



February 13, 2023

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs.

My name is David Greenham and I'm the executive director of the Maine Arts Commission.

Thank you for taking the time this morning to hear from my colleagues and me as you consider Maine's investment in the cultural life of the state.

In my testimony for the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee last month, I shared the news of the Commission's unanimous approval of our 2023 – 2028 strategic plan, which was developed over the past two years and included numerous discussions with more than 100 individuals across the state, and comments received from many others. The text of the plan is included at the end of your packet.

Our strategy for the next five years breaks down into four categories: Service, Connecting, Funding, and Advancement towards the future.

Under the category of service there is a recognition that while grant giving is an important part of the Arts Commission's work – we award about \$400,000 in grants each year – there is a need for the staff to place additional focus on work of public service that goes beyond grant giving. Public service is, of course, at the heart of all the work of state government.

The second focus that emerged centered on making connections. It was the most common need expressed by those we spoke with during the creation of the plan. After the past couple of years, especially, we've realized that while we can manage just fine with remote work and zoom meetings, there's a comfort and appreciation when we can connect in person, make small talk, and share a smile or a nod. This section of our plan will ensure that we regularly work to bring artists, arts workers and organizational leaders, together in conversation and resource sharing. In addition, we will work with discipline-based groups to encourage and support the creation of state-wide affiliate cooperative groups and support their plans to gather and share resources.

We knew that funding would emerge as a topic in our discussions. The arts are underfunded in Maine. The state's seventy-five cent per-capita spending for the arts ranks Maine 33rd in the country, just ahead of New Hampshire but well behind our New England neighbors in Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

And I just found out last Thursday that we might have a potential funding challenge to address this year. Fifty percent of our funding comes from the National Endowment for the Arts, and in order to receive that funding, the state must provide a 1:1 match.

We have a United States congress that is deeply divided, as you know. However, even our congress has agreed that our investment in culture is critical. Increases for the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and other culture-focused agencies are included in the current budget plans and have received strong, bipartisan support.

We learned from the NEA last week that the Maine Arts Commission can expect to receive between a 14 and 16 percent increase in funding through our partnership agreement in the coming fiscal year. A direct 14% increase would bring us to just over a million dollars, but also bring us within \$20,000 of our current state match. If the Federal partnership award is higher than 14% it might mean that without increasing the state match, Maine would lose out on some Federal arts funding, which I'm sure we don't want to do. We'll keep you informed of any developments there, but I wanted to share that piece of news.

However, as we look to the next five years, while an increase in direct state funding would be very impactful, we believe that expansion can also be achieved through partnerships with other state agencies.

Working to expand arts education with the Department of Education is an obvious choice. We're working on that.

But there are also other opportunities that Maine has rarely tried.

For example, we talk often in Maine about our aging population. Creative Aging programs – facilitated artistic programs that improve the emotional well-being of older adults, supports good health, strengthens social bonds, and brings a heightened experience of purpose and joy - are thriving in many states. There is consistent and reliable evidence that robust creative aging programs, aid in the prevention and promotion of chronic preventable decline, and are a useful tool in management, treatment, and end of life care. Maine is uniquely poised to become a leader in creative aging. We've been discussing our very small creative aging program with the Maine Council on Aging, and we'll soon be inviting your colleagues on the Health and Human Services Committee to examine the opportunities that already exist to expand that program.

Additionally, in some states there are thriving arts education programs in partnership with State Correction Departments which have been shown in study after study to reduce recidivism in our prisons, thus reducing costs.

There are several other possible collaborations. Just on Friday I sat in on a national zoom call that focused on the many successful collaborations around the country between arts agencies and state departments of transportation. It's my understanding that there is now funding available at the national level for state collaborations between arts and the DOT.

We will set objectives to work with other agencies – both state and national - to advocate and partner to create a larger opportunity for artist projects to exist in Maine. Like the examples I've provided, our strategic plan reminds us of the need to recognize that the arts have a significant role to play in the challenges that we face as a state.

The final area of focus in our plan is Advancing. To be most effective, we must have the ability to anticipate, shift, and adjust to the everchanging opportunities and challenges in Maine. We don't know what lies ahead, but we know we must work to strengthen our arts infrastructure, communications and collaborations so that, together, we can face an uncertain future with strength and focus. Programs of workforce and organizational development are necessary in the arts just as they are in every other industry. As I mentioned, the full text of our plan is included in your packet.

In the meantime, our small, but very dedicated staff of eight and a half FTE employees is working to help organizations and individual artists as they continue to navigate their way out of the irreparable damage that occurred through the Covid shut downs and the continued challenges with filling seats, developing and booking gigs for performances in non-arts venues such as restaurants and pubs, and working to rebuild a once-robust arts and craft market that existed prior to 2020.

