Cultural Plan: The Cultural Hub shall become the responsible party for implementing the priorities and initiatives of the Cultural Plan and carry the work forward beyond the scope of the current Plan to provide sector support and advocacy.
15.4	Support the Creative County Brand Marketing Strategy: Under the Creative County brand, design a marketing strategy to raise awareness about the shared work ahead in the cultural plan and new tools. Launch campaigns across various media platforms (social media, print, radio, TV); Highlight the benefits of the new resources and tools to both residents and visitors; Establish Community-Based Signage and Promotional Opportunities.

Priority Score: 70%

Example Success Metrics

- Percentage of arts organizations engaged with the Cultural Hub within the first year.
- Number of advocacy initiatives by the Cultural Hub.
- Number of formal partnerships established with arts organizations and retention rate.
- Number of visitors to the website.
- Media coverage generated.
- Reach and engagement rates for marketing campaigns and percentage increase in awareness about the Hub's services.

15.5	Establish a Youth-Led Advisory Team: Form a team of young leaders who will help design, produce, and implement programming, ensuring it remains youth-driven and relevant.
15.6	Develop a coordinated visitor survey system to create a comparative data set, providing sector-wide insights, saving staff time, and facilitating shared learning across organizations. Provide the survey to organizations, in multiple languages and produce data insights and sector-wide comparative data.
15.7	Create a mechanism for evaluation to ensure the hub is accomplishing its intended purpose. This should include hosting sector-wide meetings or forums to gather feedback on how the hub can provide value to artists and organizations and ensure ongoing collaboration.

Potential Partners:

GBCA, ASI, Erie County, foundations, VBN, NSG, NYSCA, civic leaders, arts organizations, business sector, and more

16. Increase Collaboration Between the Arts Ecosystem and the School System



Strengthening the connection between Erie County's schools and the arts sector is essential for expanding access to arts education and fostering future generations of artists, creative professionals, and audiences. Partnerships with Erie BOCES and Buffalo Public Schools can help connect students with arts programs, streamline grant support, and align cultural experiences with curriculum goals. Cultural organizations consulted in the planning process highlighted the challenges of collaborating with the school system but emphasized that stronger partnerships with school administrations across the county could create meaningful opportunities to engage young people within an educational setting.

16.1	Support Arts for Learning and Erie BOCES Arts in Education programs, advertise to organizations, strengthen collaboration between arts organizations and artists and Erie BOCES, and prepare/assist schools to apply for grants and budget for first year costs.
16.2	Work with Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) to increase collaboration between arts organizations and the school district: Utilize the Erie BOCES Arts in Education program or develop an alternative. This may require a key point of contact between schools and arts organizations, ensuring clear communication and alignment with curriculum goals.
16.3	Reduce barriers for field trips to cultural sites: encourage cooperation between school districts and site-based cultural organizations, incorporate bussing costs in grant applications, and facilitate field trips to sites within walking distance of schools.
16.4	Advocate for Arts Education: Engage community and elected leaders to push for the restoration and enhancement of arts education, advocate for state funding, and secure subsidies for student field trips.

Priority Score: 67%

Example Success Metrics

- Increased student participation in arts programs as a percentage of total student population.
- Higher number of collaborations facilitated between arts organizations and schools (e.g., 10% increase annually).
- Growth in student arts field trips (e.g., a 20% increase).
- Increase attendance rate of participants in networking or training events (e.g., 10% increase annually).

16.5	Develop Shared Goals and Curriculum Integration: Facilitate collaboration between educators and arts organizations to design arts-integrated lesson plans that align with academic standards. This could include field trips or artists visits. Define clear, measurable goals for the partnership.
16.6	Organize a School-Arts Summit for Networking and Collaboration: Host an annual event where schools and arts administrators can meet, build relationships, and explore collaboration opportunities, strengthening the arts-education partnership.
16.7	Encourage arts and entertainment career fairs at schools to grow future artists and cultural workers. Include creative businesses such as the local film, architecture, and design studios, professional arts organizations, and non-profit arts/culture organizations. Ensure the Arts in STEAM are represented in other career fairs.
16.8	Create Feedback and Evaluation Mechanism: Implement a system for gathering feedback from all stakeholders (teachers, students, artists, arts organizations) to assess the program's success and adjust accordingly to improve future outcomes.

Example Success Metrics
(continued)

- Positive feedback from teachers on the ease of implementing integrated lesson plans (using surveys as a method).
- Increase the response rate of arts organizations and schools in feedback surveys.

Potential Partners:

School districts, Erie BOCES, arts organizations, Buffalo Public Schools (BPS), Arts for Learning WNY, Art Teachers Association (NYSATA) WNY Chapter, Museum Education Consortium of Buffalo, Erie County Music Educators Association, and more

17. Forge Partnerships with the For-Profit Sector



Strengthening partnerships between the business community and cultural organizations presents a valuable opportunity to enhance resources, expertise, and engagement in Erie County's arts sector. Businesses can play a key role by offering pro-bono services, skill-sharing workshops, and mentorship opportunities in areas such as marketing, grant writing, and financial management. Additionally, businesses can support the sector by offering unused office or event space, promoting employee volunteer programs, and participating in recognition initiatives that highlight their contributions.

17.1	Reach out to Businesses: Connect with potential business partners. Highlight the mutual benefits of collaboration and specific opportunities for engagement. This could include pro-bono service offerings; service exchange programs; matching services programs. Include detailed partnership agreements outlining roles, expectations, and contributions.
17.2	Define and develop business incentives to encourage participation. Consider recognition programs (public awards, features in media) or other financial benefits.
17.3	Create Workshops for Skill Sharing: Coordinate workshops where for-profit companies offer training to non-profits on key skills such as marketing, grant writing, financial management, and strategic planning.
17.4	Encourage business leaders to serve on non-profit boards to provide strategic guidance and foster ongoing collaboration, including encouraging the use of Board Strong for training and recruitment tools.
17.5	Negotiate Space and Facility Partnerships: Work with businesses to offer unused office space or facilities to non-profits at reduced rates or for free.

Priority Score: 61%

Example Success Metrics

- Number of partnerships formed, and types of services exchanged annually.
- Number of businesses contacted and their level of engagement through interest expressed in partnership opportunities.
- Response rate to outreach efforts and subsequent partnerships formed.
- Workshop attendance and participant satisfaction rates.
- Number of employees participating in volunteer programs and the hours contributed.

17.6	Promote Employee Volunteer Programs: Encourage companies to implement volunteer programs that allow employees to work on non-profit projects during work hours.
17.7	Establish a system to regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of partnerships. Collect feedback from both non-profits and businesses to assess impact and make necessary adjustments.

Potential Partners:

GBCA, FAB, ASI, for-profit sector

Example Success Metrics
(continued)

- Number of business leaders actively participating on advisory boards, serving on committees, and/or serving on boards.
- Total value of space provided and the number of non-profits benefiting from this arrangement.

18. Create Opportunities to Bring the Entire Community Together for the Arts



Expanding access to festivals and events across Erie County can provide local artists and artisans with greater visibility while strengthening community engagement with the arts. By collaborating with existing festivals, cultural organizations, and independent artists, these events can showcase the county's diverse creative offer and reach new audiences. Because Erie County spans a large geographic area with cultural entities spread throughout, identifying ways to connect organizations and making it easier for residents to enjoy and engage with different arts organizations is key and contributes to further positioning Erie County as a Creative County.

18.1	Collaborate with existing festivals and events and support them to increase access and participation of local artists and artisans, reach new audiences and showcase emerging local artists.
18.2	Invite Arts Organizations Across the County: Reach out to arts organizations, local artists, and cultural groups to participate in and showcase their work at the events that reflect the diversity of the Erie County community.
18.3	Create Partnerships for Transportation Access: Form alliances with local transportation services (e.g., buses, shuttles) to offer affordable or free transportation to and from the event, ensuring accessibility for residents from all parts of the county, including rural areas.
18.4	Assist in the existing or create a Marketing and Outreach Campaign: Develop a strategic marketing campaign using social media, local radio, flyers, and multilingual outreach to ensure the entire county knows about the event. Engage local influencers and community leaders to spread the word and invite participation.
18.5	Ensure Inclusivity in Event Programming: Ensure the event includes activities that appeal to different age groups,

Priority Score: 57%

Example Success Metrics

- Total number of attendees at community-wide arts events.
- Feedback on event format and activities collected post-event, aiming for specific target positive responses from attendees.
- Increase of arts organization participation.
- Number of attendees using transportation services, targeting a specific number of participants using discounted or free transportation.

	cultures, and abilities, including accessible performances and family-friendly spaces.
18.6	Implement an Evaluation System: Create a feedback and data collection system to assess the event's success. Use surveys and post-event discussions with participants to gather input on improvements. Collect demographic data to present to sponsors and to help plan for future events.

Potential Partners:

GBCA, Erie County, arts organizations, creative businesses, and more

Example Success Metrics
(continued)

- Increase the response rate of participants in feedback surveys.
- Engagement with marketing campaigns, measured by social media reach, radio listeners, and flyer distribution (e.g., social media impressions, number of radio listeners and flyers distributed).
- Percentage of programming designed for diverse cultural backgrounds.

Moving Forward: Next Steps

The Cultural Plan represents an achievable improvement for the arts and culture sector for both residents and visitors to Erie County. We now move from planning into implementation – the necessary work of engaging the people and resources needed to accomplish the initiatives in the Plan.

As the first step, the Steering Committee will convene an Implementation Committee. This committee will be made up of representatives from government, GBCA, VBN, philanthropy, business, and cultural organizations from around the county.

Their task will be to put into effect the initiatives contained in this Cultural Plan by:

- Developing the partnerships and collaborations needed for the initiatives
- Connecting with and/or developing and stewarding funds to facilitate the work necessary
- Monitoring and evaluating outcomes from the work, and ensuring continued advancement

This Cultural Plan is intended to provide a robust resource and rationale for the achievement of priorities which have been validated and affirmed through a comprehensive community engagement and input process.

While this plan was spearheaded by Erie County and GBCA, involving the City of Buffalo is also valuable in advancing the efforts outlined in this plan, as many cultural organizations and creative businesses in the county are concentrated in the Buffalo city limits.

It is important to note that the Steering Committee acknowledges that there are already organizations across the County that have been making progress on some of the initiatives and/or implementation steps outlined in the plan. In those cases, the goal of the Implementation Committee would be to either work with these organizations to expand their remit and resources, or to increase the visibility and access to their services.

Implementation work is expected to begin in 2025.

Erie County Cultural Plan

Appendices

August 14, 2025

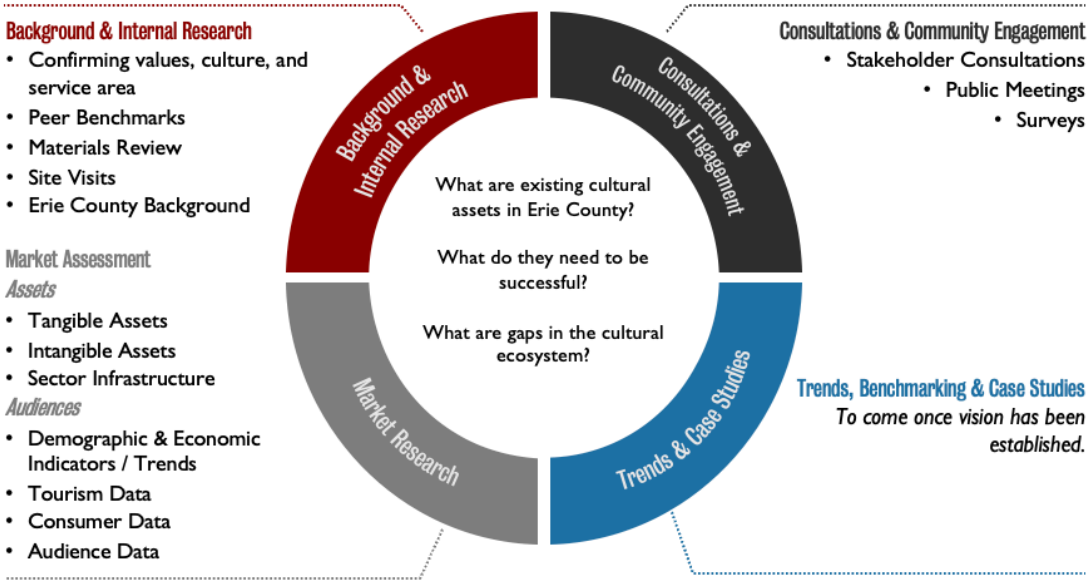
Appendix 1: Cultural Conditions Analysis

Shea's Performing Arts Center, Buffalo, NY

Appendix 1: Cultural Conditions Analysis

Methodology

Using the four sources of information in the image below, AEA assembled an initial series of inventories and evaluations that were confirmed and discussed with the Steering and Advisory Committees as part of a two-part Visioning Workshop. As part of the cultural conditions analysis, the consultant team looked at the types of arts and cultural activity being offered across the County and identified opportunities that could support the County's priorities.



Categorization of Cultural Assets

As part of the process of analyzing existing cultural assets across the County, the consultant team established five categories that served as the boundaries of "culture" for the plan. These included:

- Nonprofit Cultural Organizations
- Individual Artists & Makers
- Creative Economy
- Landmarks & Places (Built Environment)
- Media

Media and individual artists/makers have been folded into "Creative Economy" in the asset mapping and initial cultural inventory evaluation. Other assets or categories that emerged throughout the process that are more tangentially related to the cultural sector were considered as part of "support" for core cultural assets and the sector.

Market Assessment Methodology

This Market Assessment includes a variety of demographic, economic, consumer, and tourism indicators and trends as well as key assets, resources, policies, initiatives, and organizations that contribute to Erie County's cultural ecosystem.

To make information useful for developing the cultural plan, benchmarking was used for contextualization, with the following considerations:

- Cultural employment and consumption data compared to peer counties where possible.
- Because the Plan will ultimately focus on impacting the cultural sector, Erie County was compared to its peer counties in cultural participation and employment indicators. Demographic data was compared with New York state and the US overall for 2022.
- To compare Erie County to its peer group, some of its baseline numbers may differ from those in the inventory to retain consistency with peers.
- Consistent, county–level consumer spending and employment data was available for 2021, during which time some organizations were not operating at full capacity due to COVID-19.

See the chart below for areas of analysis and data sources used in the research.

Areas of Analysis	Data Source(s)
Demographic and economic indicators: current state & trends	US Census
Cultural Sector Employment	North American Industry Classification System
Cultural Consumption	▪ Consumer Expenditure Estimates ▪ MRI-Simmons Market Research Data
Tourism	▪ Visit Buffalo Niagara Reports ▪ Tourism reports from peer cities
Sectoral Impact	Previous reports (including Steering Committee-provided materials)
Programs & Services	▪ Previous reports (including Steering Committee-provided materials) ▪ Consultations
Erie County-owned Facilities	Erie County provided data
Resources	▪ Erie County cultural funding data ▪ Erie County policies

Peer Counties

Erie County was compared to 9 counties across the United States with similar population sizes, the closest being Milwaukee and Memphis. The different colored dots represent the sources that were used to identify peer counties that would have characteristsic most similar to Erie County's including their cultural vibrancy.

County (Notable City)	Lucas, OH (Toledo)	Providence, RI (Providence)	Shelby, TN (Memphis)	Milwaukee, WI (Milwaukee)	**Erie, NY (Buffalo)**	Monroe, NY (Rochester)	Allegheny, PA (Pittsburgh)	Cuyahoga, OH (Cleveland)	Philadelphia, PA (Philadelphia)	Wayne, MI (Detroit)
Population (County)	431,212	656,672	929,178	938,123	949,715	757,322	1,246,116	1,263,667	1,596,865	1,789,781
Source	●	●	●	● ● ●		● ●	● ● ●	●	● ● ●	●

● Chicago Federal Reserve Peer City Identification Tool ● *NYTimes* Twin Cities Index ● SMU Data Arts Top 40 Vibrant Communities ● Cultural Plans from S.C.

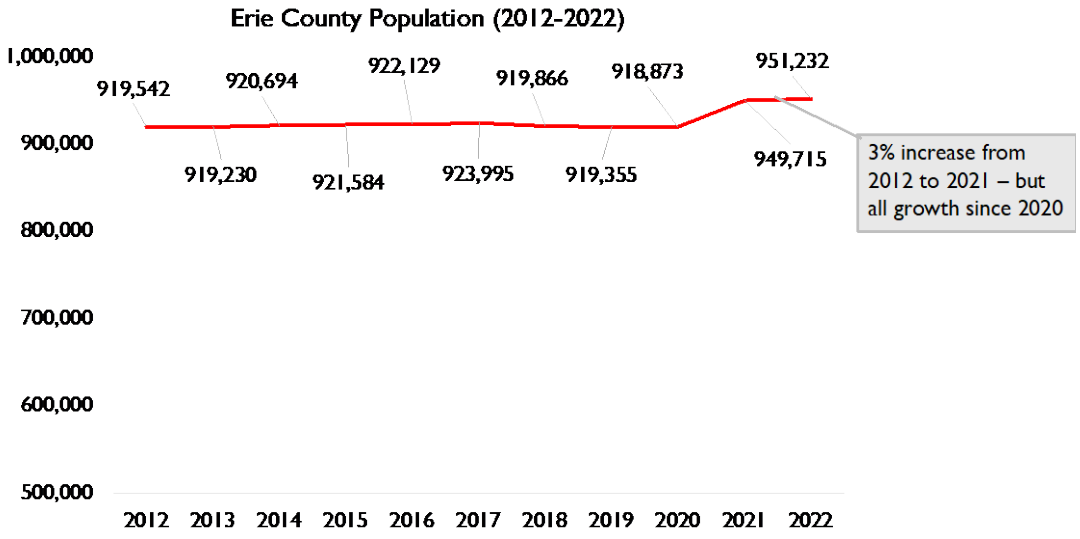
Demographic Indicators: Erie County in Summary[13]

Population

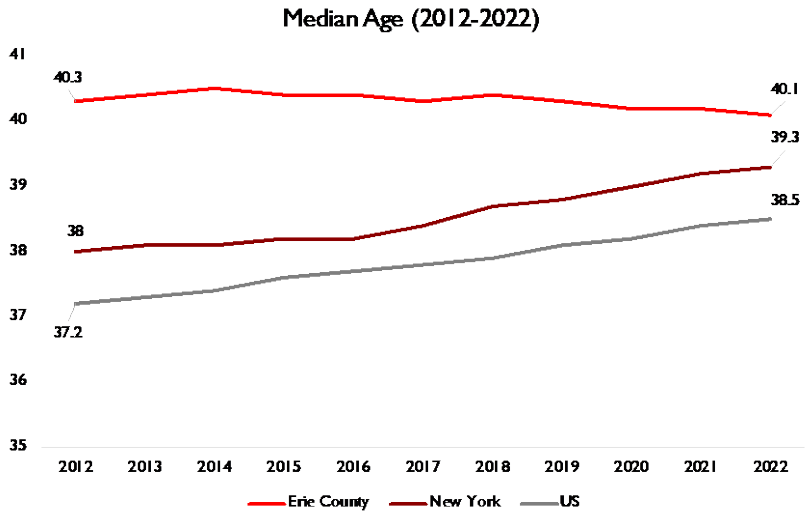
In 2022, Erie County's Population was 951,242, a 3% increase from 2012. After declining from 2017-2019, population increased from 2020 to 2021. Growth in Erie County's population can be attributed largely to an increase in immigration. Erie County's population grew at the same rate as New York state's and at a lower rate than the US overall (7%) in the same period.

[13] American Community Survey 2012-2022.

Over a longer-term trajectory, there have been more significant declines. The population of Erie County is down 15% since 1970, and the city of Buffalo has seen its population decrease by more than half since 1950.

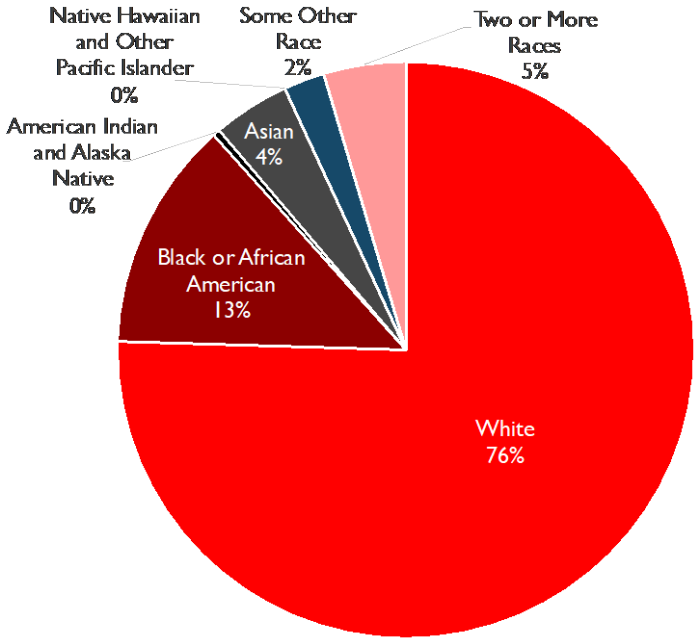


With a median age of 40.1 in 2022, Erie County's population is older than New York state (median of 39.3) and the US overall (median of 38. 5). However, while median age of New York state and the US has increased from 2012-2022, Erie County's decreased slightly in the same period.



Race & Ethnicity

Erie County's population is predominantly white (76%), followed by Black or African American (13%), Two or More Races (5%), and Asian (4%). Ethnically, 94% of the County identifies as Not Hispanic or Latino, and 6% identify as Hispanic or Latino (of any race).

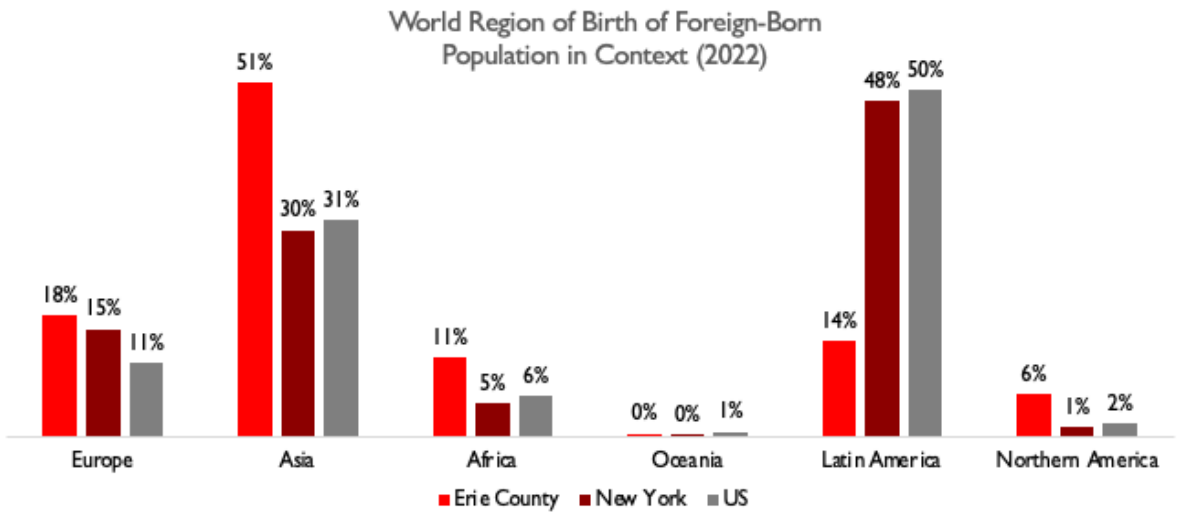


In comparison to the rest of New York State and the US overall, a slightly higher percentage of Erie County's population is white. The percentage of Erie County's population that is Hispanic/Latino (6%) is less than half of New York state's (20%) and the US overall (19%). While Erie County's population is somewhat less diverse than New York state or the U.S. as a whole, Buffalo itself has a major Black population, with more than 100,000 Black residents (37% of the city's population). These residents are largely centered in Buffalo's east side communities.