The need is great. On Friday, we just closed our organizational operations grants, and received an unprecedented 107 applications requesting a total of \$803,000. We have the funding to make awards to less than 20% of these applicants.

Nevertheless, we're working to help them in ways beyond funding. In just the past two weeks, our staff has served as an advisor, thought partner, or just a listening ear for organizations and individuals in Auburn, Augusta, Bangor, Bar Harbor, Bass Harbor, Bath, Belfast, Bethel, Biddeford, Blue Hill, Boothbay Harbor, Brunswick, Bucksport, Camden, Caribou, Denmark, Dexter, Dover-Foxcroft, Easton, Eastport, Ellsworth, Falmouth, Farmingdale, Fort Kent, Freeport, Gardiner, Gorham, Gouldsboro, Harpswell, Houlton, Kittery, Lebanon, Lewiston, Lille, Limestone, Littleton, Manchester, Millinocket, Monmouth, Mount Vernon, New Gloucester, New Sweden, Norway, Orland, Phillips, Poland, Portland, Presque Isle, Rangely, Rockland, Rockport, Saco, South Gardiner, South Paris, South Portland, St. Agathe, Van Buren, Wallagrass, Wayne, Wilton, Windham, Winter Harbor, Winthrop, Wiscasset, Yarmouth.

The arts really are everywhere in our state, and on behalf of all of those who engage in the arts in Maine: professional practitioners, hobbyists, and fans, we thank you for your support and advocacy for the arts.

Sincerely,



David Greenham
Executive Director
The Maine Arts Commission



Mission

The Maine Arts Commission fosters and encourages public interest and participation in the cultural heritage and artistic expression of our state. We fulfill our mission through partnerships and collaborations, outreach and advocacy, initiatives, information sharing and grants for organizations, individual artists, and communities throughout Maine.

Vision

The arts play an essential role in Maine's past, present, and future. The arts are the catalyst for creatively responding to our challenges, celebrations, traditions, and aspirations. Our arts reflect the character of our state and its people. Arts are collaborative, inspirational, healing, help us explore our humanity, and celebrate our commonalities and our differences. The arts bring us together and are a necessary part of a rich and fulfilling life in our state.

Land Acknowledgement

The Maine Arts Commission is located in the homeland of the Wabanaki, the People of the Dawn. We recognize and honor the Abenaki, Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot Nations and all the First Nations communities who have lived here for hundreds of generations in what is known today as Maine. *Note: Compiled with assistance from Chris Newell (Passamaquoddy), Co-Founder/Director of Education for Akomawt Educational Initiative and a former member of the Maine Arts Commission.*

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

We believe that all people – including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion - deserve equal access and opportunities to participate in a vibrant, creative life. We will implement internal strategies and policies to ensure cultural equity is uplifted as we continually strive to build a more inclusive Maine.

About the Creation of the Strategic Plan

Creation of this plan began in 2021. This plan is a work in progress and will be revisited and edited as needed to ensure that it serves as a relevant guidepost for the work of the Maine Arts Commission through 2027.

The plan includes four areas of focus: Serving, Connecting, Funding, and Advancing. These major themes emerged during our many conversations over the past two years.

SERVING

WHAT WE HEARD AND LEARNED FROM OUR CONSTITUENTS:

As with all government agencies, service must be at the center of our work. The Arts Commission works best for all when we share tools and resources with arts workers, arts organizations, and those who support them. As we learn the full impacts of the pandemic, our work to assist and elevate the creative sector in Maine is even more essential.

SERVICE AIMS + OUTCOMES

The Maine Arts Commission will:

- ✓ Be more visible to the public and to the arts and culture sector as an arts advocate, leader, partner, collaborator, funder, and friend.
- ✓ Be recognized as an arts development hub: a trusted go-to guide, listener, thought partner, and helper.
- ✓ Deliver relevant and effective development services, and research for artists and arts organizations as they successfully build audiences, raise funds, and become inspirational partners in their communities.

PROPOSED SERVICE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Demonstrate that in addition to being a grant maker, the Arts Commission is ready to assist by listening, problem solving, making connections, and encouraging collaboration.
2. Deliver services that empower artists and leaders throughout the state through professional development opportunities such as workshops and skill-building programs, as well as sharing accessible information, resources, and toolkits.
3. Provide current and accessible resources for artists and arts organizations to participate in their local cultural development.
4. Continue developing new collaborations with other service-focused vendors that offer financial, legal, health, and insurance services; affordable housing; access to equipment and arts supplies; and more.