Immigration

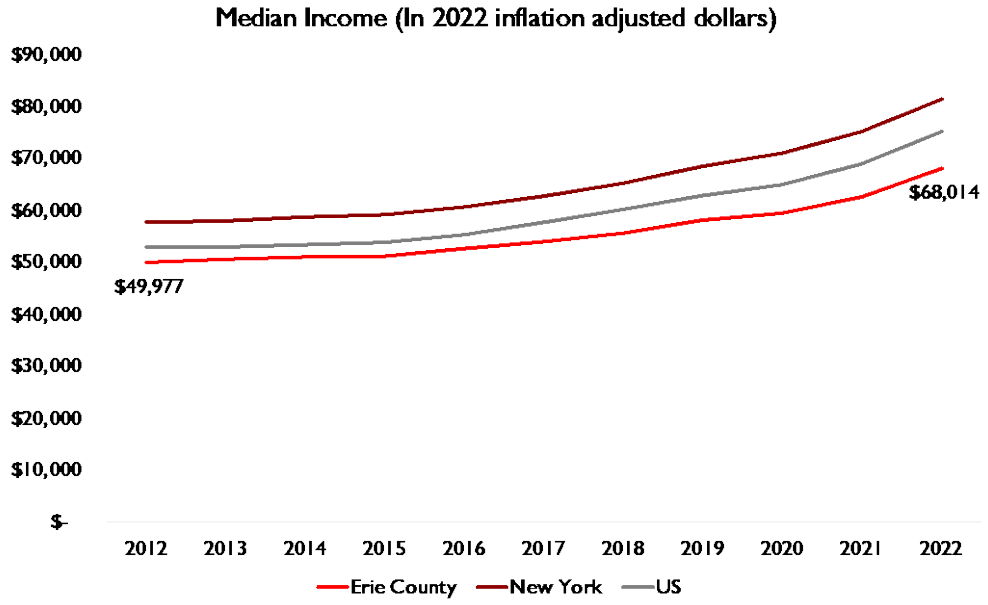
The percentage of Erie County's population that is foreign born is less than a third of New York state's and half of the US overall. However, the percentage of Erie County's foreign-born population that entered the US in 2010 or later is 15 percentage points higher than New York and 13 percentage points higher than the US overall. Recent immigrants are a crucial to consider when planning for the future of Erie County's cultural ecosystem.

Erie County's foreign-born population is distinct from New York state and the US overall in world regions of birth. Notably, the proportion of foreign-born residents who were born in Latin America is approximately a fourth of New York state and the US overall. A significantly higher proportion of Erie County's foreign-born population was born in Asia (51%) compared to New York state (30%) and the US overall (31%). And, the proportion of Erie County's foreign-born population that was born in Africa is double that of New York state and nearly double the US overall. These divergences from state and national trends suggest that Erie County's approach to planning for population shifts in its cultural ecosystem will need to take an approach sensitive to specific cultural contexts.

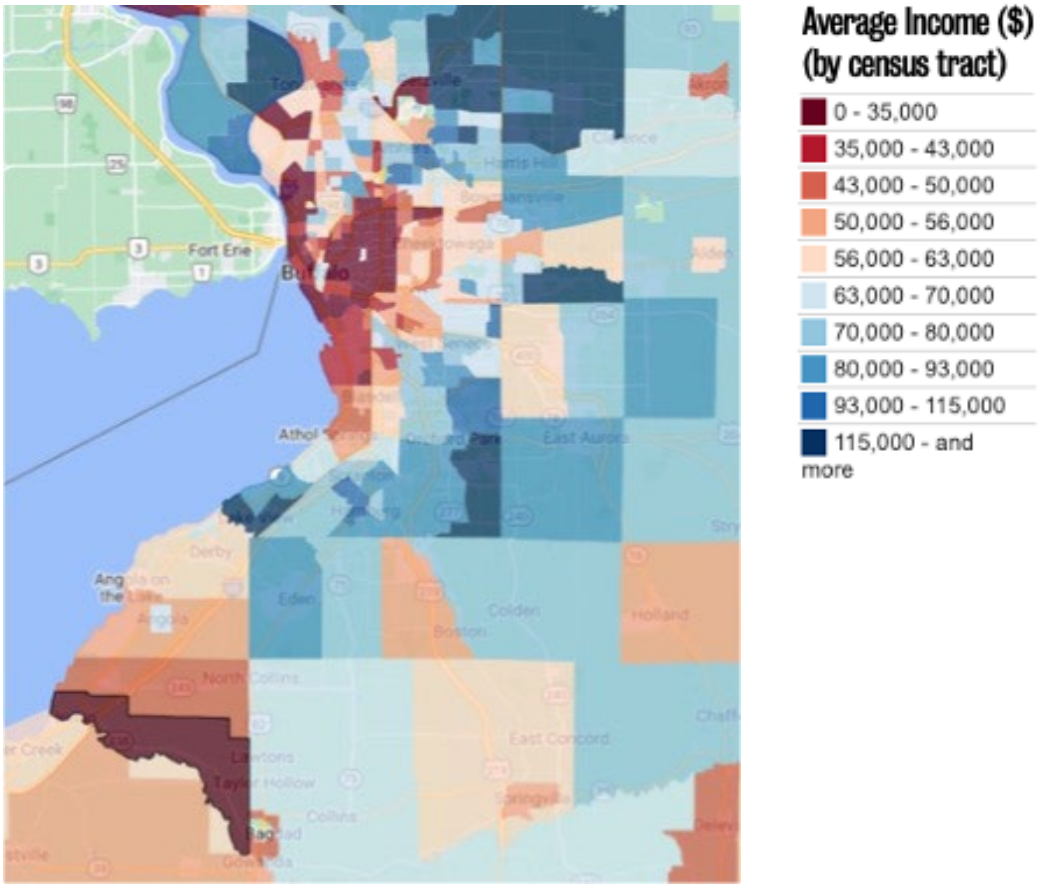


Household Income

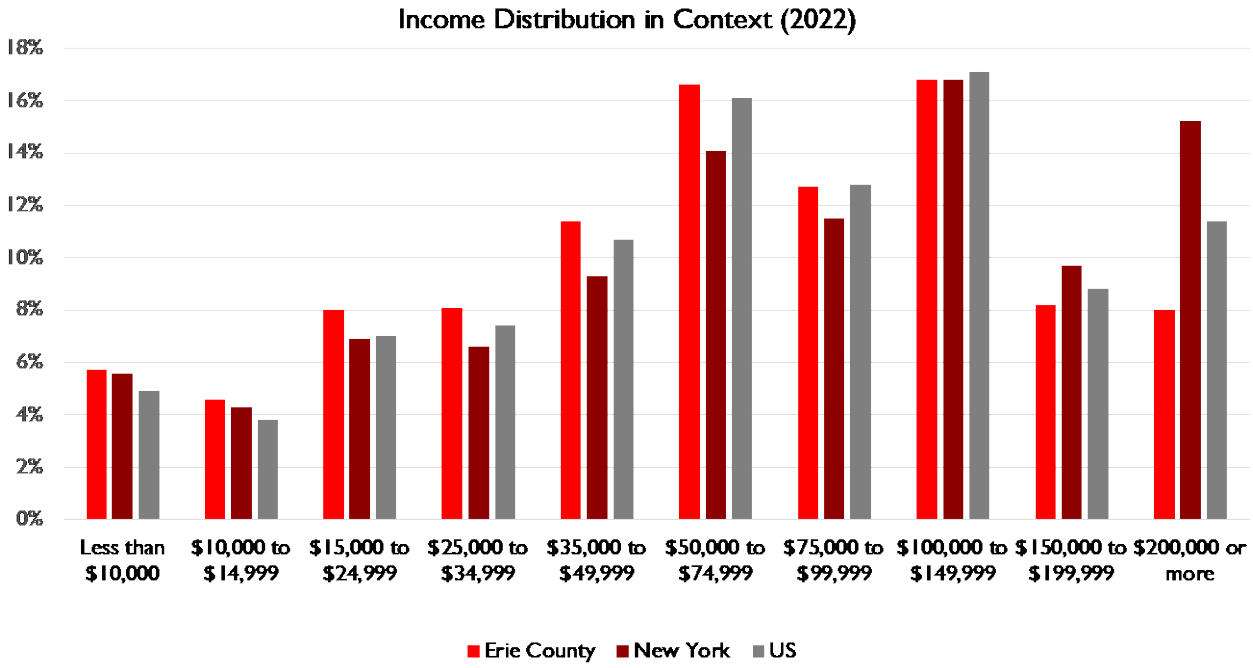
In 2022, Erie County's median income was $68,014, which was below New York state ($81,386) and the US overall ($75,149). Erie County's median income grew by 36% from 2012 to 2022, less than New York state (41%) and the US overall (42%) during the same time period.



Mapping Income by Census Tract

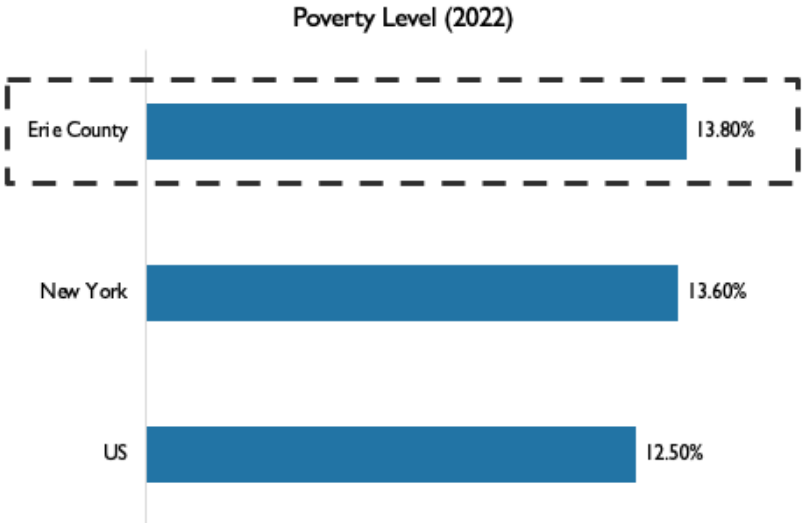


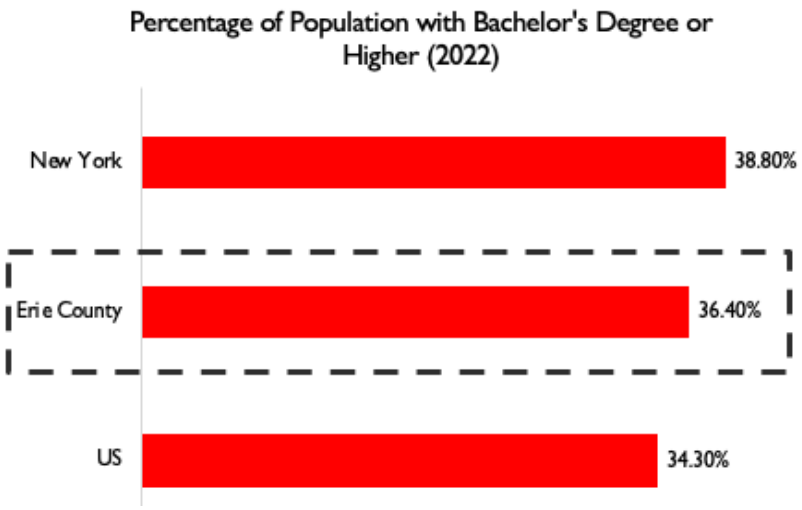
Erie County has higher percentages of residents in the $15,000 to $75,000 income bands than New York state and the US overall. A lower percentage of Erie County residents are in the $150,000+ income bands, with a significantly lower percentage of the population in the $200,000+ band (8%) than New York (15%) and the US overall (11%). This smaller pool of high-income residents suggests a potentially smaller major donor base for private arts and cultural funding.



Education & Poverty Levels

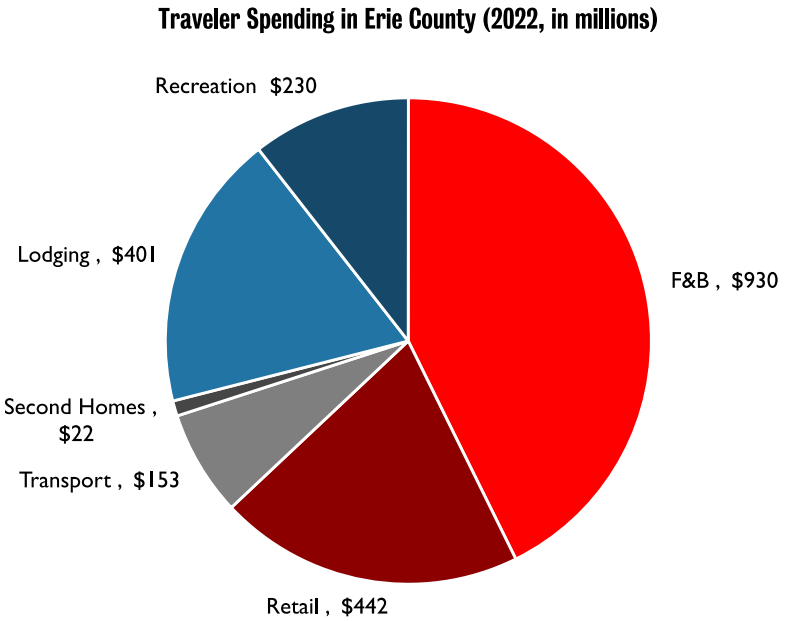
Erie County has a slightly lower percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher than New York, but slightly higher percentage than the US at large. Erie County has a slightly higher poverty level than both New York state and the US at large. As arts audiences have traditionally been more likely to have higher college degrees and to be more affluent, these statistics may suggest a slightly lower propensity for cultural participation in Erie County than in New York and the US overall.



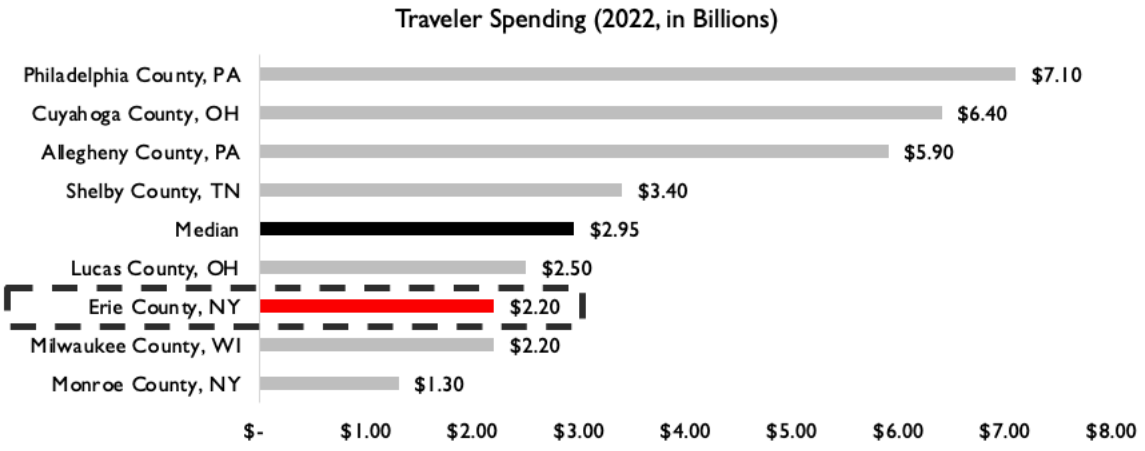


Tourism

- After dipping during the pandemic, in 2022, Traveler Spending in Erie County reached $2.2 billion, above 2019 ($1.8 billion)
- Spending in Erie County represented 64% of WNY tourism sales.
- Visits from Canada are still 25% lower than pre-pandemic, however the uptick in spending represents the growth of new markets.
- 11% of Traveler Spending is on Arts & Culture.



Erie County is at the low end of its peer group in traveler spending.[14]



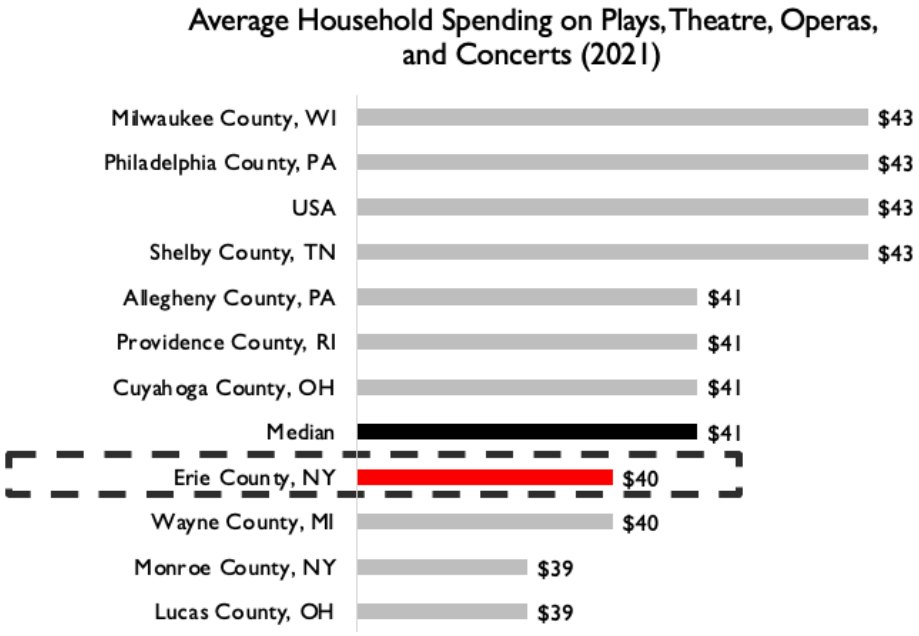
Cultural Participation

Nearly 8% of all Erie County households attended a music performance in 2021, while nearly 3% of households attended a dance performance.[15] Average household spending on plays, operas, theatre, and

[14] Visit Buffalo Niagara, Destination Toledo, https://www.toledo.com/news/2021/10/18/daily-dose/destination-toledo-recognized-for-marketing-excellence-with-state-tourism-awards/; TRIB Live, https://triblive.com/local/regional/pittsburgh-tourism-bounces-back-from-pandemic-freefall-new-report-shows/#:~:text=Data%20shows%20Pittsburgh%20welcomed%20an,to%2083%25%20of%202019%20numbers. Cleveland News, https://www.cleveland.com/travel/2023/10/cleveland-welcomed-nearly-18-million-visitors-in-2022-almost-back-to-pre-pandemic-levels.html#:~:text=Cuyahoga%20County%20welcomed%2017.9%20million,while%20they%20were%20in%20town.; Visit Milwaukee, https://www.visitmilwaukee.org/tourism-insights/#:~:text=According%20to%202022%20data%20from,metropolitan%20Chicago%20(16.5%25.); Visit Rochester, https://www.visitrochester.com/newsroom/press-releases/post/2022-tourism-spending-sets-a-record/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20visitor%20spending%20was%20up,the%20Finger%20Lakes%20region%20here; Visit Philadelphia, https://www.visitphilly.com/media-center/press-releases/philadelphias-tourism-industry-releases-2022-annual-reports/#:~:text=Visit%20Philadelphia%20Results%C2%B9%3A,up%2015%25%20from%202021); Memphis Travel, https://www.memphistravel.com/membership/tourism-economic-impact; Tourism Economics, https://esd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/Greater-Niagara-2022-NYS-Tourism-Economic-Impact.pdf

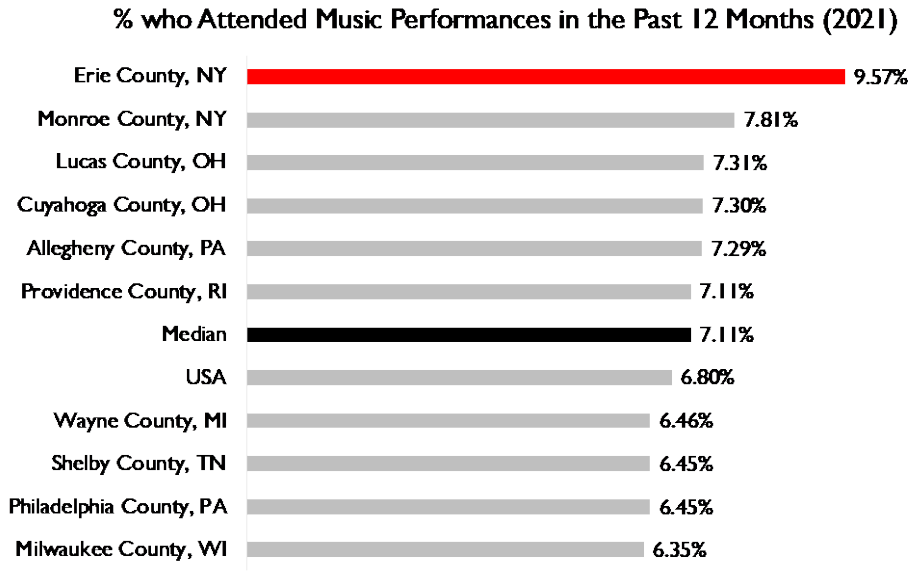
[15] Simply Analytics, MRI Simmons Local Market Data and Consumer Expenditure Estimates.

concerts was $40, more than spending on parks or museums ($28), but a third less than spending on sporting events (included for context for leisure spending overall).[16]



[16] Simply Analytics, Consumer Expenditure Estimates.

Notably, with 9.57% of its population having attended a music performance in 2021, Erie County leads its peer group and is above the median (7.11%). This suggests that live music is a key component of Erie County's cultural ecosystem. That Erie County leads in attendance but is lower in spending on performing arts (including concerts), suggests that Erie County's offering of free or low-price concerts is attractive to audiences.



Financial Resource Inventory

Erie County Facilities and Major Capital Investments

Below is a list of major capital investments that Erie County has provided funding for, both for publicly owned facilities and non-county facilities.

Publicly Owned Facilities & Major Capital Investments

- Kleinhan's Music Hall - City owned; $650,000 capital investment by Erie County
- Shea's Theatre - City owned; $750,000 capital investment by Erie County
- The Buffalo History Museum - City owned; $650,000 capital investment by Erie County
- Buffalo Museum of Science - City owned; $500,000 capital investment by Erie County in science facility and $1.1 million in Tift Nature Preserve
- Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens – County owned land and structure. Botanical Gardens is responsible for the interior maintenance and operation and minor capital improvements/ maintenance, grounds. County is providing capital funds for expansion.

Major investments in Non-County Facilities

- Buffalo AKG Art Museum - $5 million for expansion
- Roycroft Campus- approximately $1 million over several years
- Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historic Site - $150,000
- Darwin Martin House -$1 million plus over multiple years
- Buffalo Zoo - $2 million
- Explore & More Children's Museum - $150,000
- Hispanic Heritage Cultural Institute - $500,000
- Buffalo and Erie County Naval & Military Park - $1 million over multiple years

Select Non-Cultural County Facilities

- Highmark Stadium – County owns the stadium and stadium land until 2026.
- Buffalo Niagara Convention Center – County facility on County land. County pays for annual capital improvements, operation is funded through the County annual budget funding.

Erie County Funding Overview – Amount Awarded[17]

In 2023, Erie County's Adjusted Budget for Cultural Funding was $7,801,690. In the past decade, Erie County funding has increased by 40%. When adjusted for inflation, it has increased by 7%. * This does not include the one-time $5 million allocation to the Buffalo AKG Museum.

Erie County Funding Overview – Process[18]

The Erie County Cultural Funding Program adheres to the following process for distributing funding:

1. The DEP and EACAB announce the funding cycle in the beginning of the calendar year. Grants are made for the following year, usually in February.
2. County hosts applicant briefings.
3. Organizations submit applications (usually in April); DEP staff ensures they are complete.
4. DEP and EACAB distribute applications to reviewers.
5. Reviewers meet as subcommittees to discuss and assess applications; they offer feedback to all applicants, which are sent after funding recommendations are made.
6. DEP collates all reviews and assigns percentage of funding increase based on review results. Increases are based on the County's maximum total increase percentage for all grants as a whole (provided by County Budget Office).
7. Recommendations are added to the Department's budget request, which is sent to the County Executive and Budget Offices.
8. County Executive reviews recommendations and ensures that they align with expected available funds. County Executive's "Proposed Budget" is published in October.
9. Legislature reviews Proposed Budget; holds Budget Hearings, and revises budget in November. Changed budget is approved and becomes Adopted Budget.

Erie County Cultural Funding: Eligibility & Funding Levels

- Nonprofit 501(c)3 organizations that are located and providing services in Erie County that can provide 1 year of tax filing documents are eligible to apply.
- Erie County states that organizations must fulfill one of the following in their mission:

[17] Erie County Budgets, 2013-2024. All budget figures are Erie County reported Actuals, except for 2023, which is Erie County's Adjusted Budget for Cultural Funding, published in 2024. Allocations do not include Capital Awards.

[18] Erie County, "Funding Overview," https://www3.erie.gov/cultural/funding-overview#Eligibility.

- *An organization that operates on a countywide or recognizable community level, which by the nature of its cultural activities and/or collections, is unique, distinctive and of significant quality*
- *An organization that provides visitors with access to programs and displays of the performing, visual, literary and media arts, and/or to exhibits and collections, which preserve and interpret our cultural, natural and scientific heritage*
- *An organization that particularly serves the cultural needs of significant segments of the County population, thereby contributing to the quality of life in Buffalo and Erie County.*

With the caveat that: *Organizations such as social and/or multi-service, educational, athletic, after-school, or religious organizations for which cultural activity is not a primary purpose are not eligible.*

- Applicants apply in 1 of 3 tiers, which are determined by budget size. Non-profits can submit 1 application and may request no more than 20% of their previous fiscal year's operating expenses.
    - Level 1 applications may request up to $50,000;
    - Level 2 applications may request more than $50,000 and up to $200,000;
    - Level 3 applications are for requests of over $200,000.

Major Funding Sources and Partnerships to Support Culture (Public)[19]

Sales Tax

Erie County's cultural budget is funded by the general County budget, the primary source of which is sales tax. In 2022, Erie County projected $987M in sales tax. It will retain $545M and share $441M with cities, towns, villages, school districts and Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority.

Hotel Occupancy Tax (tourism)

Erie County has a 3% Hotel Occupancy Tax ("bed tax"). Total revenue for 2024 is expected to be $11.4 million. It allocates ~$3M of the tax to Visit Buffalo Niagara (VBN) annually. As of December 2023, short term renters of vacation homes are also required to pay the tax. While the tax is not dedicated to Erie County's Cultural Funding Program, VBN bolsters the efforts of many cultural organizations.

Percent for Art

[19] Erie County, https://www2.erie.gov/comptroller/index.php?q=press/comptroller-mychajliw-crippled-economy-leads-drastic-drop-hotel-occupancy-tax-revenue; 2023 Budget, https://www3.erie.gov/budget/sites/www3.erie.gov.budget/files/2022-09/budgetmessage2023.pdf; PPG Buffalo, https://ppgbuffalo.org/news-and-events/news/article:08-30-2023-12-00am/., ASI Inc., https://www.asiwny.org/creative-impact-fund/.

In July 2023, the Public Art Act of Erie County was signed into law, which will allocate 1% of building costs of Erie County capital projects to acquire and maintain public art at the site (up to $10,000). The fund will be used to implement projects in the Master Public Art Plan and/or those selected by the Arts in Public Places Committee.

New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA)

NYSCA provides significant funding to arts organizations and artists in Erie County (and throughout NY state). In 2024, NYSCA made 95 grants in all program categories for Erie County, totaling $3,844,500. Arts Services Inc. is its regranting agency for Erie County & western NY. In 2023 and 2024 funding through ASI for individual artists and community regrants totaled roughly $1.2M per year, which included new $1M allocation secured through statewide advocacy to support artists (a Senate Initiative Grant).

Municipal Funding

Municipalities in Erie County also fund cultural activities, notably arts engagement activities in libraries and free concerts in parks.

City of Buffalo

While the City of Buffalo committed $400,000 to arts and anti-violence organizations in its 2023-2024 budget, for several years, the distribution of funding has stalled. The City's lack of meaningful participation in the cultural sector is notable and a challenge for Erie County's larger cultural ecosystem.

Federal Funding

Arts organizations in Erie County are also eligible for federal funding, including from the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities, among other sources.

Private Arts Funders in Erie County

Private funders play a role in resourcing the sector. In some cases, investments can shape directions of the sector and help to seed new initiatives. Key developments in the Erie County's philanthropic community include some shifts to concentrate funding in racial equity initiatives and commitments to

Funder	Total Grantmaking (2022)
M&T Charitable Foundation	$41.2M
Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (includes the Wilson Foundation)	$41.0M
John R. Oishei Foundation	$12.0M
Cullen Foundation	$9.2M
Tower Family Fund	$6.6M
Wendt Foundation	$4.8M
Cameron & Jane Baird Foundation	$2.7M
James H. Cummings Foundation	$2.2M
Rich Family Foundation	$2.0M
Western New York Foundation	$1.7M

ongoing, significant unrestricted annual funding[20].

Notable Sector-Wide Programs, Services, Organizations, and Initiatives in Erie County

Consultations showed a need for a "hub" organization to provide centralized resources, advocacy, promotion, and collaboration opportunities across Erie County's cultural sector. Several organizations already exist that do aspects of this work.

Fund for the Arts (FFA)

Fund for the Arts is a funders' cooperative administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. Established by the 2005 "Sustaining Arts and Culture in Buffalo Niagara" Plan. Has distributed $2.6 million in funding and has supported sector-wide initiatives including Arts Services Inc. and Arts Partners for Learning WNY.

Arts Services Inc. (ASI)

ASI serves as a regional arts council that makes grants, provides professional development resources artists and organizations, administers an Arts Access program, and is an advocate for the arts. ASI was founded following the 2010 Western New York Arts and Cultural Support Initiative Report for New York State Council on the Arts and the Fund for the Arts.

Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance (GBCA)

GBCA began as an informal meeting of WNY cultural organizations. In 2009 it became an official cultural alliance that advocates for a strong sector. It secured funding for the Cultural Plan.

Frontline Arts

Frontline Arts is a coalition of arts organizations, community members, and artists that formed in 2018 to advocate for sustainable funding for organizations that have been historically marginalized. Key partners are the African American Cultural Center, El Museo, Locust Street Art, and Ujima Company.

CYOA ("Choose Your Own Adventure")

CYOA Buffalo is a free, volunteer-run weekly newsletter with cultural event listings.

Partnership for the Public Good (PPG)

[20] Foundation 990s, accessed through CauseIQ 990 Database

While not strictly a cultural organization, PPG is a policy, research, and advocacy organization that includes arts and culture in its issues, with a particular focus on Buffalo and Erie County.

Visit Buffalo Niagara (VBN)

Visit Buffalo Niagara is the region's tourism agency. It promotes arts and cultural organizations and events.

Appendix 2: Takeaways from Public Engagement



Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, NY

Appendix 2: Key Takeaways from Public Engagement

Public engagement for the cultural planning process included site visits, focus groups, tabled events, and public sessions. A survey was also conducted and highlights can be found on Appendix 3. The list of organizations, individuals, and entities engaged or involved in the public engagement efforts can be found below in addition to key takeaways from the process.

Site Visits List

- Asbury Hall (Babeville)
- Buffalo & Erie County Central Library
- Buffalo AKG Art Museum
- Buffalo Architecture Center at the Richardson Olmsted Campus
- Burchfield Penney Art Center
- FLW's Darwin Martin House
- FLW's Graycliff
- Hispanic Heritage Council of WNY
- Irish Classical Theatre Company
- Just Buffalo Literary Center
- Kleinhans Music Hall
- Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor
- Road Less Traveled Productions
- Roycroft Campus
- Shea's Buffalo Theatre & Shea's 710
- Stained Glass Association of America
- Trinity Episcopal Church
- Tri-Main Center (Arts Services Inc., Buffalo Arts Studio, Neglia Ballet, Western New York Foundation, Journey's End Refugee Services, artists Monica Angle, Alexa & Edreys Wajed)
- Visit Buffalo Niagara

AEA / JPCS team attendees: Annie Bares, Catalina Casas, Jacques Garcia, Joe Lin-Hill, and Daniel Payne

Key Takeaways from Focus Groups

Artists

Key Takeaways

- More opportunities to get young people to see artists working.
- More education programs that teach the soft skills and survival tactics such as having money and paying taxes and feeling comfortable in different spaces (artist-specific capacity building).
- Examples such as Yo Buffalo program should be modeled from in terms of soft skills.
- Deeper engagement with arts and culture in school systems and small programs that students can apply for regarding arts and culture.
- Create spaces for emerging artists of different media to explore and learn.
- More recognition from various organizations on artist life and full valuation of skill sets and contributions.

Challenges

- Grant requirements that force artists to compete with grant-writing teams at larger organizations.
- Hole in education where there is a lack of artist engagement at an early age for students.
- Underpayment for work from larger organizations.

Arts Education

Key Takeaways

- Importance of creating buy-in from the community on what this sector does.
- Art educators should reframe and shift how they talk about what they do.
- Lack of investment in young people which results in a lack of investment into larger organizations with few quality workers and less audience.
- Need more buy in from school administrators across the county.
- Plan should include impact stories.

Challenges

- Art educators are filling in for what schools should be doing.
- Art education keeps getting cut from budget.
- Perception that large organizations are offering the same thing smaller organizations are doing.
- Underpayment and working multiple jobs.
- Issue understanding the value of arts.

Creative Economy

Key takeaways

- Collaboration should be focus on performing arts and across different disciplines.
- Tax incentive for "for-profit" cultural entities.
- For-profit cultural institutions are contributing to culture and arts in the community.
- We need a focus on residents and effectively recognizing the improvement in quality of
- life for residents.

Challenges

- Need to avoid duplication efforts for publications addressing the arts to get the same information.
- Protect venues in the region from taking over cultural activities. We need to make sure that economic impact is circulating within the communities that is supporting them.
- We need to nurture the up and coming.
- Large scale planning in our geography is an asset and there needs to be a cohesiveness so planning resources are not stretched thin.

Educational Institutions

Key Takeaways

- Safety, emotional stability, increasing student achievement are top priorities for participants.
- Establishing artist-in-residence programs with our school where artists work with students over an extended period to allow for deeper engagement and learning is needed.
- A combination of in-school and off-site programing is preferred for arts and culture programs.
- Partnering with arts and culture organizations has been overwhelmingly favorable to school participants.
- Increase the number of outside programs that schools can participate in for Arts and Culture.

Challenges

- There is a gap in partnerships with local theaters, galleries, museums, dance companies, and music schools.
- Majority of participants work with arts and culture organizations in their schools but there is a lack of formal process for majority of the participants.

Frontline Arts Organizations

Key takeaways

- Funding shows an investment in small organizations, which would be equitable and reparative.
- In the past, we have applied to the same grants as big organizations–who then get it–and then we are asked to help them (for free first). Large organizations need to compensate us when we are asked to help them; they're duplicating what we do and doing it poorly, and then they're coming to us for help.

- We continue to have conversations, but we don't have ownership–if you're really listening, you will tap into it.
- There needs be a bigger effort to talk to even smaller organizations than us. Their needs might be untapped. Leaders and team working on this plan need to go knock on doors and personally engage with the smaller organizations to hear what their needs are.

Challenges

- There is not enough money to properly execute programs or pay for those doing the work.
- "Larger organizations are consuming more of the pie"…how can the needs of smaller organizations be prioritized over their needs?
- Funders want to donate towards what they want to see happen vs. what the community/arts organization actually needs.
- It is difficult to hire and sustain staff.
- There is a need for higher education staff, but people are not compensated enough to pay off loans – thus the younger generation does not see the value in getting the education to do this type of work.
- There is often no health insurance or benefits.
- Many of the large organizations that continue to get funding are not actually addressing community needs or servicing all communities.
- There is a constant need to justify the value of the work and explain why these key organizations exist.

Funders

Key takeaways

- There are so many organizations already that it would be better if the Cultural Hub were not a new organization that needed a whole new governance structure; it would be more appealing if the things within the Hub could be absorbed by other entities like ASI or NSG.
- It would be helpful to look at what the gaps are in services that already exist and see what is worth funding more of.
- Some foundations have already tried funding capacity building initiatives and trainings, but arts organizations either do not attend or prefer to go for the artistic funding. A lot of money has been spent on this front and it has not been as successful.
- While there are too many organizations, it becomes quite challenging to determine who should or should not exist. Who decides that? There clearly isn't enough money for all of the organizations though, so what are the core elements that we're looking at to evaluate whether an organization should receive funding or not?

- It is all about the narrative change, and working with artists and educators could be beneficial in building awareness.
- The lack of resources reinforces siloes, so more funding could help with alignment.
- Whatever is being built needs to be self-sustaining; maybe the funding can be moved under a not-for-profit like ASI.
- The narrative around the value of the arts and how the benefits the community is important; language matters and so do actions.

Large Cultural Organizations

Key takeaways

- There is a need for a cultural hub that is an overarching entity.
- Funding should be remade so that it matches the different value propositions that different kinds of organization provide to the community.
- 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, 990's.

Challenges

- County, City, state all need to fund their part (e.g. Bed tax recommendation).
- Recognition of operating cost.

Media and Regional Economy Focus Group

Opportunities

- Dollars should be committed to marketing.
- More communication about What's going on in the region in the form of a marketing plan.
- A focus on younger audiences, 40 and under.
- Greater investment into visitor readiness across hospitality industry.
- Internal campaign for residents, such as Visit Buffalo Niagara's campaigns for tourists. For example, a Live Buffalo Niagara for residents.
- Erie County staff dedicated to cultural plan.
- There is a need for a convening body.
- Dedicated funding source, like tax schemes, for cultural organizations.

Challenges

- There is a lack of marketing for the sector.
- Funding, collaboration and leadership.
- New York State ESD funding application and timing to fulfill requirements are not applicant friendly.
- Funding situation politics need revision.

Small Cultural Organizations

Key Takeaways

- What an organization offers and its context should be included in funding criteria; with resources other than money also offered to help.
- Should be streamline funding applications.
- There should be addressing the lack of awareness and communication.
- Young people should be targeted for participation in the cultural ecosystem.
- There should be an Office of Cultural Affairs in Buffalo.

Challenges

- People are working multiple jobs at small cultural organizations, and that is due to a general lack of resources
- There is a disconnect in the perception of value between general consumers and the funding community
- The region needs to be a good place for artists to make a career, with media interest, or else they will leave the area
- The cultural plan implementation would require substantial staffing

List of Locations with Cultural Plan Engagement Materials

Poster Board/tabletop poster Locations:

7/14/24 – Taste of Buffalo

7/21/24 – Skyride

7/24/24 –

- BPO at North Park Community School #50
- Taste of Orchard Park
- Board of Block Clubs Event

7/26/24 – Disability Pride Celebration

7/26-27/24 –

- Buffalo Irish Festival
- Garden Walk Buffalo

7/28/24 – Explore and More Touch A Truck

7/28/24 – Pappy Martin Jazz Festival

8/2-8/7 – AKG First Friday

8/2-8/5 – Eden Corn Festival

8/11/24 – Asian Food & Culture Festival

8/24/24 – Steel Plant Museum outdoor event

8/25/24 – Elmwood Village ArtFest

8/31/24 – Wing Fest

Tabled Events

7/10/24 – Gentners Market Springville (informal)

7/13/24 – Taste of Buffalo

8/7/24 – Bisons game Senior Day event

8/15/24 – Erie County Fair

8/21/24 – DEI Support Group meeting

General Flier Locations

Buffalo and Erie County Public Libraries

Slow Roll Buffalo

Seneca Nation Library

UB departments on both North and South campuses

- UB GPSA

ECC South

Shakespeare in Delaware Park – Traveling play

Delavan Grider Community Center

Village of Hamburg Community Center

Orchard Park Community Activity Center

Erie County Senior Centers

Buffalo Convention Center

Kenmore Farmers Market

Hamburg Farmers Market

Double Decker Bus Tours

The Friends of the Lake Erie Seaway Trail Center

Amherst Arts and Culture in Public Places Board (ACPPB)

Commercial/pedestrian centers:

- Villages
  - Hamburg
  - Kenmore
  - East Aurora
  - Williamsville
  - Springville
- Streets
  - Hertel Ave
  - Elmwood Ave
  - Niagara Street
  - Allen Street
  - Main Street
  - Chippewa Ave

Appendix 3: Highlights from Survey



Michigan Street: African American Heritage Corridor, Buffalo, NY

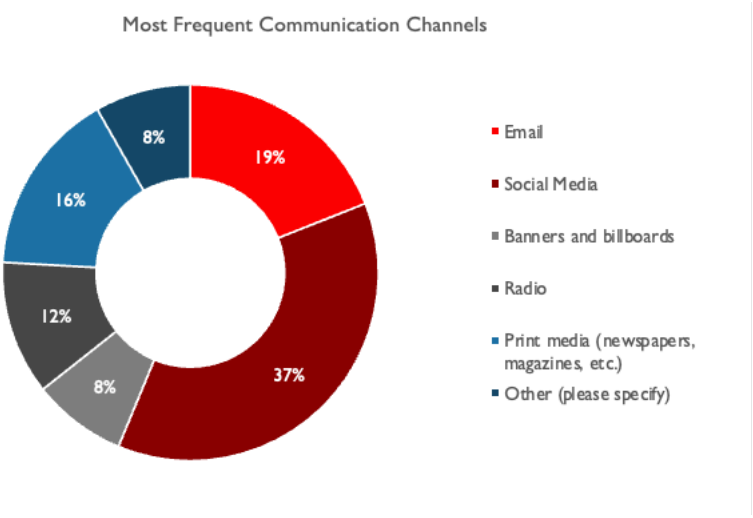
Appendix 3: Highlights from Survey Results

Below are key highlights from the survey categorized by General Survey, Cultural Workers, Creative Businesses, and Artists. More details on survey results can be found in the Public Engagement Report.

General Survey

How do you most often hear about Erie County arts and cultural events?

People most often hear about Erie County arts and cultural events through social media (37%), followed by email (19%), print media (16%), and radio (12%). This highlights the growing relevance of digital channels, which account for 56% of the responses. However, traditional media remains significant, with print media, radio, banners, and billboards collectively representing 36% of the results.

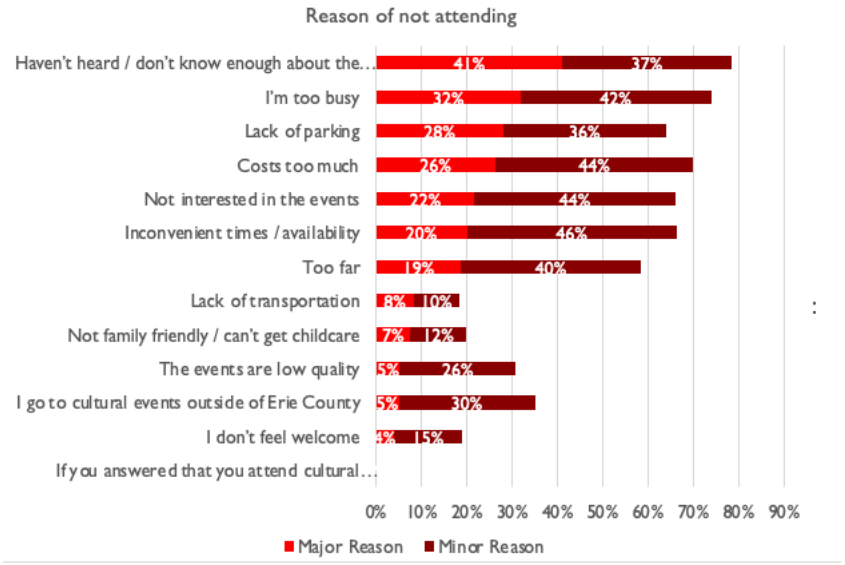


Other includes word of mouth, TV, subscriptions.

Please indicate whether each of the following is a major reason, minor reason, or not at all a reason you have decided NOT to attend an arts and culture event in Erie County in the past.

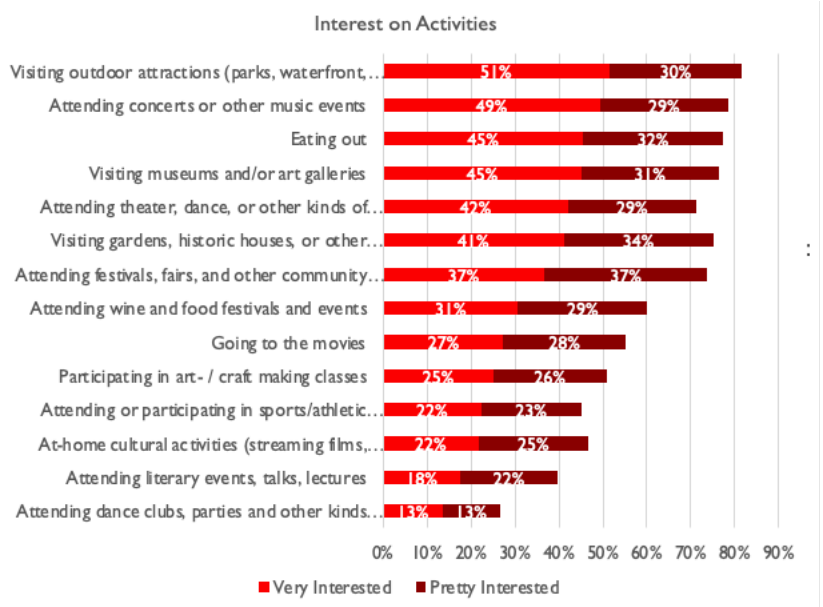
This graph functions as a thermometer: the redder the graph, the more relevant the response. When considering reasons for not attending cultural events, 'haven't heard about them' emerges as the most

predominant reason. While not major reasons, 'I'm too busy,' 'lack of parking,' and 'costs too much, are other main reasons why people may not be attending arts and culture events in the County.



How interested are you in the following activities when you are in Erie County or the surrounding area?

This graph also functions as a thermometer: the redder the response, the more interest people have in specific activities. The top three activities are visiting outdoor attractions (such as parks and the waterfront), attending concerts or music events, and dining out. In terms of arts and culture, the top three interests are music, museums/galleries, and performing arts.



Are there any arts and cultural events that you would like to see in Erie County?

This graph illustrates the types of arts and cultural events that respondents would like to see in Erie County. The size of each box represents the level of interest, based on how frequently respondents mentioned them. For example, music festivals and concerts show the highest interest, followed by multicultural festivals and family-friendly events. On the other hand, less frequently mentioned – but still desired – are themes like art and technology, outdoor activities combined with art, and more affordable events.



Do you have any suggestions as to how current arts and cultural events in Erie County can be improved?

Connections for Youth

- Funding for arts programs in schools, and arts organizations and schools.
- More, young musical/vocal groups.
- Promote arts classes and group activities.
- Work with K-12 public schools.
- Advertisement for free or low-cost kids' arts programming.
- More events for tweens/teens.

Communications Support

- Historical context and narratives in arts promotion.
- One central resource for all cultural events, easy to navigate with a comprehensive event guide(e.g., weekly email and printed).
- Better advertising and widespread information about events.
- Improved communication about events, online calendars and updated listings.

- Better media coverage and more effective social media outreach and newsletters.

Creative County

- Increase accessibility, including for disabled and immunocompromised individuals.
- Increase public transportation options and parking solutions.
- Expand events into rural communities and various neighborhoods.
- Integrate arts into community spaces like parks, zoos, community spaces and waterfronts.
- Market arts as the county's greatest asset.
- More public art works that are identifiable to the area historically. Kaiser Town, Lovejoy, East Side, Fruit Belt.

Arts Grants and Support Systems

- Increased County funding for arts and cultural initiatives.
- Financial support for cultural institutions and smaller not-for-profit organizations.
- Funding for queer artists and DIY music scenes.
- Support for diverse and emerging talents in the arts.
- Financial support for cultural institutions.