CONNECTING

WHAT WE HEARD AND LEARNED FROM OUR CONSTITUENTS

We must collaborate. None of us alone is as strong as all of us together. Working together enhances knowledge sharing, builds teamwork and trust, strengthens communications, relationships, and makes goals easier to attain. We heard repeatedly in planning conversations that artmakers need help honing their community building practices. Keeping arts relevant and valued in communities requires constant fresh engagement and connection. The Arts Commission's efforts to connect, facilitate collaboration, and convene will remain critical.

CONNECTING AIMS + OUTCOMES

The Maine Arts Commission will:

- ✓ Work to collectively produce a positive impact of the arts in Maine.
- ✓ Facilitate teamwork building and networking.
- ✓ Lift new voices and help facilitate essential connections among under resourced communities with other communities in Maine, New England, and Eastern Canada.
- ✓ Convene artists and organizations to strengthen their capacity and sustainability as an arts network.
- ✓ Support state-wide and regional collectives to advocate, encourage, spotlight, and promote innovation and creativity of all Maine artists and arts and culture organizations.

PROPOSED CONNECTING STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Help guide and build a network among diverse groups of artists, arts organizations, arts associations, statewide arts affinity groups, and businesses.
2. Help empower artists and arts leaders through workshops, information, professional development opportunities, and toolkits.
3. Use collaborations to facilitate partnerships building between the arts sector and their local communities: schools, libraries, museums, businesses, and local leaders in municipalities, tourism, health and wellness, and community and economic development organizations.
4. Build our value and expand our influence as a model agency in terms of how well we partner with others.

FUNDING

WHAT WE HEARD AND LEARNED FROM OUR CONSTITUENTS

For decades, the arts sector has been remarkably resourceful. The ‘show must go on spirit’ has honed our skill sets to stretch resources masterfully. But artists and arts organization workers tell us COVID’s impact on our undercapitalized arts sector has been overwhelming. Financial support – and more of it – is needed for general operations. Artists and arts organizations are facing a myriad of challenges. The Arts Commission realizes that revamping current grantmaking to make it easier, less restrictive, and more widely accessible will be advantageous to grantees, and to the Arts Commission itself. We must also work collaboratively to increase the amount of funding that supports the arts in Maine.

FUNDING AIMS + OUTCOMES

The Maine Arts Commission will:

- ✓ Work to successfully leverage additional financial investment from other resources that do not compete with the arts sector.
- ✓ Ensure that our fund distribution is more equitable in reaching artists and arts organizations, especially those in under resourced and rural Maine communities.
- ✓ Work closely with the philanthropic sector to raise awareness and increase support of Maine artists and arts organizations.
- ✓ Work with the Governor and the Legislature to secure an increased arts appropriation from the state for operations, grants, and investment in infrastructure.

PROPOSED STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Work together with Maine arts funders to achieve greater equity in county-by-county arts funding.
2. Strive toward more direct, less restrictive investment in local cultural development.
3. Track collective annual progress and share information to continually improve arts funding equity.
4. Guide and encourage targeted investment into specific needs, such as statewide arts service organizations, workforce development programs, artist support, creative placemaking and organizational partnerships.
5. Integrate how we dovetail what we do with the goals and objectives of other government departments and associations to secure support for artists and arts organizations with and through others.
6. Work with Maine leaders to secure out-of-state funding from regional and national sources that will result in statewide artistic and cultural impact.

ADVANCING

WHAT WE HEARD AND LEARNED FROM OUR CONSTITUENTS

To be most effective, we must have the ability to anticipate, shift, and adjust to the everchanging opportunities and challenges in Maine. We don't know what lies ahead, but we know we must work to strengthen our arts infrastructure, communications and collaborations so that, together, we can face an uncertain future with strength and focus.

ADVANCING AIMS + OUTCOMES

The Maine Arts Commission will:

- ✓ Advocate for arts education, creative aging, and life-long learning throughout Maine.
- ✓ Work with Maine's leaders to ensure that resources exist to keep talented and creative young people in Maine.
- ✓ Decentralize our programs to ensure that artists and arts leaders from around the state are actively involved in decision making.
- ✓ Make Maine a state known for its focus on holistic strategies in advancing creative placemaking.

PROPOSED STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Together with arts and cultural leaders remove barriers to arts participation and increase accessibility and visibility using the lenses of community building and healing.
2. Advocate for arts education support in all Maine schools and communities.
3. Find creative strategies to address the cross sector needs of affordable housing, jobs, public transportation and all the other basic needs that are identified as a barrier for young people to stay in Maine.
4. Examine ways the Arts Commission can ensure a more equitable distribution of funds and resources to encompass the entire state.
5. Engage in planning with local communities to ensure a readiness for Maine to pilot creative placemaking programs that are replicable and can spread to communities throughout the state.