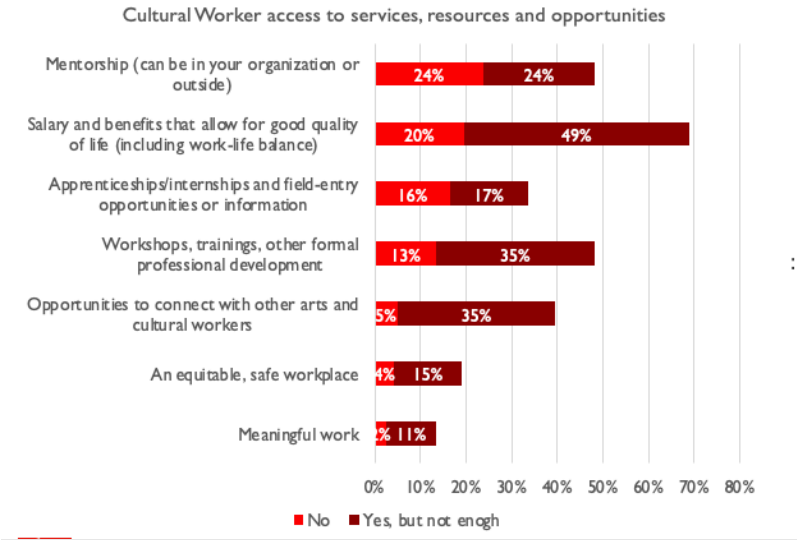
Cultural Hub

- Develop a specific indoor arts center.
- Develop and maintain dedicated resources for arts coordination and support. Including the creation of an effective arts task force.
- Expand regional coordination to minimize competition and enhance collaborative efforts.
- Increased event availability and affordability, and access to various demographics
- More afternoon events and options for all ages.
- Promote local and international cultural exchanges (exhibitions, performances, and festivals)

Cultural Worker Survey

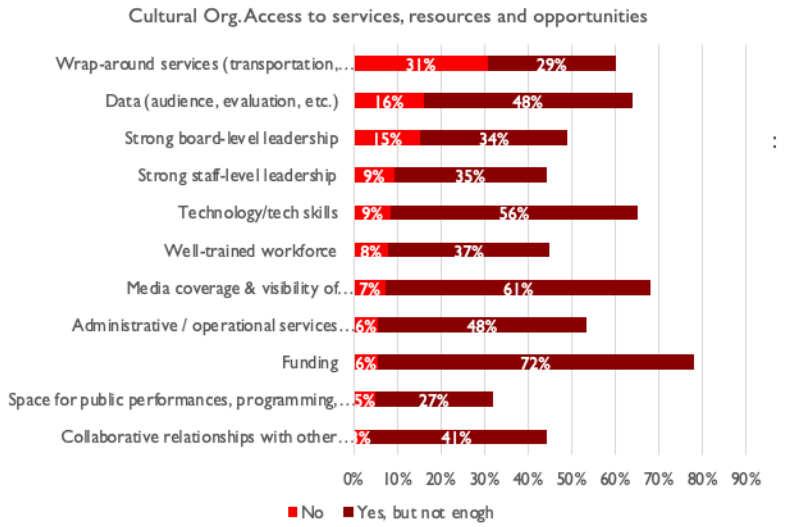
Assess whether you have access to services/opportunities/resources to support your cultural sector career and professional development.

These graphs function as a thermometer: the redder the graph, the more relevant the response. When assessing access to services, opportunities, and resources, these were identified as the most difficult ones to access, offering insight into areas that need improvement in Erie's cultural landscape. Cultural workers highlighted that the services, opportunities, and resources they struggle to access – or find insufficient – include mentorship, salary and benefits, and entry-level opportunities such as apprenticeships or internships. Other significant areas with limited access are workshops and formal professional development, as well as opportunities to connect with other arts and cultural workers.



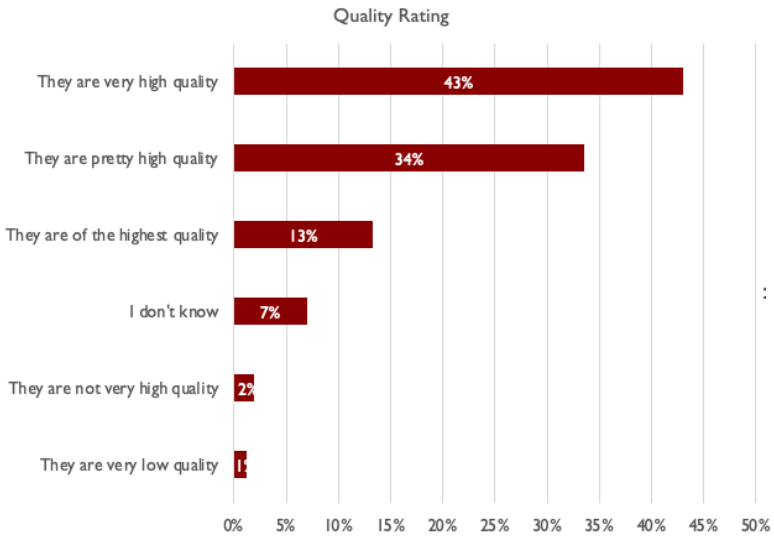
Assess whether your organization has access to services/opportunities/resources to fulfill its mission

When evaluating access at the organizational level, cultural workers identified the top three services, opportunities, and resources their organizations struggle to access: wrap-around services (e.g., transportation), reliable data, and strong board-level leadership.

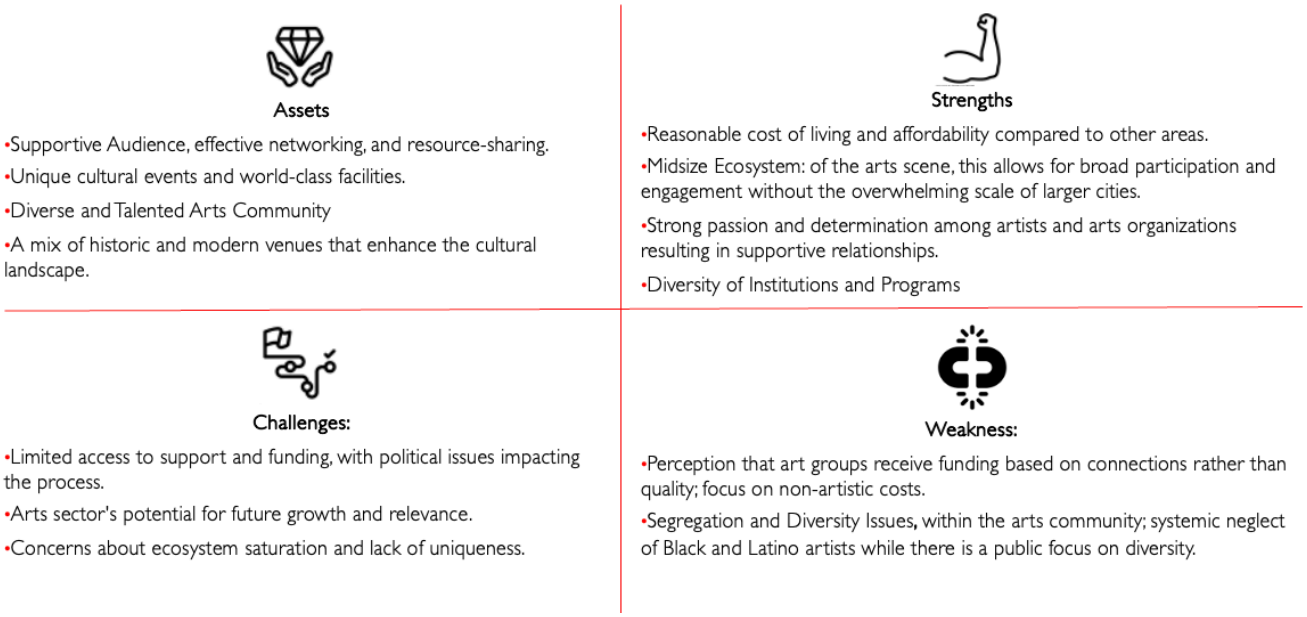


How would you describe the quality of life of the arts and cultural events listed above?

Cultural workers, very similar to the general audience, have a very high opinion of the quality of arts and cultural events in Erie County, with 43% describing the quality as 'very high,' followed by 34% rating it as 'pretty high,' and 19% considering it to be 'the highest quality.



What are the strengths/unique assets of Erie County's arts ecosystem?



What's missing from Erie County's arts ecosystem? – Key Themes

Funding

- A strong emphasis on the need for more funding, especially for smaller and grassroots organizations. There is a lack of operational and programming funds, with many pointing out that current funding does not keep pace with inflation or the actual needs of the arts community.
- Concerns about inequity in how funding is distributed, with larger institutions receiving the bulk of support while smaller organizations struggle.

Lack of Collaboration

- Respondents expressed a desire for more partnerships and shared efforts across the arts sector, as organizations often work in silos.

Need for a Unified Approach

- There is a call for a more unified approach to promoting and organizing arts activities, including better communication and coordination among organizations and the need for a coordinated calendar of events.

Access to Opportunities

- Concerns about accessibility, both in terms of geographic reach (e.g., rural areas being neglected) and for underrepresented communities. There is also a need for more affordable and accessible programming, particularly for those with limited resources.

Visibility and Awareness

- A lack of visibility for arts opportunities and events.

Quality of Arts Programming

- Respondents mentioned that while there are some standout moments, the overall quality of events could be improved, with more world-class offerings.

Infrastructure and Sustainability

- There is concern about the state of arts infrastructure, including the need for better facilities, technological upgrades, and more resources to maintain and utilize spaces effectively.

Education and Professional Development

- There is a noticeable gap in arts education within schools, with respondents calling for increased support to develop future artists and audiences.
- A need for more support for local artists, especially emerging professionals, was highlighted, with calls for better professional development opportunities and recognition of local talent.

What thoughts or ideas do you have for Erie County's Cultural Plan?

Connections for Youth

- A focus on youth arts programming that is well funded and has opportunities for youth to be paid and that considers transportation.
- More funding for educational opportunities/programs.

Communications Support

- A database and a calendar for all art-related opportunities.
- Invest in quality professional productions and promote them far and wide.
- Promotion and Marketing Campaigns; traditional and digital media to reach diverse audiences and promote the arts as a key element of Erie County's identity.
- County-wide promotional opportunities (banners, billboards, airport ads).
- Explore AI Image generation as a starting point for other media

Creative County

- Open the Marina for artists/singers/crafts shows/bands.
- Bring more ideas to create engagement with attendees.
- A local arts festival of all disciplines. No one outside of WNY should be able to participate.

- Include rural areas and different demographics. Focus on infrastructure (i.e. facilities development), cultural districts, community engagement incentives/initiatives.
- Connect more organizations with one another.
- Unified tourism plan to promote the arts & cultural sector to visitors.

Arts Grants and Support Systems

- ☐ Increase funding amounts to artists, smaller arts and cultural organizations.
- ☐ There should be more collaboration to produce extraordinary events and festivals that combine all art forms.
- ☐ Support new or more equitable funding opportunities.
- ☐ Maintenance of existing public art projects should be critical.
- ☐ Provide additional funding and marketing opportunities. Get the tour buses from Niagara Falls to visit the cultural assets of Erie County.
- ☐ More operational support for cultural institutions.

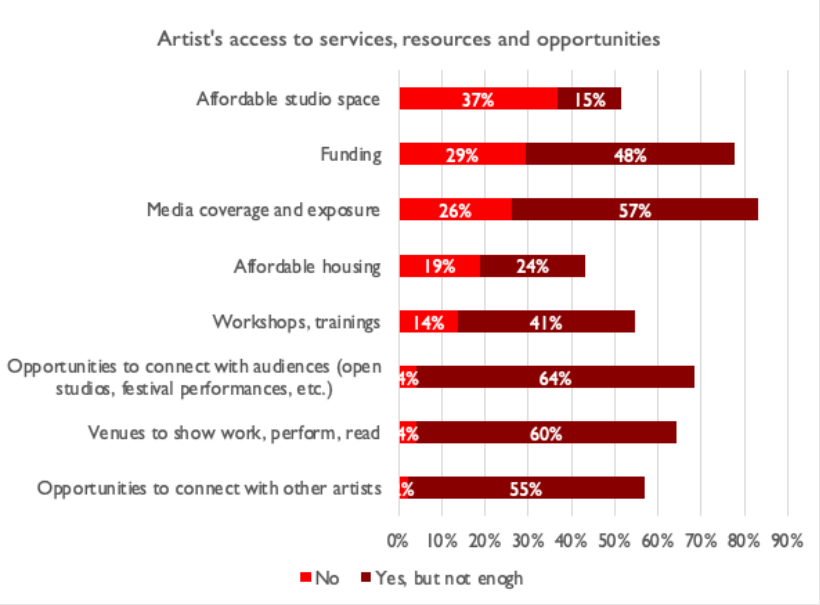
Cultural Hub

- Include IATSE Local 10 and the other well-qualified entertainment unions in as many County-funded arts and performance-based opportunities as possible.
- Identify ways to collaborate and partner - to save costs on administrative staff/processes; promote programming; reduce government-created bureaucracy and duplication when receiving funds..
- Incorporate deliberate measures to support and raise awareness of smaller organizations and those outside of the City of Buffalo.

Artist Survey

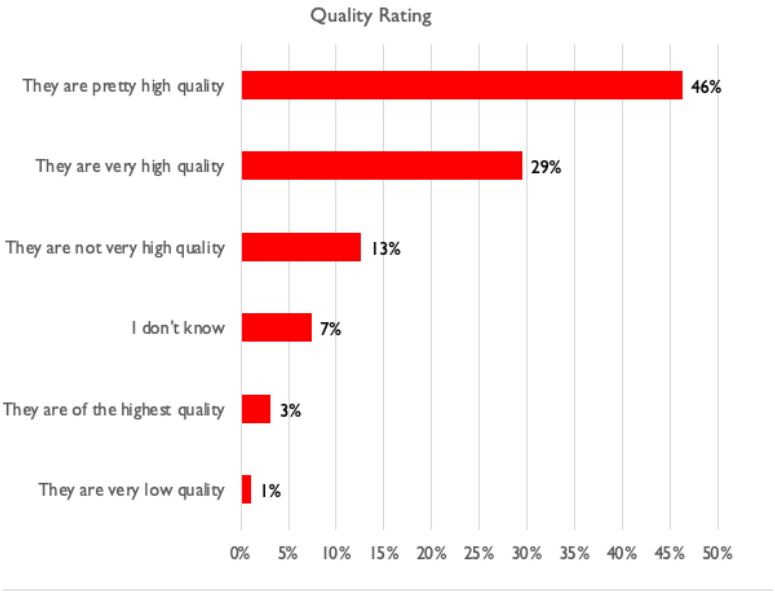
Assess the level of access you have to services/opportunities/resources to support your practices in Erie County.

These graphs function as a thermometer: the redder the graph, the more urgent or relevant the response. When assessing access to services, opportunities, and resources, the most challenging areas were identified, shedding light on what needs improvement in Erie's cultural landscape. Artists highlighted that the services, opportunities, and resources they struggle to access – or find insufficient – include affordable studio space, funding, and media coverage/exposure. Other areas with limited access, though less critical but still important, are opportunities to connect with audiences, venues to showcase their work, and opportunities to connect with other artists.



How would you describe the quality of arts and cultural events listed below?

Artists, much like the general audience and cultural workers, hold a very high opinion of the quality of arts and cultural events in Erie County. 46% describe the quality as 'very high,' followed by 29% who rate it as 'pretty high,' and 13% who consider it to be 'the highest quality.



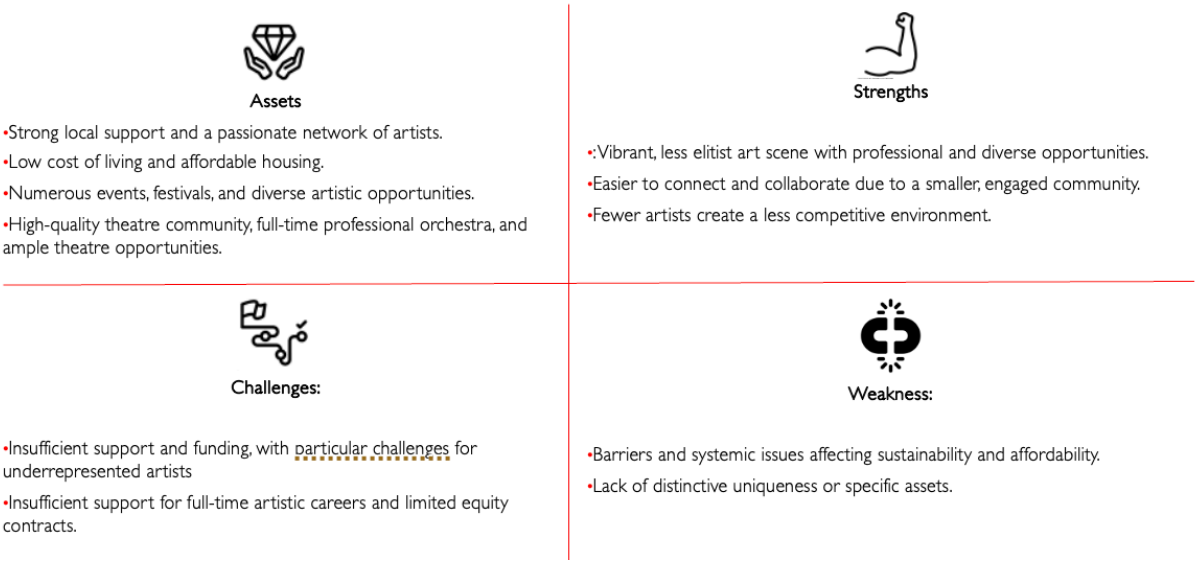
What Erie County organizations (formal or informal) are most supportive of your artistic practice and/or career?

Of the organizations mentioned, the survey's Top 10 most frequently cited are:

- Arts Services Inc. (ASI)
- The Buffalo Institute For Contemporary Art (BICA)
- Burchfield Penney Art Center
- Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra (BPO)
- Buffalo AKG Museum
- WNY Book Arts
- Buffalo Society Arts
- CEPA Gallery
- Irish Classical Theatre
- Shakespeare in Delaware Park

Others include Springville Center for the Arts, WNYG, Buffalo International Film Festival, Hallwalls, and more.

What are the strengths/unique assets of Erie County's arts ecosystem?



What's missing from Erie County's arts ecosystem? – Key Themes

Funding

- Increased funding for artists, including grants for individual projects and operational support for arts organizations.
- Accessible funding opportunities for emerging and independent artists.
- Support for specific art forms, such as film and poetry, as well as infrastructure for publication and media.

Affordable Space

- More affordable housing and studio spaces for artists.
- Access to free or low-cost practice spaces and facilities.
- Cooperative ownership models for artist workspaces to prevent displacement due to gentrification.

Promotion and Visibility

- Enhanced promotion for local artists and arts events.
- Improved media coverage and centralized arts calendars.
- Publicity and opportunities for artists to showcase their work more broadly.

Infrastructure and Facilities

- Development and maintenance of physical artistic and cultural spaces.
- Investment in cultural infrastructure comparable to other major cities.

Community and Networking

- More opportunities for artists to connect with each other and collaborate. Organized arts conventions and networking events to facilitate connections and job opportunities.

Accessibility and Equity

- Affordable access to arts events and programs.
- Greater inclusivity in arts programs and opportunities for marginalized communities.
- Addressing barriers that restrict who can create, view, and participate in the arts.

Arts Education and Professional Development

- More training and professional development opportunities for artists.
- Support for arts education programs to nurture future audiences and artists.

What thoughts or ideas do you have for Erie County's Cultural Plan?

Connections for Youth

- Support arts education in schools and provide access to arts education programs.
- Expand cultural workshops and demonstrations for schools and organizations.
- Support organizations like the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and Buffalo Girlchoir in their youth outreach and education

Communications Support

- Improve promotion and visibility of local arts and events.
- Create a comprehensive arts/show listing for easier access to event information.
- Develop better media coverage for local art galleries and events.
- Increase reviews and publicity for artistic events.
- Promote local arts organizations and education programs.

Creative County

- Ensure all areas use parks for events to foster community connections.
- Develop a subsidized gallery district and support independent art galleries.
- Increase promotion of local art galleries and provide more public art installations.
- Create a large outdoor venue for the BPO and other arts events.
- Address housing issues impacting opportunities to live and work in Buffalo.

Arts Grants and Support Systems

- ☐ Increase funding for the arts and improve the grant application process, including individual artists and theatre.
- ☐ Provide more funding for black artists and support for artists from diverse communities.
- ☐ Invest in artist-owned spaces and public performance spaces.
- ☐ Offer professional resources such as accounting and tax help for artists.
- ☐ Support small business funding, affordable studio space, and tool sharing.
- ☐ Explore film tax credits and other financial incentives for the arts.

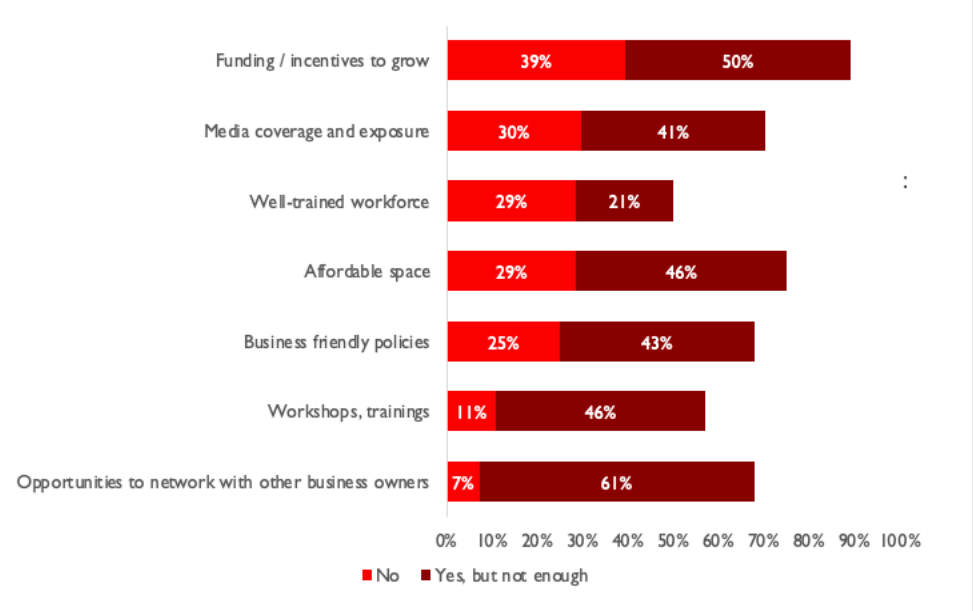
Cultural Hub

- Develop infrastructure for all forms of art, including literary arts.
- Foster collaboration and resource sharing among artists and organizations.
- Form a committee that includes diverse community representatives.
- Protect and support cultural resources and public arts spaces.
- Build connections between larger institutions and smaller galleries to elevate local art.
- Ensure true inclusion of both established and new artists, addressing barriers to entry.

Creative Business Owner Survey

Assess the access you have to services/opportunities/resources to support your creative economy business in Erie County.

These graphs function as a thermometer: the redder the graph, the more relevant the response. When assessing access to services, opportunities, and resources, the most challenging areas were identified by examining responses marked 'no access' and 'yes, but not enough,' which shed light on what needs improvement in Erie's cultural landscape. Creative business owners highlighted that the services, opportunities, and resources they struggle to access – or find insufficient – include funding and incentives for growth, media coverage and exposure, and a well-trained workforce. Another area with limited access, though less critical but still important, is the opportunity to network with other business owners



What are the strengths/unique assets of Erie County's arts ecosystem?



What's missing from Erie County's arts ecosystem? – Key Themes

Affordable Space and Facilities

- A strong emphasis on the need for more funding, especially for smaller and grassroots organizations. Affordable, private office space
- More affordable storefronts.
- Better incentives for brick-and-mortar locations

Funding

- Paid artist opportunities for for-profit companies
- Funding for programs and spaces made specifically to support art that aren't focused on overcharging facilitators.
- Need for more cultural funding, easily accessible processes especially for smaller organizations.
- Access to capital for women and BIPOC small business owner.
- Tax incentives and grants for businesses with low-impact, sustainable practices

Support and Opportunities

- More visiting artists.
- More opportunity to grow and gain positive exposure as up-and-coming artists.

Communication and Promotion

- Better communication and promotion for all to shop local.
- Dedicated, sustainable media coverage.

Leadership and Advocacy

- Leadership: A need for visionaries and effective advocates for the arts

Bureaucracy and Process

- More programs for up-and-coming businesses with fewer high stipulations.
- A more symbiotic relationship with taxpayers and less bureaucracy.
- Public transit, sidewalk and road upkeep, penalties for negligent landlords/better standardized features or services for commercial leases.
- Elimination of political interference: "Arts in this town is too elitist and too political".

Community and Resources

- "I could benefit from more access and exposure to resources at UB".

What thoughts or ideas do you have for Erie County's Cultural Plan?

Communications Support

- Improve media and marketing strategies.
- Enhance cultural experiences tied to local arts, such as interactive or educational elements.
- One website and strong social media presence to promote opportunities regularly

Creative County

- Promote local art fairs and talent festivals.
- Support local businesses and foster community inclusivity.
- Ensure representation of all cultures in arts initiatives.

Arts Grants and Support Systems

- ☐ Increase availability of programs, grants, and networking for business and financial support.
- ☐ Support development of folk art and creative economy entrepreneurs.
- ☐ Focus grant planning on smaller organizations rather than larger ones.

Cultural Hub

- Develop strategies to grow the audience base for cultural events.
- Engage diverse communities through forums and surveys.

- Ensure comprehensive action plans for cultural initiatives.
- Improve the public cultural service system to support and develop folk art teams, creating a conducive environment for creative economy entrepreneurs.

Other

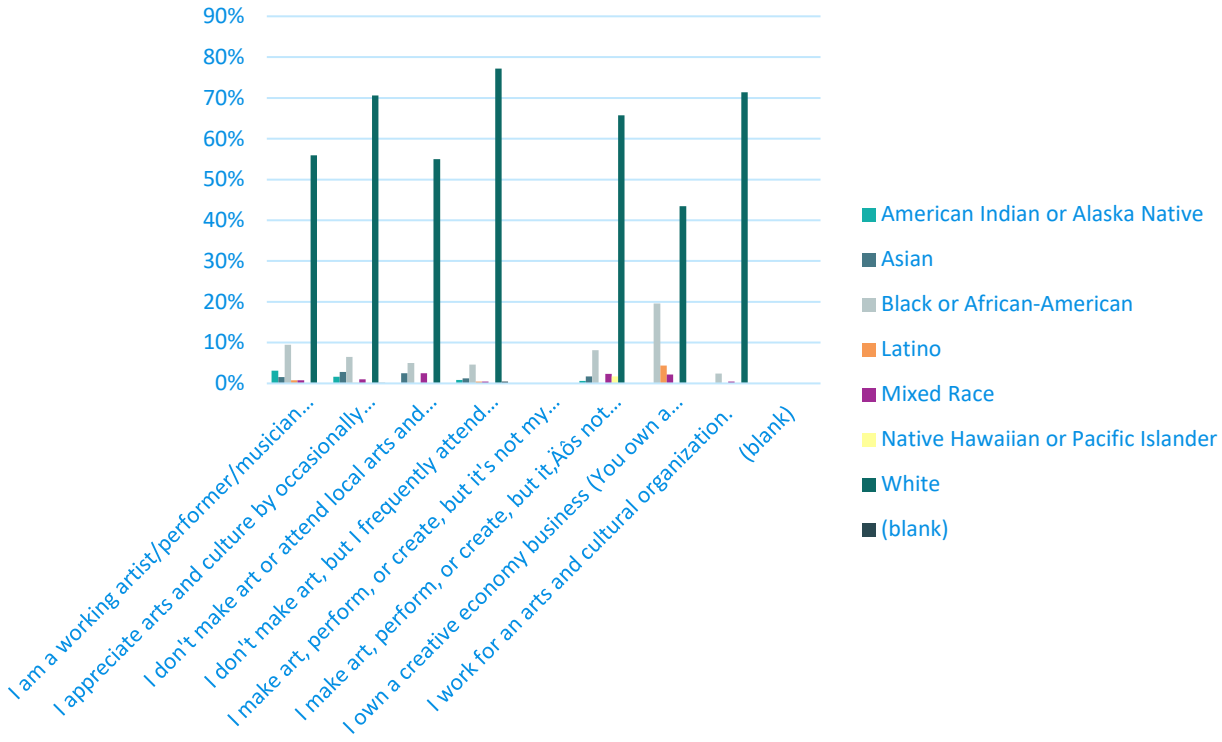
- Address and eliminate political connections influencing arts planning.
- Highlight the need for equitable opportunities beyond networking and connections.
- Acknowledge and thank contributors to the cultural planning process.

Demographic Breakdown by Question: Highlights

How do you participate in Erie County's arts and cultural scene?

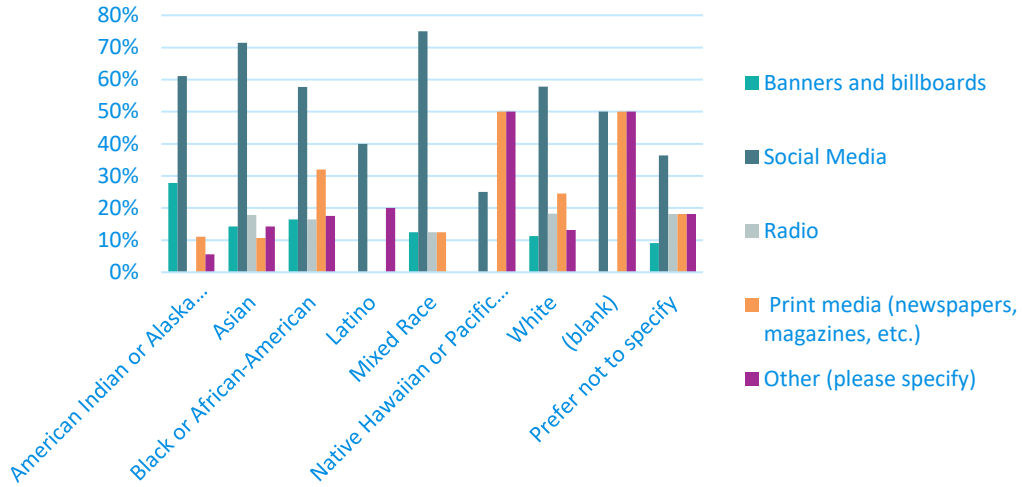
There were 1,681 respondents to this question, with 171 blanks and 11 who preferred not to specify. Below is a summary of the chart:

- Of the 127 people who responded, "I am a working artist", the majority (56%) identify as white, followed by Black or African American. (9%).
- Out of the 681 people who responded, "I appreciate arts and culture by occasionally attending events (ex. free concerts, museums, festivals, arts and crafts fairs, dance recitals, etc.)", the majority (71%) identify as white, followed by Black or African American (6%).
- Out of the 40 people who responded, "I don't make art or attend local arts and culture opportunities", the majority (55%) identify as white followed by Black or African American (5%).
- Out of the 237 people who responded, "I don't make art, but I frequently attend cultural events, collect art, donate to arts organizations and/or serve on the board of an arts organization", the majority (77%) identify as white, followed by Black or African American (5%).
- Out of the 172 that responded, "I make art, perform, or create, but it's not my job and/or source of income", the majority (66%) identify as white followed by Black or African American (8%).
- Out of the 46 that responded, "I own a creative economy business (You own a for-profit business with creative outputs full-time or in addition to another job (ex. independent retail, media, galleries, performance venues, architecture etc)," the majority identify as white (43%), followed by Black or African American (20%).
- Out of the 206 that responded, "I work for an arts and cultural organization", the majority identify as white (71%) followed by Black or African American (2%).

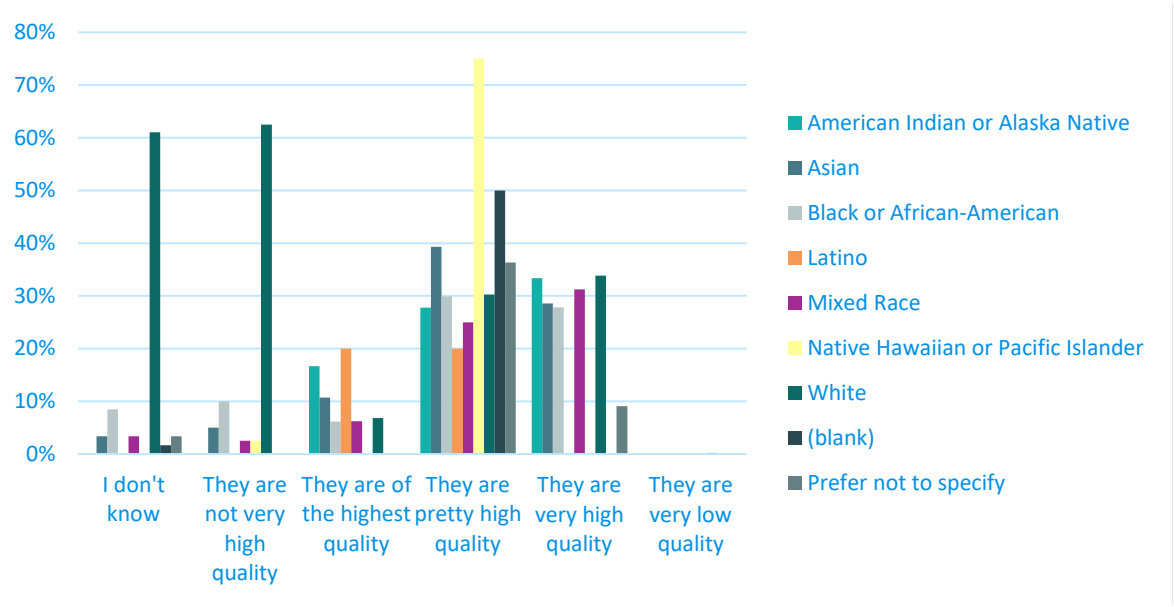


How do you most often hear about Erie County arts and cultural events?

When asked about preferred communication channels and how respondents hear about arts and cultural events in Erie County, across most races, social media is the preferred channel of communication. Other key forms of communication mentioned were word of mouth, TV, and friends. For Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders and Black or African Americans, print media is also a key source of information.



Overall, how would you describe the quality of the arts and cultural events [listed above]?

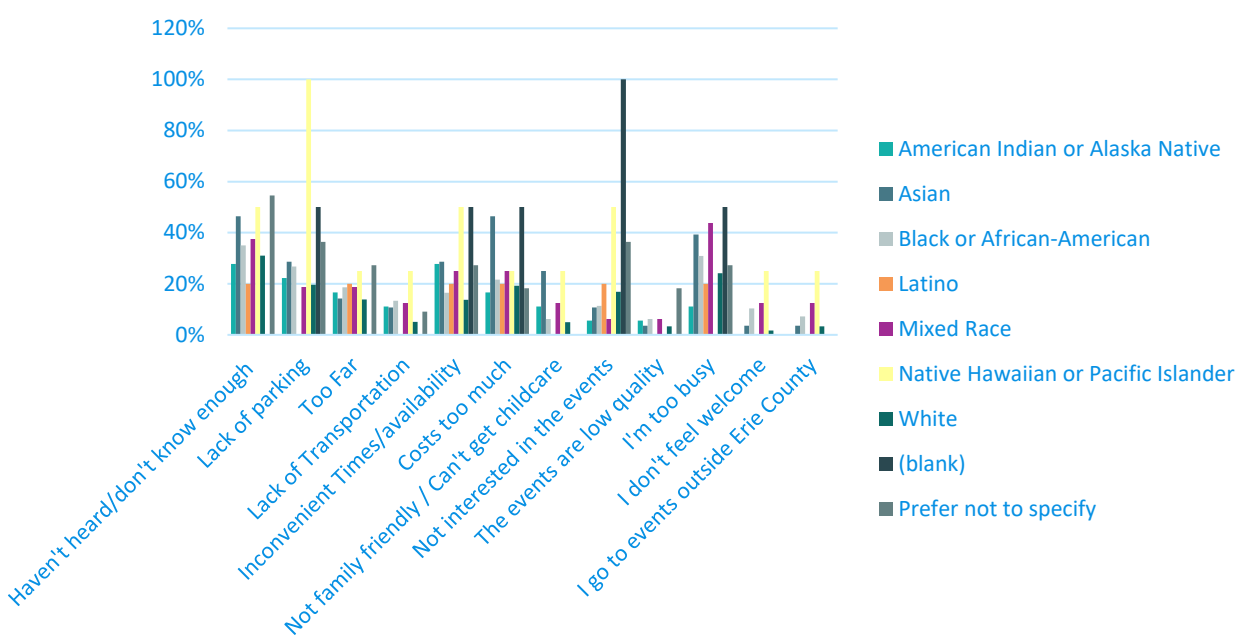


Please indicate whether each of the following is a major reason, minor reason, or not at all a reason you have decided NOT to attend an arts and culture event in Erie County in the past.

Based on the responses to this question, below is a breakdown by race of the responses to this question:

- American Indian or Alaska Native: For the 18 respondents in this group, the two main reasons for not attending arts and culture events in Erie County are because they "Haven't heard/don't know enough" and because of "Inconvenient Times/availability".
- Asian: For the 28 respondents in this group, the two main reasons for not attending arts and culture events in Erie County are because they "Haven't heard/don't know enough" and because it "Costs too much."
- Black or African American: For the 97 respondents in this group, the main reason for not attending arts and culture events in Erie County is because they "Haven't heard/don't know enough" followed by "I'm too busy."
- Latino: For the 5 respondents in this group, the main reasons (6 were tied) for not attending arts and culture events in Erie County are because they "Haven't heard/don't know enough," it is "Too far," "Inconvenient," it "Costs too much," "Not interested," and "I'm too busy."
- Mixed Race: For the 16 respondents in this group, the main reason for not attending arts and culture events in Erie County is because "I'm too busy," followed by "Haven't heard/don't know enough."

- **Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander:** For the 4 respondents in this group, the main reason for not attending arts and culture events in Erie County is a "Lack of parking." Other main reasons include "Haven't heard/don't know enough," "Inconvenient," and "Not interested."
- **White:** For the 1,037 respondents in this group, the main reason for not attending arts and culture events in Erie County is "Haven't heard/don't know enough followed by "I'm too busy."

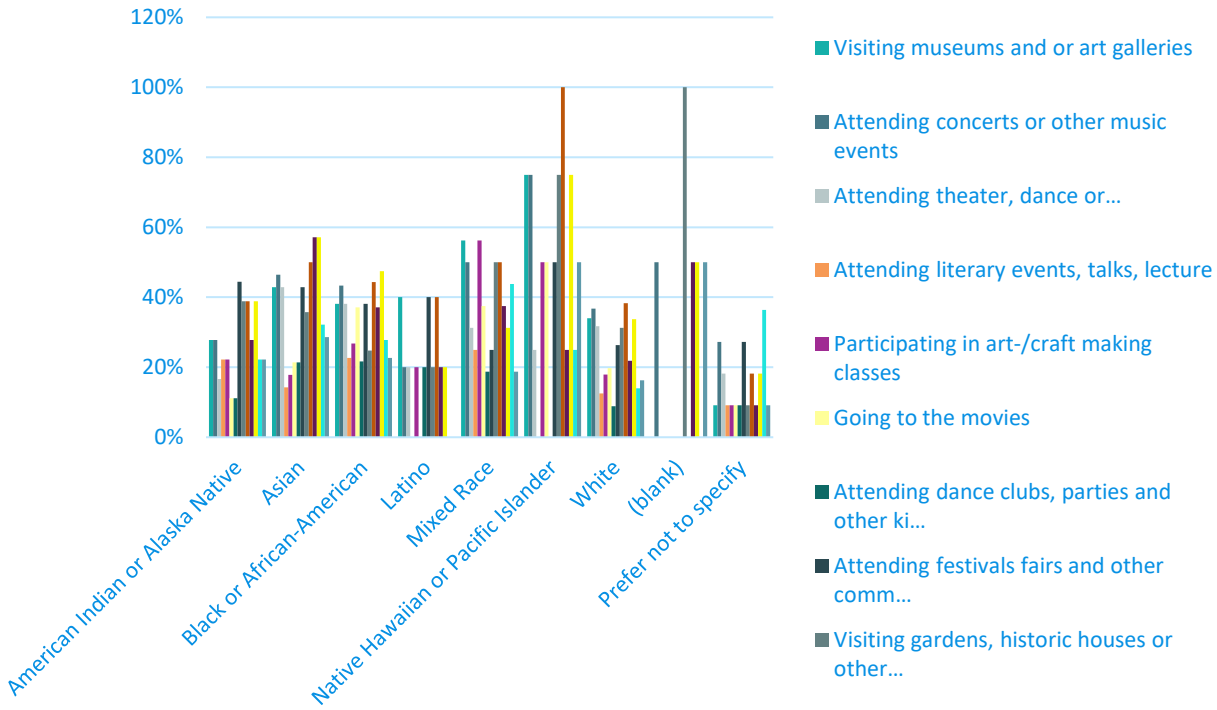


How interested are you in the following activities when you are in Erie County or the surrounding area?

Based on the responses to this question, below is a breakdown by race of the responses to this question:

- **American Indian or Alaska Native**: For the 18 respondents in this group, the three main activities this group is interested in are: "Visiting gardens, historic houses, or other cultural attractions," "Visiting outdoor attractions (parks, waterfront, etc.)," and "Eating out."
- **Asian:** For the 28 respondents in this group, the two main activities this group is interested in are: "Attending wine and food festivals end events," "Visiting outdoor attractions (parks, waterfront, etc.)," and "Eating out."
- **Black or African American:** For the 97 respondents in this group, the main activity this group is interested in is: "Eating out," followed by "Visiting outdoor attractions (parks, waterfront, etc."
- **Latino:** For the 5 respondents in this group, the three main activities this group is interested in are: "Visiting outdoor attractions (parks, waterfront, etc.)," "Visiting museums and/or art galleries," and "Attending festivals, fairs, and other community events."

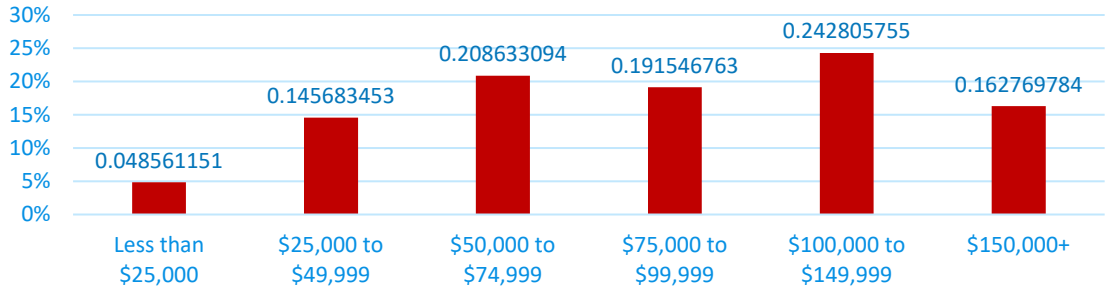
- **Mixed Race:** For the 16 respondents in this group, the two main activities this group is interested in are: "Visiting museums and/or art galleries," and "Participating in art- / craft making classes."
- **Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander:** For the 4 respondents in this group, the main activity this group is interested in is "Visiting outdoor attractions (parks, waterfront, etc."
- **White:** For the 1,037 respondents in this group, the main activity this group is interested in is "Visiting outdoor attractions (parks, waterfront, etc." followed by "Attending concerts or other music events."



Breakdown by Household Income

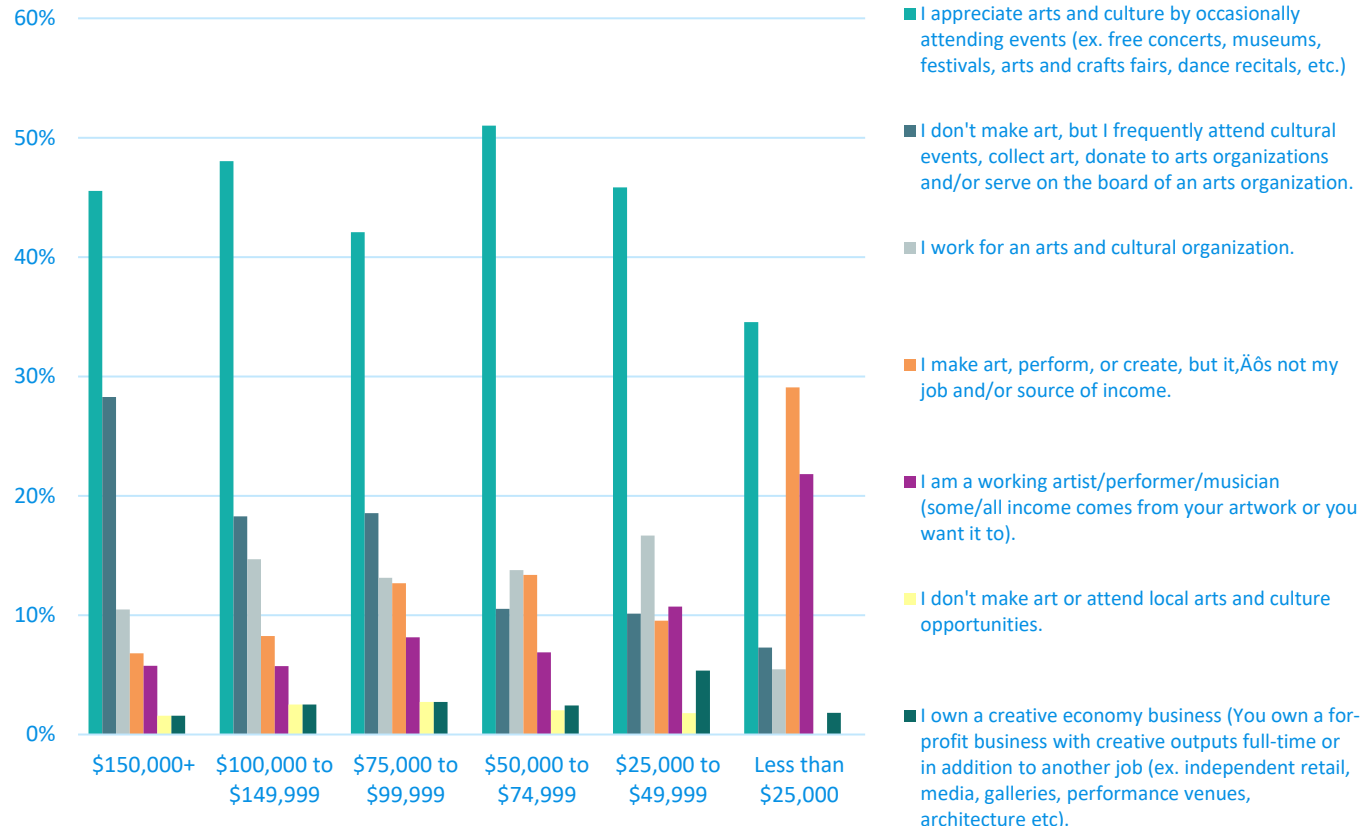
General Survey

Of the respondents to the survey, the majority of respondents fall under the category of $100,000 to $149,999 followed by $50,000 to $79,999.



Participation in Arts and Culture by Household Income

They majority of respondents across all household incomes "appreciate arts and culture by occasionally attending events (ex. Free concerts, museums, festivals, arts and crafts fairs, dance recitals, etc.)

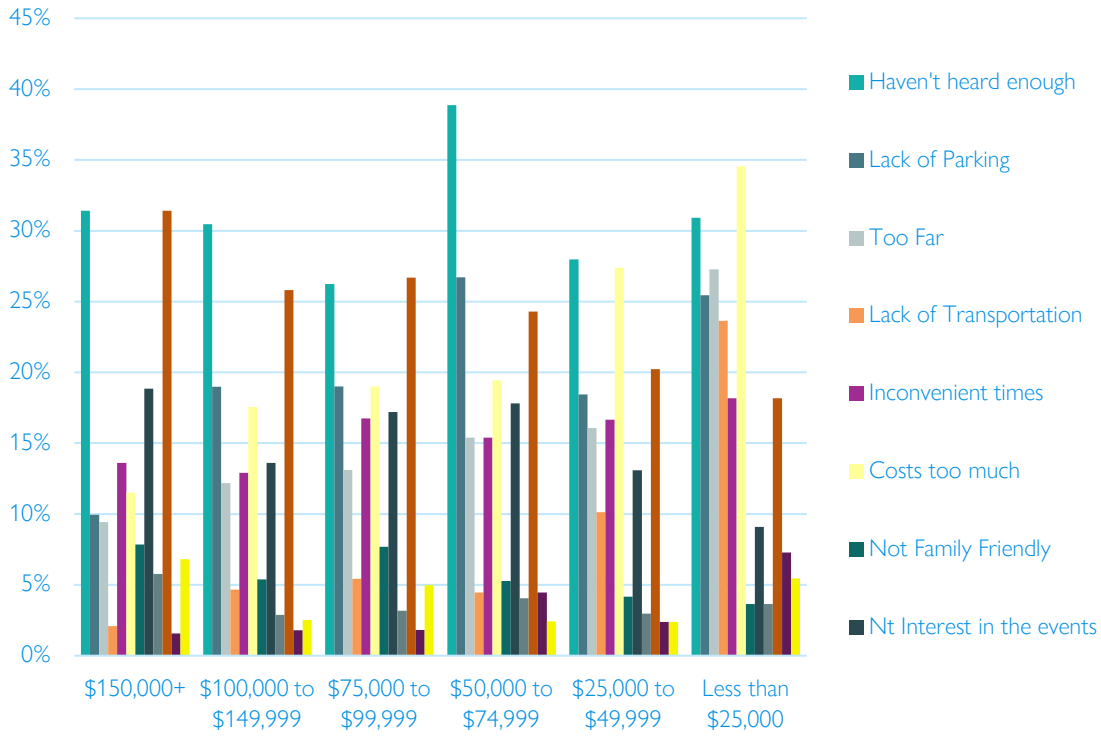


(Breakdown by Household Income) Please indicate whether each of the following is a major reason, minor reason, or not at all a reason you have decided NOT to attend an arts and culture event in Erie County in the past.

Based on the responses to this question, below is a breakdown based on the household income:

- **$150,000+:** The two main reasons why respondents in this group do not attend arts and culture events are because they "Haven't heard/don't know enough" and they're "Not Family Friendly".
- **$100,000 - $149,999**: The main reason why respondents in this group do not attend arts and culture events is because they "Haven't heard/don't know enough."
- **$75,000 - $99,999**: The two main reasons why respondents in this group do not attend arts and culture events are because they they're "Not Family Friendly" followed by "Haven't heard/don't know enough."
- **$50,000 - $74,999**: The main reason why respondents in this group do not attend arts and culture events is because they "Haven't heard/don't know enough."

- **$25,000 - $49,999**: The two main reasons why respondents in this group do not attend arts and culture events are because they "Haven't heard/don't know enough" and because it "Costs too much."
- **Less than $25,000**: The main reason why respondents in this group do not attend arts and culture events is because it "Costs too much" followed by "Haven't heard/don't know enough."



Do you have any suggestions as to how current arts and cultural events in Erie County can be improved?

Household Income Bracket	Feedback Comments
$25,000 to $49,999	More affordable pricing; need for public transportation; increased marketing; events should cater to various cultures and communities.
$50,000 to $74,999	A variety is nice, new vendors that haven't been at other events. Add a Renaissance Festival. Advertise more on social media about upcoming events. Advertise well before events. Need more advertising; improve publicity immensely. Events should have better food options, and more events focused on food. Facilitate a central depository for events with more detailed information. Free parking would be a great improvement; consider free transportation. Improve ADA compliance and ensure

	diversity and inclusion. Have more than one music festival each year, maybe once a month? More science events, more collaborative and affordable arts events.
$75,000 to $99,999	Enhance collaboration between arts organizations; diversify event offerings; ensure events are accessible to families; provide educational opportunities tied to events.
$100,000 to $149,999	Focus on high-quality programming; prioritize funding for larger events; consider international performers; improve marketing strategies to attract broader audiences.
$150,000+	Add more family-friendly and diverse events at varied times. Highlight great parks. Create an easy-to-navigate calendar of events. Better advertising and awareness of events needed. Provide funding for organizations, improve venues for safety, and support for artists. Promote more classes and workshops for adults and increase the variety and frequency of events. Consider printed communications in public spaces. A central website for cultural events would be beneficial. More investment in local artists and cultural diversity, and support for foreign language organizations.

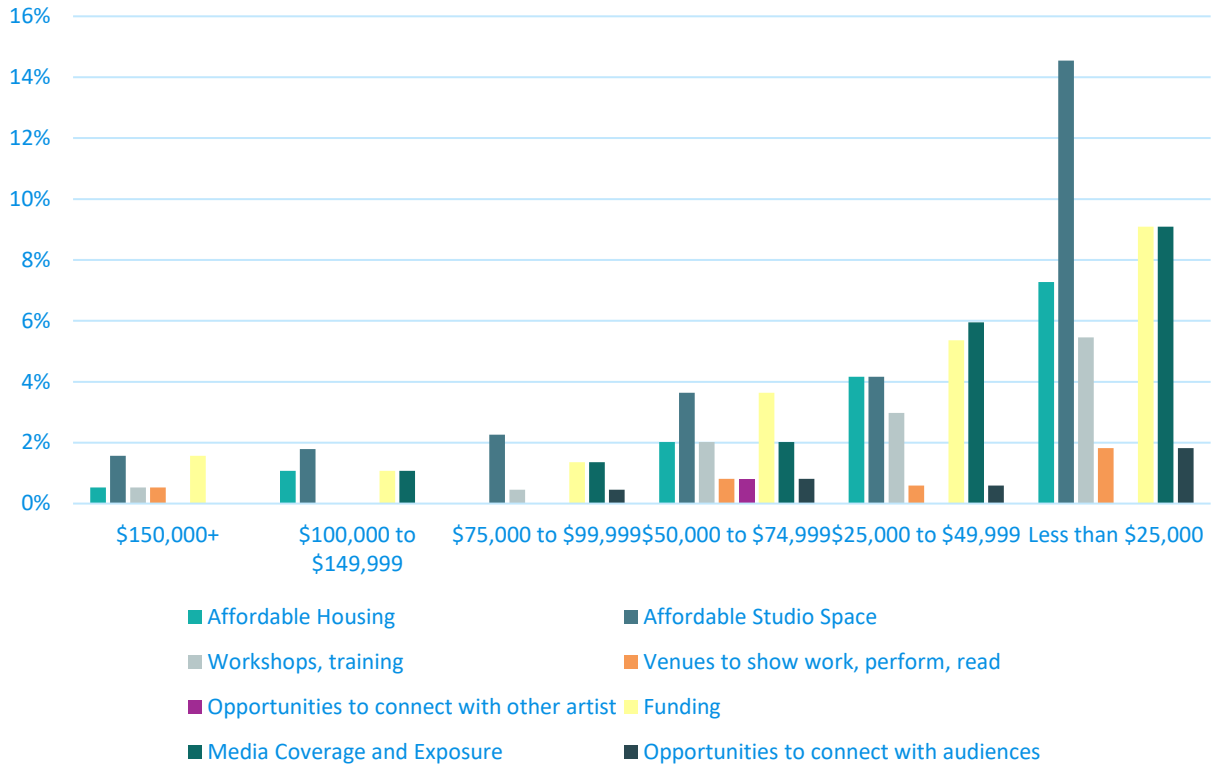
Artists

Services, Opportunities and Resources artists do not consider they have access to (by Household Income)

Based on the responses to this question, below is a breakdown based on the household income:

- $150,000+: The two resources or opportunities artists in this category don't feel they have access to include: "Funding" and "Affordable Studio Space".
- $100,000 - $149,999: The two resources or opportunities artists in this category don't feel they have access to include: "Funding" and "Affordable Studio Space".
- $75,000 - $99,999: The main resource or opportunity artists in this category are missing is "Affordable Studio Space".
- $50,000 - $74,999: The two resources or opportunity artists in this category don't feel they have access to include: "Funding" and "Affordable Studio Space".
- $25,000 - $49,999: The two resources or opportunities artists in this category don't feel they have access to include: "Funding" and "Media Coverage and Exposure".

- **Less than $25,000**: The main resource or opportunity artists in this category don't feel they have access to is "Affordable Studio Space" followed by "Funding" and "Media Coverage and Exposure."



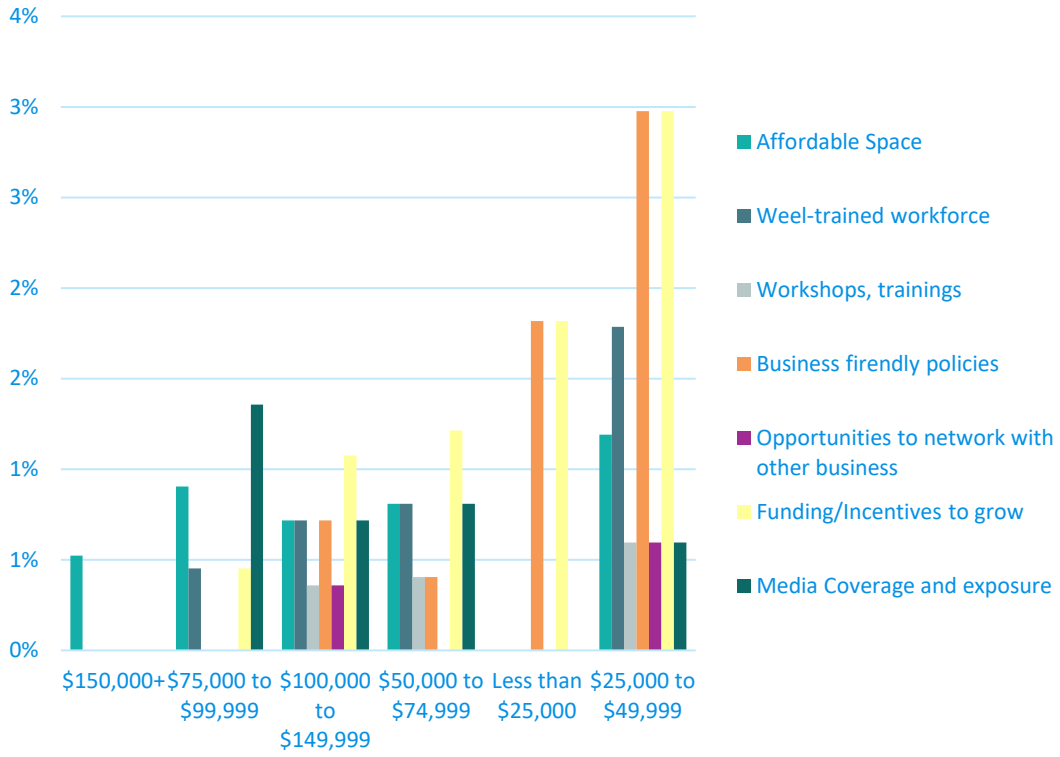
Creative Business Owners

Services, Opportunities and Resources artist do not consider they have access to (by Household Income)

Based on the responses to this question, below is a breakdown based on the household income:

- **$150,000+:** The main resource or opportunity creative business owners in this category don't feel they have access to is: "Affordable Space".
- **$100,000 - $149,999**: The main resource or opportunity creative business owners in this category don't feel they have access to is "Media Coverage and Exposure" followed by "Affordable Space."
- **$75,000 - $99,999**: The main resource or opportunity creative business owners in this category don't feel they have access to is: "Funding/Incentives to Grow."
- **$50,000 - $74,999**: The main resource or opportunity creative business owners in this category don't feel they have access to is: "Funding/Incentives to Grow".

- **$25,000 - $49,999**: The two resources or opportunities creative business owners in this category don't feel they have access to include: "Funding/Incentives to Grow" and "Business Friendly Policies".
- **Less than $25,000**: The two resources or opportunities creative business owners in this category don't feel they have access to include: "Funding/Incentives to Grow" and "Business Friendly Policies".



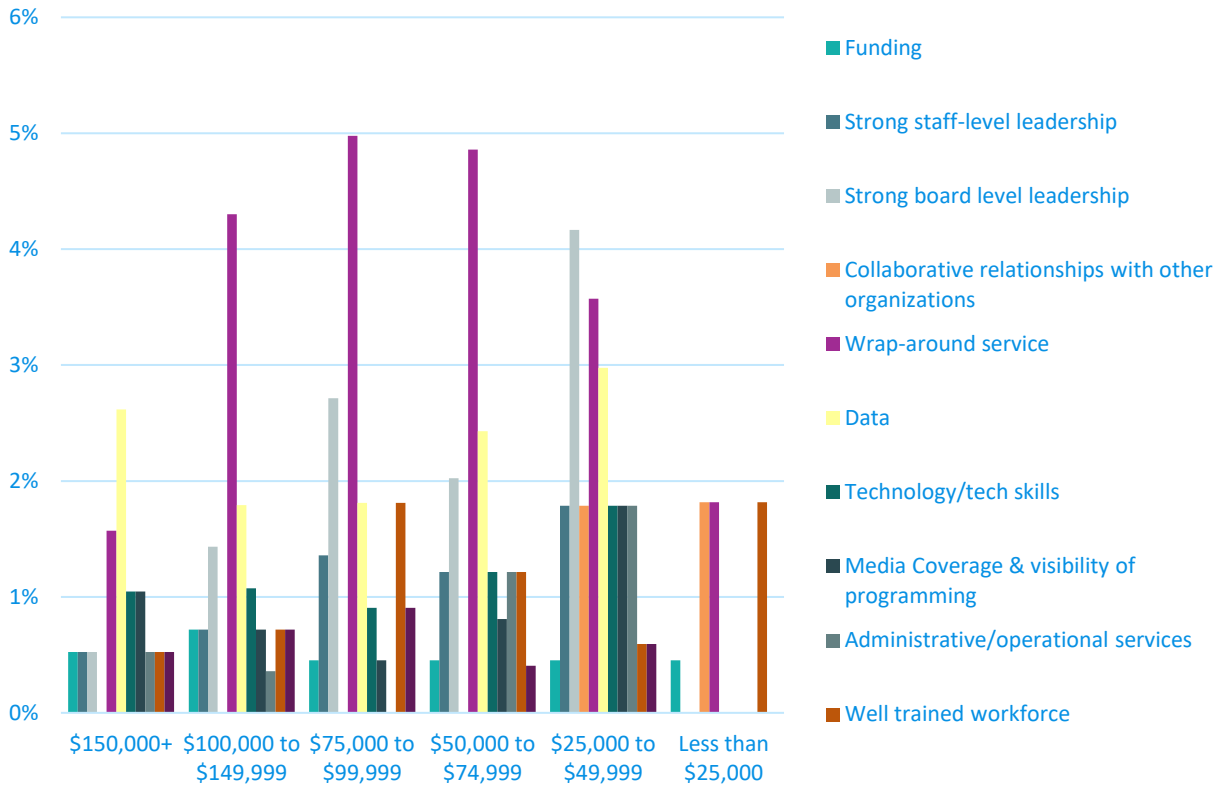
Cultural Worker

Assess whether your organization has access to services/opportunities/resources to fulfill its mission. You can also indicate that you don't find a resource relevant to your organization's needs.

Responses below and in the chart reflect services/opportunities that Based on the responses to this question, below is a breakdown based on the household income:

- **$150,000+:** The main resource or opportunity cultural workers in this category don't feel their organization has access to is: "Data."
- **$100,000 - $149,999**: The main resource or opportunity cultural workers in this category don't feel their organization has access to is: "Wrap-around services".
- **$75,000 - $99,999**: The main resource or opportunity cultural workers in this category don't feel their organization has access to is: "Wrap-around services".

- **$50,000 - $74,999**: The main resource or opportunity cultural workers in this category don't feel their organization has access to is: "Wrap-around services".
- **$25,000 - $49,999**: The main resource or opportunity cultural workers in this category don't feel their organization has access to is: "Strong board level leadership" followed by "Wrap-around services."
- **Less than $25,000**: The three main resources or opportunities cultural workers in this category don't feel their organization has access to is: "Wrap-around services," "Collaborative relationships with other organizations," and "Technology/tech skills."

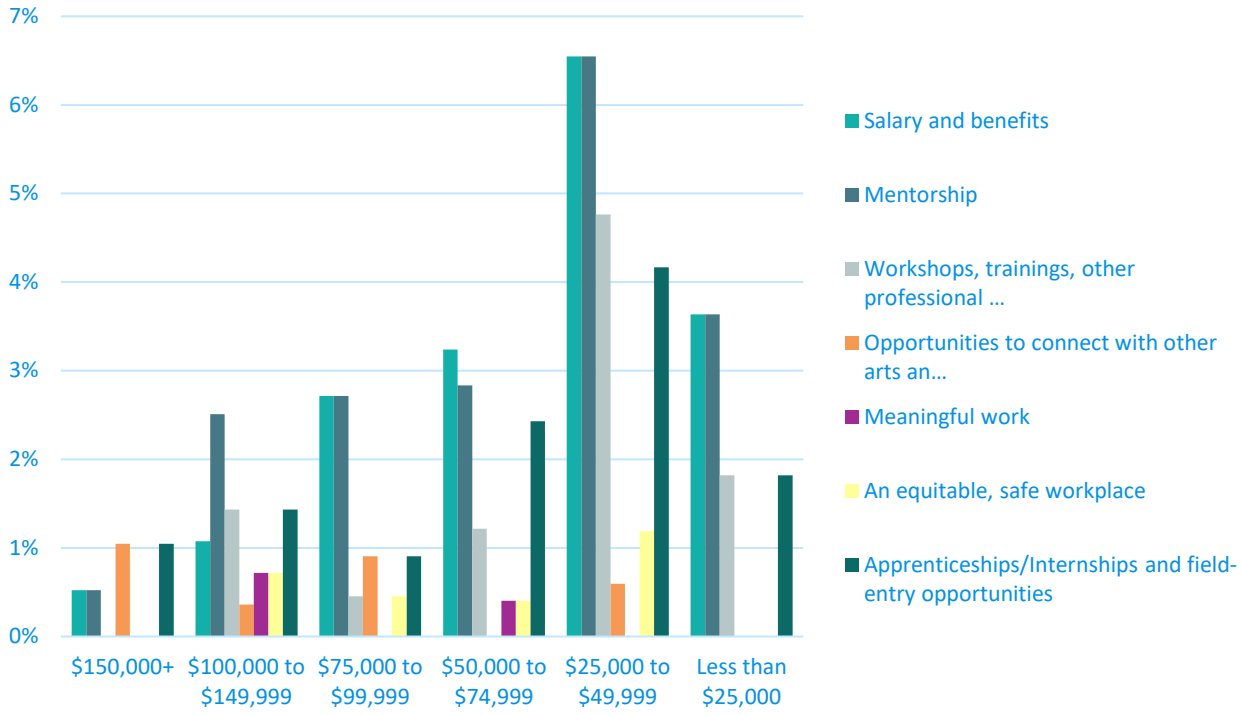


Assess whether you have access to services/opportunities/resources to support your cultural sector career and professional development. You can also indicate that you don't find a resource relevant to your needs.

Responses below and in the chart reflect services/opportunities that Based on the responses to this question, below is a breakdown based on the household income:

- **$150,000+:** The main resource or opportunity cultural workers in this category don't feel they have access to is: "Opportunities to connect with other arts and cultural workers."
- **$100,000 - $149,999**: The main resource or opportunity cultural workers in this category don't feel they have access to is: "Mentorship."

- **$75,000 - $99,999**: The two main resources or opportunities cultural workers in this category don't feel they have access to are "Mentorship" and "Salary and benefits."
- **$50,000 - $74,999**: The main resource or opportunity cultural workers in this category don't feel they have access to is: "Salary and benefits" followed by "Mentorship."
- **$25,000 - $49,999**: The two main resources or opportunities cultural workers in this category don't feel they have access to are "Salary and benefits" and "Mentorship."
- **Less than $25,000**: The two main resources or opportunities cultural workers in this category don't feel they have access to are "Salary and benefits" and "Mentorship."



Appendix 4: Development of Prioritization for the Cultural Plan

Frank Lloyd Wright's Graycliff, Evans, NY

Appendix 4: Development of Prioritization for the Cultural Plan

In order to understand the context of the cultural sector in Erie County, AEA Consulting conducted a market assessment (see Appendix 1 for more details) that would provide the base upon which the Cultural Plan would be built. The market assessment provided a foundational understanding on the arts funding resources available, the number of arts organizations across the county, and key partners and initiatives that are already playing an important role in the sector, such as Arts Services Inc. (ASI).

After the market assessment, AEA then conducted, stakeholder interviews, site visits, public meetings, and focus groups, that led to the initial longlist of 86 potential initiatives (see Appendix 5) covering various themes and focus areas, such as capacity building and funding needs. Then, the list was narrowed down by systematically applying a coding Cultural Plan to identify the most essential community-driven needs mentioned by the participants in the public engagement sessions, using the following tags:

- Transportation
- Marketing
- County
- Marketing
- Tourism
- Youth
- Schools
- Funding
- Arts Education
- Grant Making
- Cultural Hub
- New Grants
- Partnerships
- Professional Development
- Knowledge Sharing
- Resource Sharing
- Engagement and Support

AEA used this coding process to thoroughly analyze recurring themes and how they relate to each other. This helped us pinpoint where different initiatives overlap and differ. Using this method, they identified five main thematic areas that match the community's goals: arts grants and support systems; communications support; connections for youth; creative county; and cultural hub.

After grouping the initiatives under each overarching theme, they were combined and refined. This structured process reduced the longlist to a shortlist of 19 main ideas across five key themes (see Section 3).

Incorporating the Survey Results

Once the survey was closed, three main questions were considered and analyzed to help identify the main initiatives for the final cultural plan:

- Do you have any suggestions as to how current arts and cultural events in Erie County can be improved?
- What thoughts or ideas do you have for Erie County's Cultural Plan?

- What is missing from Erie County's arts ecosystem that would make it easier to be a working cultural worker/artist/creative business owner?

The survey responses to these questions resulted in approximately 72 initiatives (see Appendix 5) that aligned with some of the themes and initiatives that emerged from the previous exercise. Once they were compared to the original list of initiatives, they were then categorized into the main priorities of the Cultural Plan listed above. This comparison helped identify areas of alignment, differences, and nuances in implementation. As a result, the 19 initiatives were maintained, which included four new ideas from the survey results. These new ideas either improved existing initiatives or replaced those that didn't align with the survey results. Additionally, this exercise helped simplify the language of each initiative and develop the implementation steps for each one based on the feedback from the respondents.

Prioritization of the Cultural Plan

Once the list of initiatives was refined, the next step was to prioritize them, determining which should be addressed first and where to focus initial efforts to streamline the implementation phase. AEA established four criteria categories to evaluate the potential key initiatives that will drive the direction of the cultural plan. These categories include *impact, cost, complexity,* and *timeline*.

The criteria were weighted so that impact and feasibility metrics have equal weight. Cost was given a 2x weight, complexity a 1x weight, and timeline a 1x weight – thus, impact was given a 4 weight.

Impa

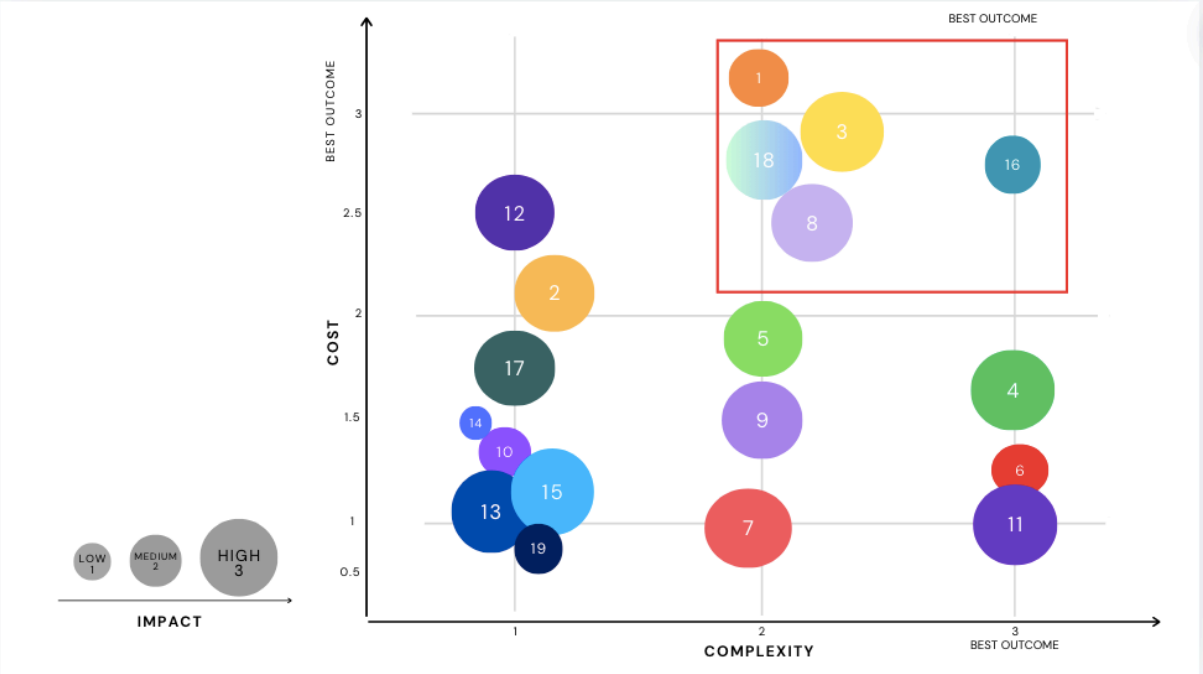
Feasibility

Criteria	Definition
Impact *(4x weight)*	• ***High Impact***: increases the visibility of the sector, helps it reach new audiences, and contributes to the strengthening and capacity building of organizations in the County. • ***Medium Impact:*** addresses some issues in the sector, but not the top priorities or affects a limited part of the sector. • ***Low Impact:*** limited/relevant to a specific group of organizations, does not pertain to wider audiences, or does not elevate the sector in a significant way
Cost *(2x weight)*	• ***High Cost:*** $600,000+ • ***Low and Medium Cost:*** Scaled for costs below $600,000
Complexity *(1x weight)*	• ***High Complexity***: Involves a variety of stakeholders or significant resources. • ***Medium Complexity***: Requires some new partners or additional resources. • ***Low Complexity***: Leverages existing resources and partnerships or can be easily achieved/implemented with existing resources.
Timeline *(1x weight)*	• ***Long Term***: 5+ years • ***Medium Term***: 3-5 years • ***Short Term***: < 2years

Each initiative was scored against specific criteria on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 indicating the worst score (low impact or high cost) and 3 indicating the best score. Impact, Complexity, and Timeline were scored qualitatively. To assess "cost," each overarching initiative was analyzed by breaking it down into key action items and estimating their costs. The cost scores range from 1 to 3, with 3 indicating no cost and 1 indicating estimated costs totaling $600,000 or more.

In order to estimate the cost of the initiative, it was broken down into the likely steps needed to implement it. This included the costs of organizing a festival or major event, providing transportation support, event production, and marketing and communications. The approximate costs of each step were then calculated using various public data and benchmarks. A score was assigned to each initiative based on the estimated total costs. A worst score of 1 would represent costs totaling $600,000 or more.

This image provides a visual representation of the score for each initiative, using the corresponding color code found in the section below. *(Note these numbers refer to the table on the next page – not the initiative numbers in the main body of the report.)*



The scores for each of the initiatives can be found on the next page.

(For all: 3 = best outcome; 1 = worst outcome)

		Impact	Feasibility				
#	Initiative	Impact	Cost	Complexity	Timeline	Score	%
18	Develop a Grants Clearinghouse for Resource and Funding Awareness	3	2.49	2	3	**21.98**	95.6%
8	Increase accessibilty for Arts and Culture events in the County in terms of disabilities	3	2.42	2	3	**21.83**	94.9%
3	Revise the cultural funding process and develop a new one. This new process should be transparent and address the following: A multi-year funding model with a standardized application form. Acknowledgment of differences in size, mission, and contributions among organizations. Clear and well-communicated criteria.	3	2.77	2	2	**21.53**	93.6%
5	Marketing and Media Awareness : Enhance visibility for arts and culture through community-based signage, promotional opportunities, and strategic partnerships for in-kind advertising opportunities.	3	2.22	2	3	**21.44**	93.2%
4	Encourage the development of arts journalism and content that provides critical coverage of arts and culture across a range of diverse media outlets	3	1.58	3	3	**21.17**	92.0%
9	Grow the audience base for cultural events in terms of demographics and geography.	3	1.76	2	3	**20.52**	89.2%
11	Develop a symbiotic relationship between tourism marketing and the cultural sector to enhance Erie County's reputation as an arts and culture destination, with a focus on branding the region as a cohesive "museum district" through targeted strategies and investments.	3	1.00	3	3	**20.00**	87.0%
12	Planning for enhanced access and utilization of artistic facilities & infrastructure	3	2.50	1	2	**20.00**	87.0%
16	Create a calendar for sector organization.Create a coordinated calendar to organize the arts and culture sector, preventing scheduling conflicts and maximizing exposure for diverse programming	2	2.82	3	3	**19.65**	85.4%
1	Advocate for expanded funding criteria that cover administrative overhead costs and provide grants to individuals, non-501(c)(3) entities, and minority groups	2	3.00	2	3	**19.00**	82.6%
17	Launch a Creative Economy/Non-Profit Cohort Program to connect small organizations with larger entities for capacity building, collaboration, and support. (Focus on Organizations)	3	1.90	1	2	**18.79**	81.7%
2	Develop new public funding schemes.	3	2.13	1	1	**18.27**	79.4%
7	Develop Accessible Youth Arts Programming (3)	3	1.00	2	2	**18.00**	78.3%
15	Create a unified ecosystem for professional development and training for artists, cultural workers and arts educators, with mentorship, fellowships, and 'grow your own' programs to build internal talent and address sector fragmentation (focus on individuals)	3	1.14	1	2	**17.27**	75.1%
13	Create a cultural hub to coordinate the arts and culture sector in the region	3	1.00	1	1	**16.00**	69.6%
6	Create a system of collaboration between the arts ecosystem and the school system.	2	1.24	3	2	**15.48**	67.3%
19	Forge Partnerships with the For-Profit Sector to Enhance Non-Profit Capacity through Pro-Bono Services and Business Incentives	2	1.00	1	3	**14.00**	60.9%
10	Create opportunities to bring the entire community together for the arts. Examples include an EC Culture Weekend, a broader EC Festival, and similar events.	2	1.00	1	2	**13.00**	56.5%
14	Develop a coordinated visitor survey system to create a comparative data set, providing sector-wide insights, saving staff time, and facilitating shared learning across organizations.	1	1.49	1	2	**9.97**	43.4%

Below are the 19 initiatives categorized by theme.
(Note these numbers refer to the table on the page prior – not the initiative numbers in the main body of the report.)



Arts Grants and Support Systems

1 Advocate for expanded funding criteria that cover administrative overhead costs and provide grants to individuals, non-501(c)(3) entities, and minority groups

3 Revise the cultural funding process and develop a new one. This new process should be transparent and address the following:

- A multi-year funding model with a standardized application form.
- Acknowledgment of differences in size, mission, and contributions among organizations.
- Clear and well-communicated criteria.

2 Develop new public funding schemes.



Communications Support

4 Encourage the development of arts journalism and content that provides critical coverage of arts and culture across a range of diverse media outlets

5 Marketing and Media Awareness – Enhance visibility for arts and culture through community-based signage, promotional opportunities, and strategic partnerships for in-kind advertising opportunities.

Connections For Youth

6 Create a system of collaboration between the arts ecosystem and the school system.

7 Develop accessible youth arts programming

Creative County

8 Increase accessibility for Arts and Culture events in the County in terms of disabilities

11 Develop a symbiotic relationship between tourism marketing and the cultural sector to enhance Erie County's reputation as an arts and culture destination, with a focus on branding the region as a cohesive "museum district" through targeted strategies and investments.

9 Grow the audience base for cultural events in terms of demographics and geography

12 Planning for enhanced access and utilization of artistic facilities & infrastructure

10 Create opportunities to bring the entire community together for the arts. Examples include an Erie County Culture Weekend, a broader Erie County Festival, and similar events.

13 Develop a coordinated visitor survey system to create a comparative data set, providing sector-wide insights, saving staff time, and facilitating shared learning across organizations.

Cultural Hub

14 Create a cultural hub to coordinate the arts and culture sector in the region

15 Create a unified ecosystem for professional development and training for artists, cultural workers and arts educators, with mentorship, fellowships, and 'grow your own' programs to build internal talent and address sector fragmentation (focus on individuals)

16 Create a calendar to organize the arts and culture sector

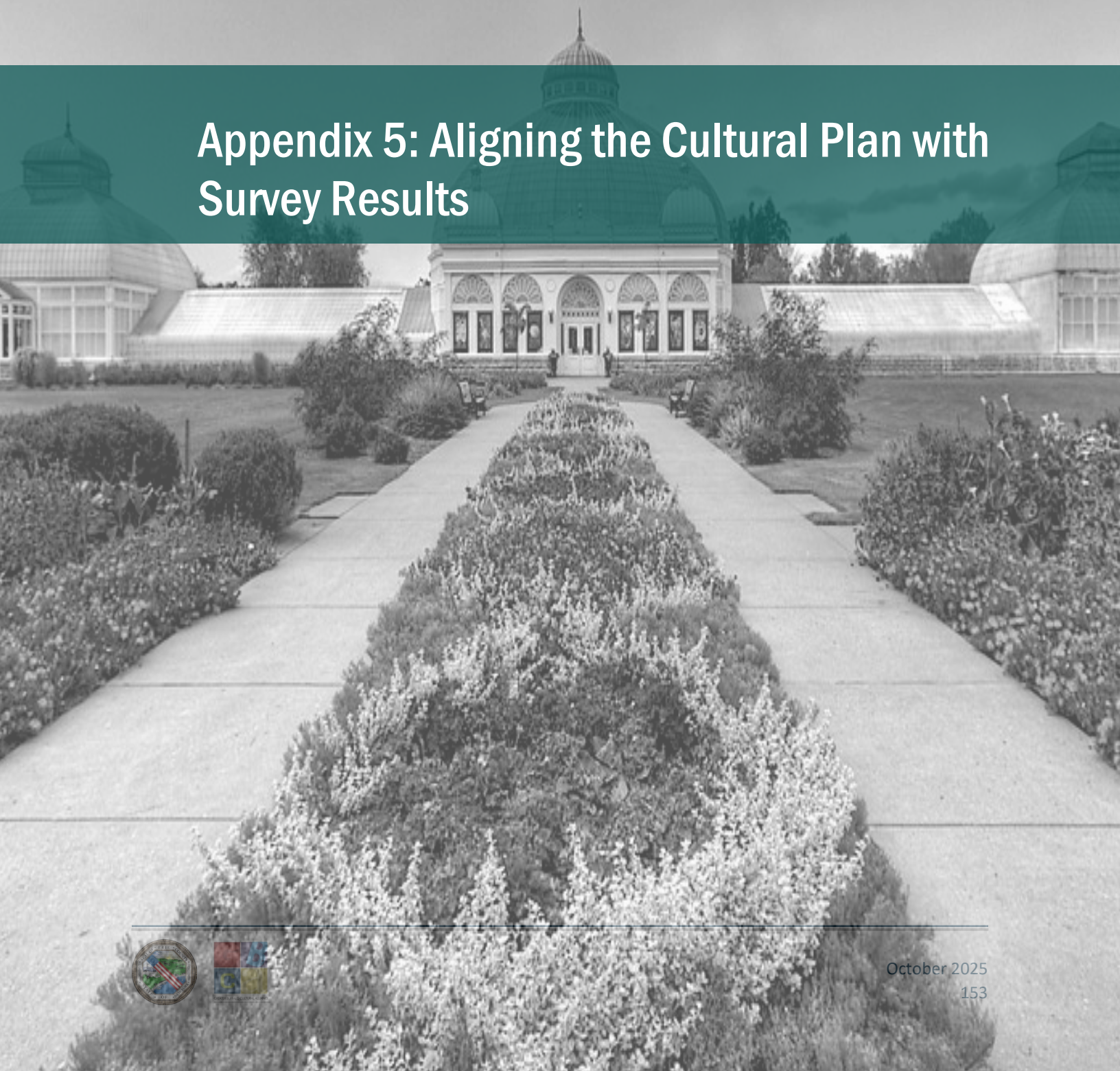
17 Launch a Creative Economy/Non-Profit Cohort Program to connect small organizations with larger entities for capacity building, collaboration, and support. (Focus on Organizations)

18 Develop a grants clearinghouse for resource and funding awareness

19 Forge partnerships with the for-profit Sector to enhance not-for-profit capacity through *pro-bono* services and business incentives

Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens, Buffalo, NY

Appendix 5: Aligning the Cultural Plan with Survey Results



Appendix 5: Aligning the Cultural Plan with Survey Results

This table shows how each of the 19 initiatives, across the five priorities of the plan, align with feedback from survey respondents. The specific requests listed on the column on the right are those that were predominantly mentioned.

Category	Framework Initiatives	General audience requests
	1 2	▪ Increase funding for youth arts programs and school arts education, promote free or low-cost arts programming, and expand events for tweens and teens. ▪ Support and advertise local musical/vocal groups and enhance media and marketing strategies. ▪ Develop a strong online presence to regularly promote these opportunities and improve cultural experiences with interactive elements. ▪ Work with K-12 public schools.
	3 4 5 6 7	▪ Expand arts events to rural communities and various neighborhoods, integrate arts into community spaces, and market arts as a key county asset. ▪ Increase public art reflecting local history, open the Marina for arts shows, and host a local arts festival exclusive to WNY. ▪ Enhance infrastructure (ie. facilities development), support community engagement, and connect organizations. ▪ Develop a unified tourism plan, create a large outdoor venue, and support independent galleries. ▪ Promote local art fairs, support local businesses, and ensure diverse cultural representation.
	8 9	▪ Develop a central resource for all cultural events with an easy-to-navigate guide and comprehensive listings. ▪ Enhance advertising, media coverage, and social media outreach. Invest in quality productions, use traditional and digital media for promotion, and explore AI for media creation. ▪ Improve visibility of local arts, create a unified arts listing, and strengthen promotion and marketing strategies.
	10 11 12	▪ Increase County funding for arts and cultural initiatives, including support for smaller organizations, queer artists, and diverse talents. ▪ Enhance collaboration for events and festivals and ensure equitable funding opportunities. ▪ Maintain public art, provide additional funding and marketing, and improve grant processes. ▪ Offer professional resources for artists, support small businesses, explore financial incentives, and invest in artist-owned and public performance spaces. ▪ Focus grants on smaller organizations and support folk art and creative economy entrepreneurs.
	13 14 15 16 17 18 19	▪ Develop an indoor arts center and create resources for arts coordination, including an effective task force. ▪ Expand regional collaboration to reduce competition and enhance efforts, increase event availability and affordability, and support cultural exchanges. ▪ Raise awareness and support for smaller organizations and those outside Buffalo. ▪ Streamline administrative processes, build infrastructure for all art forms, and form a diverse advisory committee. ▪ Ensure inclusion of both established and new artists, protect cultural resources, and foster connections between large institutions and smaller galleries to elevate local art. ▪ Foster collaboration and resource sharing among artists and organizations. ▪ Improve audience engagement and support folk art and creative economy entrepreneurs.

(*Note the initiative numbers here refer to the table in the previous section – not the initiative numbers in the main body of the report. Also note that Initiative #13,* Develop a coordinated visitor survey system to create a comparative data set, providing sector-wide insights, saving staff time, and facilitating shared learning across organizations, *was initially part of the Cultural Hub but was later moved to Creative County per discussions with the Steering Committee.*)

Appendix 6: Longlist of Potential Initiatives

Theatre of Youth, Buffalo, NY

Appendix 6: Long List of Potential Initiatives

1. Create a comprehensive community arts and culture calendar (beyond just listings), an effective space for collective advocacy, and other cultural hub-like functions to facilitate coordination across the sector.
2. Hire a full-time staff person in the County who is solely dedicated to arts and culture and can help facilitate relationships between arts organizations and with schools, help with grant applications and information about other resources, and more.
3. Develop a closer symbiotic relationship between tourism marketing and the cultural sector to brand the region as an arts and culture center, with explicit strategies and investments to support this effort.
4. Improve the perception of Buffalo as an arts and culture destination to attract more visitors.
5. Reintroduce media outlets and arts journalism (not simply listings) that cover the arts, including the willingness to offer appropriate critical analysis.
6. Create opportunities to bring the entire community together for the arts. Examples include an EC Culture Weekend, a broader EC Festival, and similar events.
7. Provide capacity support through training and professional development tools.
8. Advocate for governmental processes that support arts and culture independently of changes in elected officials.
9. Ensure an awareness across the sector of "capacity that is there already" for use.
10. Create administrative exchange programs to foster capacity building and knowledge sharing.
11. Create incentives for cultural participation for youth.
12. Crowd-source/share resources around accounting, HR, facilities, and IT.
13. Establish an initiative for arts funders to coordinate their processes (a consolidated funding application, for example, with multi-year commitments).
14. Create a regional asset map (potentially in collaboration with VBN).
15. Establish partnerships with WNY colleges and universities to leverage any underutilized capacity and resources for capacity building through collaboration.
16. Foster face-to-face contact between funders and organizations, with particular emphasis on enhancing interactions between small organizations and legislators who allocate funding. This direct engagement will help those in power better understand the impact of these organizations.
17. Develop centrally located, shared rehearsal space / community-based 'warehouse for arts'

18. Expand ASI's Culture Access Pass or develop a more robust and accessible version.
19. Address the lack of awareness and communication around arts and culture by considering ideas such as adding street pole banners and 'free' ads at airports dedicated to 501(c)(3) arts organizations.
20. Establish a cohesive training and development pipeline (elementary schools to college and beyond), incorporating mentorship and fellowship opportunities for cultural workers at existing entities, to address the current fragmentation and ensure continuous professional growth.
21. Develop business incentives for in-kind support by for profits of non-profits.
22. Focus on capacity building for small and mid-sized organizations, drawing from the successful development history of Just Buffalo Literary Center and similar entities, rather than solely creating new organizations.
23. "Create an ecosystem with feeders and pipelines for continuous growth and development."
24. In response to the proliferation of small and new organizations, explore the potential for larger organizations to act as intermediaries for smaller, emerging entities. Large organizations should focus on supporting smaller organizations by partnering more effectively and helping manage their growth.
25. Find a way to collaborate with NFTA to provide free transportation options for visiting cultural assets, which would particularly improve accessibility during winter when travel to and from rural locations is challenging.
26. Develop a directory of arts organizations to channel community and individual interests into existing organizations, avoiding duplication of efforts.
27. Creative economy/non-profit knowledge sharing cohort program.
28. Develop a system that better facilitates cultural organizations' collaborations with school systems, both for school visitations and fieldtrips. This system should have a pronounced focus on benefiting young people and a more organized and coordinated approach across different districts and schools.
29. Create grants focused specifically on collectives, individuals, or artists (non-501(c)(3)s) that are not just project-based, but also help with other general expenses.
30. Foster an atmosphere of collaboration in the grant-making sector.
31. Consider sunsetting organizations that are no longer vital.
32. Enhance and support organizations in securing more federal or regional grants and financial support.
33. Address the (increasing) shortage of quality arts education teachers in schools; restore arts curricula.

34. Develop a tax to support funding, taking inspiration from successful examples like the ZAP tax in St. Louis, and similar taxes in Salt Lake City and Colorado Springs (LART tax) -Is there a way to ensure that residents are not additionally burdened by these tax receipts devoted to arts and culture?
35. Create spaces for artists to come together and collaborate in-person (e.g. “salon” style sessions that could foster knowledge-sharing).
36. Develop a multi-year funding process. The Wilson Foundation’s funding model is exemplary in this regard, as it maintains oversight from year to year without repeating the same processes annually. The AAM accreditation process is another useful model – organizations undergo the process once for a set period, tie it to a strategic plan with benchmarks, and make revisions or updates every five years. Rotate organizations as cohorts annually and support them in succeeding through the extensive accreditation process.
37. Develop incentives for larger culturals [or smaller ones] to take things on the road to other EC communities.
38. "Identify partners that could provide in-kind ad space such as billboards or ads in

magazines."

39. Investigate available state funding for field trips that covers $10 per student, substitute teacher costs, and transportation, especially since Erie County schools are rated as needing support (C-Rated).
40. Explore the concept of organizing cultural field trip days where students visit multiple organizations.
41. Creation of a business service organization.

"Decrease barriers of communication and access to arts and culture information for non-English speaking communities."

42. Establish partnerships with the private sector and identify opportunities for pro-bono services.
43. Create (or identify) a database of funding resources and available opportunities (presumably beyond ASI’s newsletter listings). A support organization could also help and encourage organizations to be creative in accessing these new sources of funding.
44. Networking opportunities between organizations of the same size and different sizes (could be virtual or in-person).
45. Create a standardized application model, such as a common application form (CFA), to reduce the repetitive and substantial work required for each individual funder with varying priorities.
46. Revise the cultural funding process to better align with the diverse value propositions that various types of organizations – and different sectors with distinct funding streams – bring to the community. Not all organizations should be held to the same standards

of accountability and uniform criteria. The funding process should acknowledge differences in size, mission, and contributions, as a one-size-fits-all approach does not serve the ecosystem effectively. [EC's tiered system noted as a positive step in this direction.]

47. Create a transparent portal for funding applications that shows how reviewers' input is used, taken seriously, and impacts grantmaking outcomes. The NYSCA process serves as a good model for this approach.
48. Engage high school and college students to volunteer and work in cultural organizations
49. Develop and promote a more cohesive "museum district"
50. Engage the for-profit community as dedicated partners.
51. Partner with travel agencies bringing in buses of tourists to highlight assets across the County.
52. Creation of a cultural hub that could vet these kinds of vendors and provide a list with vetted professionals or employ such professionals itself.
53. Focus on engaging Millennials and Gen Z and identify ways of bringing art to youth (especially as a mental health tool).
54. Develop enthusiast/incentives (?) for philanthropy in newcomers, young professionals in Erie County.
55. Collaborate with schools to align exhibitions (and other programming) with the curriculum to enhance the visibility of cultural activities across the county (e.g. Zeitz MoCAA in South Africa).
56. Enhance services of bus lines going out and coming in from rural locations.
57. Develop a coordinated scheduling system to ensure unique and diverse programming by regional artists and organizations, preventing overlap (e.g. artist with simultaneous exhibition in two places, two theaters offering same play, etc.) and maximizing exposure and impact across different venues.

Develop and support effective fellowship programs [Cullen, ASI Springboard, Oishei Leaders offered as examples]

58. Foster partnerships between large and small organizations. These partnerships could include providing a certain number of hours of grant writing assistance for small organizations, for example.
59. Create an insurance bargaining coalition to help reduce rising insurance costs in healthcare and other areas. Collective bargaining power within the arts and culture sector so that organizations are not treated individually could yield substantial savings - Some organizations have had to decline EC funding because the cost of insurance required to accept the funding would have left them with a deficit, as the funding was insufficient to cover that cost.
60. Identify (or develop) and promote awareness of a grants clearinghouse.
61. Percent for Art program or percentage of HOT allocations program.

62. Foster the relationship and integration with the for-profit world (volunteering services, devoting professional time, offering space, etc.) – could there be a business incentive for appropriate and committed in-kind support?
63. Develop artists' housing program.
64. Include high quality music education in our schools, delivered by competent and inspiring teachers. This could include funding for our organizations to interact directly with students during the school day as well as after.
65. Leverage the resources of start-up companies to assist non-profits, which often face similar capacity issues, and provide support for cross-sector learning more broadly.
66. Communicate and establish clear funding criteria. Develop criteria that provide a trustworthy basis for understanding funding decisions. Ensure that feedback is provided on all submitted information – what an organization offers and its context should be part of the criteria.
67. Have a "special events" bus that can drive around different cultural locations across the County.
68. Nurture and incentivize 'grow your own' pipeline programs within organizations.
69. Advocate for the acceptance of administrative overhead costs in grant making. Recognize and support the inclusion of operating costs in grant budgets. For example, UB charges a 30% overhead fee.
70. Create a comparative data set, including coordinated visitor surveys and studies, to provide sector-wide insights rather than relying on disparate data from individual organizations. Coordinating visitor studies across organizations will allow for comparative and aggregate data, potentially saving staff time and facilitating learning.
71. Facilitate participation in common projects (DEAI work by largest 10 culturals held out as example)
72. Explore how artists' unions can and should be involved.
73. Improve coordination of the crowded theater market to avoid resource and schedule conflicts.
74. Busing grants to historic sites.
75. Professional development for art teachers: required to complete 70 hrs/yr of professional development and can be difficult to teachers. Perhaps arts/culture non-profits can develop professional development training programs for art teachers? for example, Stitch Buffalo offer a workshop for art teachers to teach children to embroider (or other fabric arts?) Squeaky Wheel may be able to tecah some media-related stuff to teachers (besides teaching the children directly)
76. Hub with teacher funding and connections/resources (available/vetted programs/artists to teach the kids, either in schools or offsite, and costs, etc.)
77. As a performing artist, I have been nearly universally unable to perform

anywhere in Erie County because of the persistent lack of accessibility infrastructure at venues. Masking is not encouraged anywhere. HEPA filtration, let alone done properly for the amount of patrons in a space, is virtually nonexistent. We have almost no spaces or access to UV lamps proven to allow performing artists to perform maskless in safety and to provide lasting levels of protection towards audiences. There is no funding or interest in making spaces accessible. We are left to either risk disability and death or risk unemployment, abject poverty, housing instability and homelessness, our beyond capacity shelter system, and the criminalization of homelessness. Is this how we want to treat our brilliant residents? Is this pushing arts forward to maim and kill us off? The facts support this is not hyperbole. This is the tortured reality of our artists. And if you are immunocompromised in any way or more likely to catch things? Count the dead artists. Remember their names. Inform your practice and your budgets.

78. Expand transportation options - State Park's "Connect Kids" is useful for historic sites and parks – bussing grants

79. Potential connections with caregiving agencies/social services/disability services/ People Inc./ etc. to reach disabled populations? Difficulty reaching them due to mediums (visual, audio, etc.) as well as some more house-bound or who have difficulty attending locations (whether mental or physical). Issues for the organizations include capacity (such as arranging ASL interpreters, or physical barriers to locations) and costs.

Appendix 7: Cultural Plan Case Studies

Kleinhans Music Hall, Buffalo, NY

& Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

Appendix 7: Cultural Plan Case Studies

Cuyahoga County, (Cleveland) Ohio

The Cuyahoga County cultural plan was developed under the Cultural Plan of Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (CAC). It was completed in 2000, with a completed progress report in 2007, and a case studies document in 2008. The plan focused on three key pillars and objectives:

1. **Public Benefit**: The plan prioritizes the creation of meaningful connections between arts organizations and their communities by emphasizing inclusivity, accessibility, and community engagement. This involves ensuring cultural programs address local needs and enhance community belonging.

80. **Artistic and Cultural Vibrancy**: The plan has initiatives focused on fostering creativity and relevance in programming, with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. CAC-funded organizations are encouraged to create culturally significant experiences that engage a variety of audiences.

81. **Organizational Capacity**: The plan prioritizes strengthening the operational capabilities of arts organizations, which includes strategic planning, financial sustainability, and fostering environments where artists and cultural professionals can thrive.

The CAC, who is in charge of implementing the plan, is funded through a dedicated tax on cigarettes. The revised tax was expanded in 2024 and is estimated to provide approximately $160 million over the next ten years, which ensures sustained support for arts and culture organizations across the county. Similarly to Erie County, the CAC is an important supporter of the sector and has distributed over $247 million to more than 485 organizations across the county. Just in 2023, $12.3 million were given out across 280 grants. There were over 275 organizations funded in 2023.

Alleghany County, (Pittsburgh) PA: "Imagine Pittsburgh 2030"

Imagine Pittsburgh 2030 is a long-term cultural and revitalization plan focused on transforming Pittsburgh's downtown area into a vibrant hub of economic, cultural, and community activity. The plan began in 2010 as a community-driven initiative and is likely to be completed by 2028. The arts and culture aspect of the plan are integrated into the broader revitalization efforts of the plan. Key arts and culture elements of the plan include:

- Converting outdated commercial office spaces into mixed-use housing (a significant percentage is designated as affordable);
- Enhancing public spaces like Market Square, Point State Park, and the Cultural District and create amenities such as outdoor amphitheaters, play areas, and green spaces;
- Supporting local artists and cultural institutions to enhance the vibrancy of the area; and
- Fostering local arts and culture, with significant support from the Pennsylvania Council of Arts and regional organizations.

By integrating arts and culture, the plan aims to foster a sense of community and identity; attract new residents and make the county and Pittsburgh more appealing and livable; and to enhance tourism by

showcasing the city's cultural richness and heritage. This plan involves significant collaboration among city, county, state, and private stakeholders. Funding includes a $600 million investments, with contributions from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Alleghany County, the City of Pittsburgh, private sector partners, and philanthropic foundations. This is a similar funding and partnership model to the one that Erie County is exploring through this cultural plan.

CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan (Austin, Texas)

Austin's cultural planning efforts are centered around this plan, which was adopted in 2010. The plan aims to ensure that the city's rapid growth does not negatively impact its rich cultural heritage. Key aspects include supporting arts and culture through initiatives that prioritize equity, inclusion, and the sustainability of creative spaces:

- **Cultural Vitality**: Preserve and enhance Austin's creative identity by supporting local artists, cultural organizations, and historic districts.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Focus on historically marginalized communities, including East Austin's Black and Mexican American neighborhoods, by integrating their cultural stories and spaces into city planning.
- **Economic Development**: Recognize the arts as a critical sector that contributes significantly to Austin's economy, including its live music and festival scenes.
- **Sustainability of Creative Spaces**: Address the displacement of artists and cultural organizations due to rising rents and development challenges through funding and creative space programs.

Some key initiatives that emerged include:

- **Creative Space Assistance Program**: provides funding to artists and organizations to help with the rising costs of acquiring studio spaces or off-site spaces.
- **Expansion of Cultural Infrastructure**: includes projects like the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center expansion and the relocation of the Dougherty Arts Center.
- **Historic Preservation**: the Equity-Based Preservation Plan works to protect historically significant sites tied to underrepresented communities.

Austin's arts funding comes in great part from its Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT), which supports arts grants and programs. Recent restructuring of funding, through programs like Nexus, Thrive, and Elevate, aims to prioritize equity and streamlines application processes to include smaller and underserved organizations. In 2024, for example, over $21 million was distributed to musicians and artists through these grants.

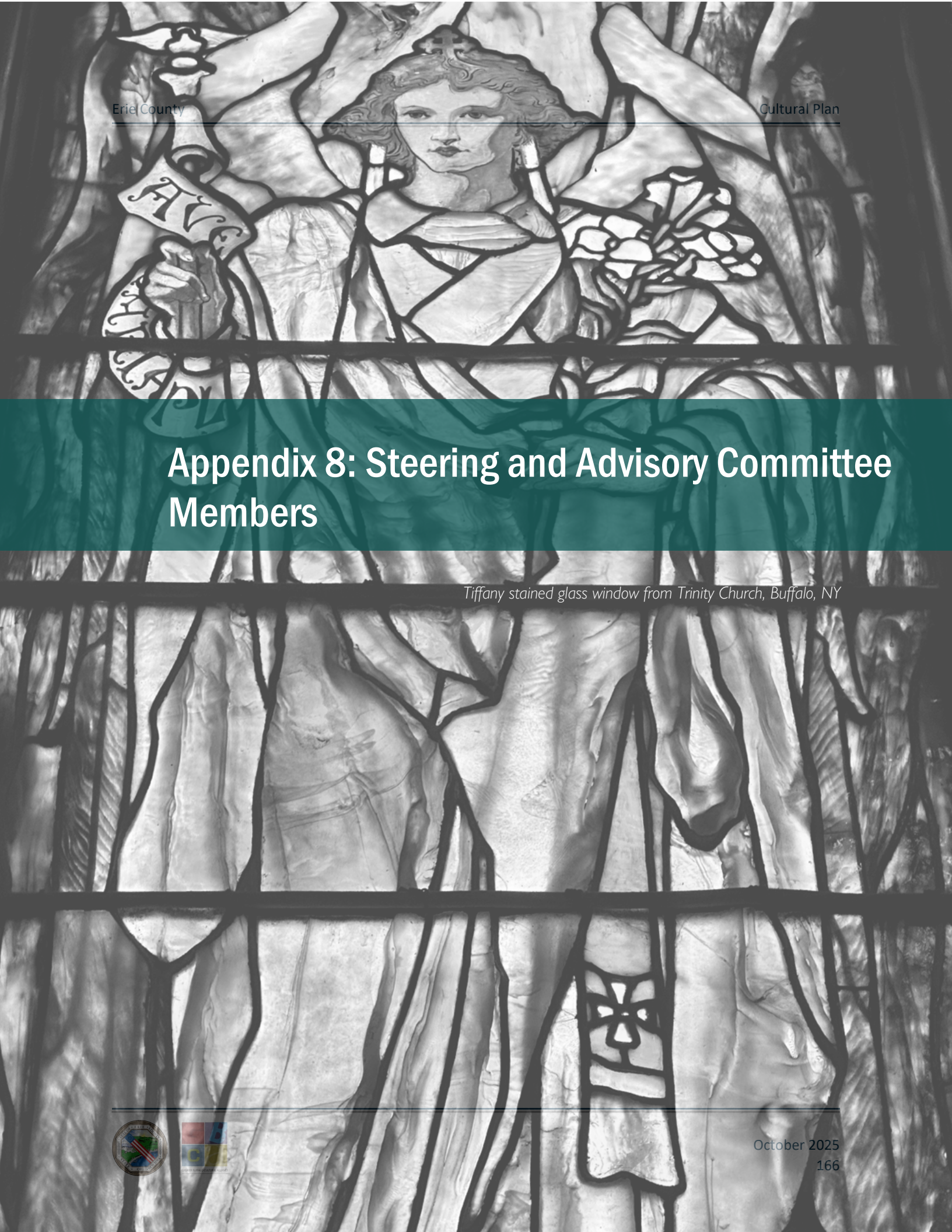
Other Arts and Culture Funding Models

- The **Lodgers and Automobile Rental Tax (LART)** in Colorado Springs generates revenue from a 2% tax on lodging and campground rentals and a 1% tax on automobile rentals. The revenue is collected and allocated by the city for various purposes, including tourism, economic development, and community

events. It indirectly funds arts and culture in the form of festivals, cultural events, performing arts events and other similar initiatives that directly promote tourism and economic impact.

- The **Zoo, Arts & Parks (ZAP) Program** in Salt Lake County, Utah, supports arts and culture by distributing a portion of a 0.1% county sales tax to a variety of organizations and initiatives in three categories:
  - ***Tier I (Large Organizations)***: Funding goes to large cultural institutions like museums, symphonies, and performing arts organizations that have a significant impact on the local arts and culture scene. These organizations must have an annual operating budget of at least $400,000.
  - ***Tier II (Small and Medium Organizations)***: Supports smaller arts and cultural organizations that may not qualify for Tier I funding. This includes community-based arts programs, local theaters, dance troupes, and educational initiatives that bring cultural opportunities to underserved populations.
  - ***Zoological Category***: While this funding primarily supports the county's zoos and animal parks, these institutions often host cultural and educational events that intersect with arts programming.
  - ***Cultural Development and Accessibility***: ZAP funding helps increase accessibility to arts and culture by enabling free or low-cost programming for residents. Funding supports cultural diversity by investing in programs that celebrate various traditions, languages, and histories within the community.
  - ***Community and Tourism Impact***: Arts organizations funded by ZAP contribute to the local economy by attracting tourists and enhancing Salt Lake County's reputation as a cultural destination.

Appendix 8: Steering and Advisory Committee Members



Tiffany stained glass window from Trinity Church, Buffalo, NY

Appendix 8: Steering and Advisory Committee Members

Steering Committee

Thomas Baines, Deputy Commissioner of Planning & Economic Development, Erie County
Scott Behrend, Artistic/Executive Director, Road Less Traveled Productions & Co-Chair GBCA
Connie Campanaro, Partner & Co-Founder, NuLevel Strategies LLC, Erie County Arts & Cultural Advisory Board Chair
Mariely Ortiz, Senior Planner, Erie County
Yuki Numata Resnick, Director of Arts and Culture, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, & Musician
Mark Rountree, Chief Planner, Erie County
Laurie Torrell, Co-Chair GBCA
Briana Zuchowski, Assistant Planner, Erie County



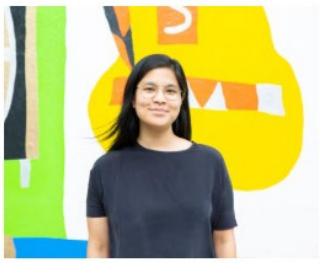
Thomas E. Baines, Esq.
Steering Committee
Deputy Commissioner of Planning & Economic Development ECDEP; EACAB



Scott Behrend
Steering Committee
Artistic/Executive Director of Road Less Traveled, GBCA representative



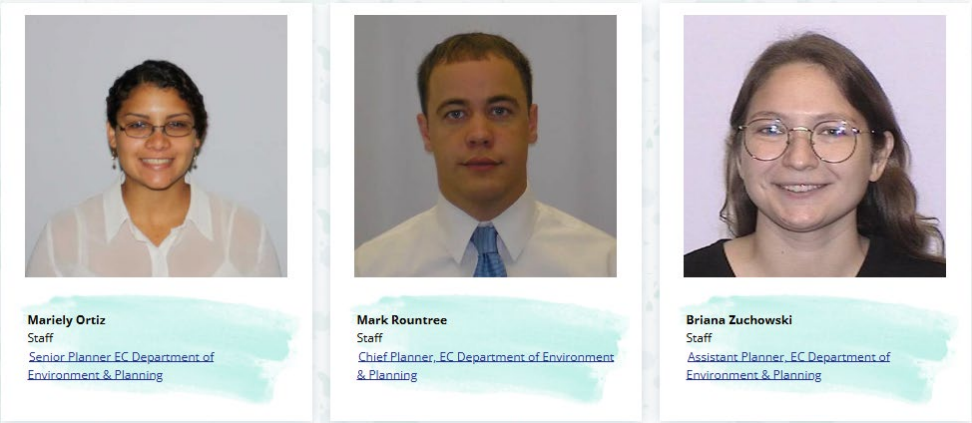
Connie Campanaro
Steering Committee
Arts/culture organization leadership, non-profit consultant. EACAB representative



Yuki Numata Resnick
Steering Committee
Violinist, Arts/Culture nonprofit leader, Director of Arts and Culture at the Community Foundation

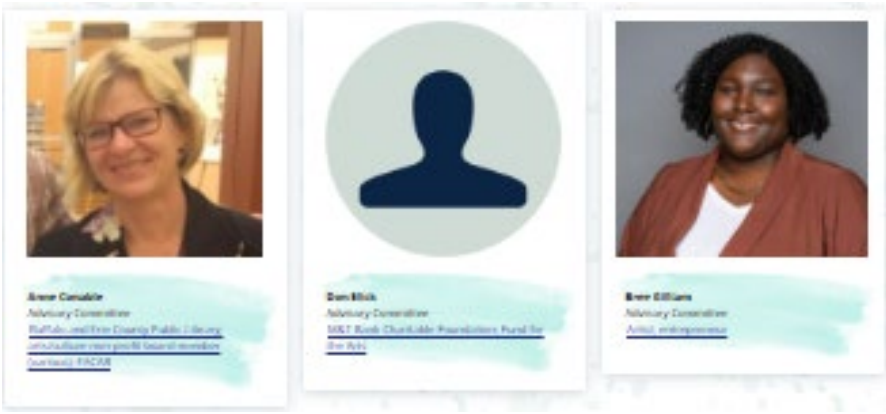


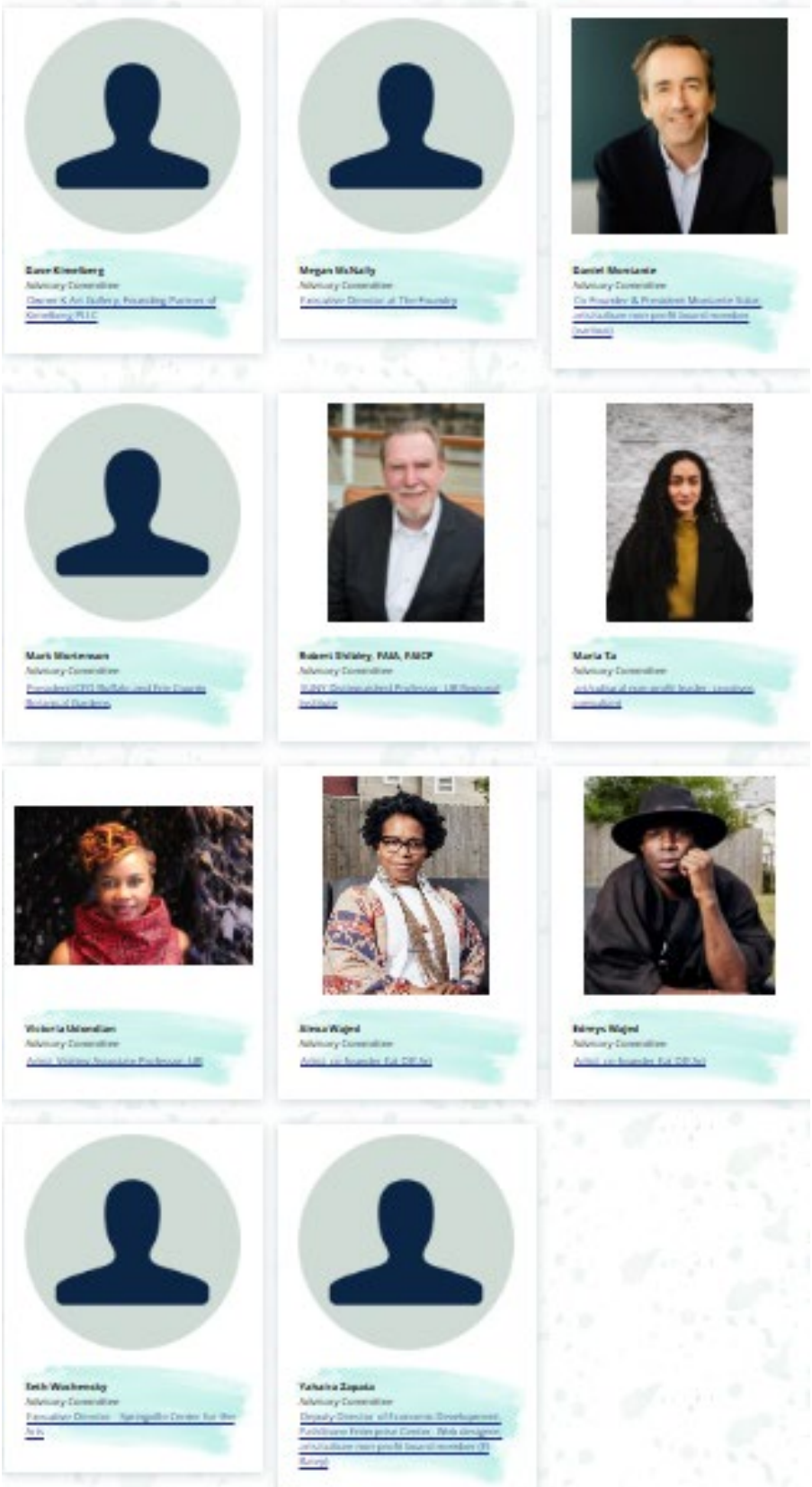
Laurie Torrell
Steering Committee
Arts/culture organization leadership, non-profit consultant. GBCA representative



Advisory Committee

Anne Conable, Former Manager of Community Engagement, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library
Don Elick, Senior VP, M&T Charitable Foundation
Bree Gilliam, Artist
Dave Kimelberg, Founder, K Art
Megan McNally, Executive Director, The Foundry
Daniel Montante, President, Montante Solar
Mark Mortenson, Former President and CEO, Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens
Meg Quinn, Former Artistic Director of Theatre of Youth (TOY)
Bob Shibley, Former Dean of School of Architecture and Planning, University of Buffalo
Maria Ta, Interim Executive Director, Ujima Company
Victoria Udondian, Artist
Alexa Wajed, Artist and Founder, Eat Off Art
Edreys Wajed, Artist and Founder, Eat Off Art
Seth Wochensky, Executive Director, Springville Center for the Arts
Yahaira Zapata, Deputy Director of Economic Development, PathStone Corporation





Consultant Team

AEA Consulting

Annie Bares, Research Analyst
Catalina Casas, Consultant
Mariana Gomez Mendoza, Research Analyst
Joe Lin-Hill, Senior Associate & Former Deputy Director at the Buffalo AKG
Daniel Payne, Principal

Jacques Planning & Consulting Services

Jacques Garcia
Tamesha Parris



Catalina Casas
Consultant
AEA Consulting



Jacques Garcia
Consultant
Founder and Principal, Jacques Planning & Consulting Services



Joe Lin-Hill
Consultant
Senior Associate, AEA Consulting



Tamesha Parris
Consultant
Project Manager, Jacques Planning & Consulting Services



Daniel Payne
Consultant
Managing Principal, AEA Consulting

Acknowledgments



Mural at Buffalo Cobblestone Commons, by Morgan Blair. NFTA Yard (DL&W Terminal)

Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgment

The work on this Cultural Plan has primarily taken place in Erie County New York, on the traditional land of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, one of the oldest and most powerful confederacies ever formed among native peoples. This confederacy was based on peace, matriarchal extended families, and democratic representative government which balanced local interests with the group as a whole.

We acknowledge the sovereignty of the Six Nations – the Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca and Tuscarora – and the treaties that were made on these territories. Especially the Dish with One Spoon Wampum, an agreement developed by Indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes region and northeastern North America which holds that we are to act respectfully to one another and to this land. It is understood as a sacred agreement and promise. It's about sharing and making sure we can survive into the future. It is about working in friendship to make sure resources are shared, preserved and replenished.

Though this acknowledgement cannot correct the many wrongs of the far and recent past, we pledge to work toward partnership – with a spirit of reconciliation and healing for present and future generations.

Special Thank You to Supporters

Erie County's extraordinary partnership made undertaking this Cultural Plan possible.

First funding was obtained through a NYS Empire State Development Strategic Planning and Feasibility Study grant secured by Erie County in partnership with Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance. Special thanks to:

Mark Poloncarz, Erie County Executive

Maria Whyte, Immediate past Deputy County Executive

Dan Castle, Commissioner Department of Environment & Planning

Mariely Ortiz, Senior Planner (& Project Manager for the Cultural Plan)

Thomas E. Baines, Esq. Deputy Commissioner of Planning & Economic Development

Mark Rountree, Chief Planner Dept. of Environment and Planning

Briana Zuchowski, Assistant Planner Dept. of Environment and Planning

& all of the Erie County Legislators

Fund for the Arts at the time of project commitment (Oct. 2023) included the following foundations, with leadership by Beth Gosch, Western New York Foundation and Darren Penoyer, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo:

Cameron and Jane Baird

Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

Conable Family Foundation

KeyBank

M&T Charitable Foundation

John R. Oishei Foundation

Western New York Foundation

Additional essential financial support was provided by:

Cullen Foundation

Robert J. and Martha B. Fierle Family Foundation

Fiscal sponsorship and administrative support for Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance is provided by Arts Services Inc.

The project consultant firm AEA Consulting went above and beyond, contributing many hours of additional time to see this Cultural Plan through, and we are grateful.

An in-kind consulting contribution was also made by Mary Beth Debus, Program Savvy Consulting.

The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System, under the leadership of John Spears was an extraordinary partner, tapping into its 37-branch system and providing meeting space to support the work.

Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance (GBCA) is a grassroots effort which works to collectively position arts, culture and creativity as critical community assets and priority areas for public and private investment and engagement. It is led by volunteer steering committee broadly representative of the cultural community which meets 6 times a year and provides many hundreds of hours of contributed talent to projects undertaken. Thanks to all the members of the Steering Committee who contributed in ways large and small to this project. Special thanks to Meg Quinn who served as lead researcher for GBCA's investigation of Cultural Plans and Planning processes across the Country and around the world.

Special Dedication to Mark Mortenson

We make special acknowledgement of the life, legacy and lasting impact of Mark Mortenson whose sudden and unexpected passing on September 14, 2024, was an enormous loss to the cultural community. Mark was involved with Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance working to support creation of the Cultural Plan from its very inception, right through the last Advisory Committee he attended in July. Mark's professional life was devoted to community service, starting as the President of the Buffalo Museum of Science, where he played a pivotal role in its revitalization. He continued to make significant contributions at The Arc of Erie County, The Richardson, and the Architecture Museum. His most recent role as the Executive Director of the Buffalo and Erie Botanical Gardens saw him overseeing an expansion and remodel that further enhanced his community's cultural landscape. Mark's dedication to his work and his community was matched by the affection and respect he garnered from colleagues and peers. His strategic brilliance and unparalleled sense of humor illuminated and made so much more enjoyable the Cultural Plan journey and we will seek to do justice to his memory in the days to come.