

MEMO



DATE: March 3, 2022
TO: Chase Law, President & CEO
RE: Visioning Roadmap

Following a discovery period and series of planning sessions, Next Stage has developed a roadmap outlining the vision and strategic direction for Arts Council of Winston-Salem & Forsyth County ('Arts Council') informed by a Strategic Visioning Task Force and board and staff leadership at a recent retreat. This roadmap articulates four (4) overarching goals with nine (9) objectives in service to them. The goal setting builds upon feedback received by the organization, summarized as a part of Next Stage's Current Conditions Memo published in December 2021.

Next Stage recommends this strategic planning roadmap memo for review and endorsement by Arts Council's CEO and board of directors ahead of a second phase of work to build an implementation strategy including strategies and tactics to realize it.

Our Values Compass

This visioning process began with an effort to formalize a set of values and guiding principles for Arts Council. If mission is the 'what' of the organization, values define 'how' - how the mission is carried out and how decisions are made. As defining, touchstone ideals, values permeate everything the organization does, from its programming and community engagement to operations and staff/volunteer management.

Organizational values serve as broad guidelines and a reference point for the development of guiding principles, which establish the fundamental norms, rules and ethics that represent what is desirable and affirmative for an organization and help leaders determine the rightfulness or wrongfulness of actions.

Values and guiding principles are essential to establishing organizational vision. If an organization does not closely examine its "how," then everything it does can be justified as being in service to the mission.

To define a set of values, a survey taken by 146 individuals including community members, donors, member organizations, artists, volunteers and board members helped to narrow to a set of seven core values: Creativity, Community, Diversity, Access, Innovation, Inclusivity and Excellence.

At the leadership retreat on February 15, 2022, participants were asked to help shape the values into guiding principles that will help the organization make decisions. The resulting framework is outlined below.

Arts Council of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County...

- Champions creativity as an essential community asset (Creativity)
- Engages authentically in all corners of the community (Community)
- Celebrates fresh perspectives and diverse voices (Diversity)
- Breaks down barriers to expand human connection (Access)
- Embraces risk-taking to advance collective goals (Innovation)
- Creates a culture of belonging for creatives and all residents (Inclusivity)
- Sets an ambition to outperform expectation (Excellence)

A next step for the organization will be to build processes to reinforce these guiding principles in all facets of its business model including programming, operations, governance, staffing, marketing and fund development. The goal is to ensure that constituents would be able to identify these guiding principles without having to read them, seeing them show up in all aspects of Arts Council.

The Big Ideas

This visioning effort was an exciting one, with members of the task force and board open to exploring ways Arts Council could reposition its work against a contemporary backdrop to increase its value proposition, grow impact and channel new and increased resources.

The story of Arts Council traces its beginnings to an operational framework – the first United Arts Fund in the country. The organization has long been defined by its processes – it’s ‘how’ – rather than on the specific destination or outcome for those processes. In this way, Arts Council has always been focused on empowering the work of the ‘cultural leaders’ to advance their work.

Next Stage’s research suggests that Arts Council is at a significant crossroads with an opportunity to reinvent itself. The pandemic has been both disruptive and a force of change, encouraging examination of purpose and a focus on innovation. Moving forward, the organization has an opportunity leverage this moment in time to shift how it channels community resources to lead the cultural sector forward.

This planning process surfaced a number of learnings, not the least of which is the need to expand the membership of what it means to be a ‘cultural leader,’ while also recognizing that Arts Council’s identity remains one of process. Wrestling with how community ambition gets implemented, and who contributes to the shaping of that ambition, was explored through a focus on four modes of being for Arts Council:

- As a **CONVENER**, Arts Council will build an equitable approach to engagement, ensuring fresh and diverse voices are not just heard but provided a platform. Arts Council aspires to be the framework upon which community builds its ambition, and this will only be possible if all are at the proverbial table. This will be accomplished through decentralized relationship-building toward formal efforts to bring people together.
- As a **CATALYST**, Arts Council will aim to leverage its role as a convener to facilitate buy-in on a shared vision and set of goals. Rather than serve as umbrella for this activity, Arts Council sees itself as the undergirding scaffolding that lifts up great ideas, identifies areas of intersection, and encourages working together to achieve big ideas. In this way, Arts Council is less the owner of the process and more the steward of community ambition toward articulation and gameplan development.
- As a **CONDUIT**, Arts Council will work to leverage its financial and facility resources to serve as a conduit of an even more precious resource – the ‘people power’ of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County. With catalytic concepts as a blueprint, Arts Council will work to activate human resources ‘to put intention into practice.’ Arts Council endeavors to lead a movement of ‘people who do,’ turning its bias for action into an expression of community spirit.
- As a **COLLABORATOR**, Arts Council performs the role it is uniquely and best-positioned to do, creating new systemic collaborations that cross-pollinate arts and culture into areas of tourism, education, economic development, and workforce pipeline creation, while working to solve the region’s signature challenge of racial equity and inclusion.

While the temptation for a process like this would be to define the hoped-for end result, feedback and discussion suggests that many more voices must be engaged to determine that destination. Arts Council’s role is to usher in a new era for the cultural sector in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County, one where collaboration and equity are its hallmarks.

Arts Council has a critical role to play as a backbone organization focused on realizing this vision. It will require a new set of engagement strategies and a commitment to stay the course even in the face of adversity. But for an organization with a history of being first to market, it is a role Arts Council is designed to realize.

Vision Roadmap

The following vision roadmap seeks to encapsulate the ambition of Arts Council to fully embody its roles as convener, catalyst, conduit and collaborator to achieve collective aims built collaboratively with the community. While it is focused on forward progress over the next five years, it also suggests a mode of operation that will serve the organization for many years to come.

Vision: A community where all residents realize the value of arts and culture experiences, and where those who create them are supported in their individual and collective efforts.

Mission: To help ensure that the empowering and enriching benefits of arts and culture reach all members of our diverse community.

Goal #1: Build an equitable approach to engagement, ensuring fresh and diverse voices are not just heard but provided a platform.

Objective #1A: Embark on a community-wide trust-building effort through face-to-face engagement in the neighborhoods and institutions of stakeholders.

Objective #1B: Launch a series of convenings focused on building relationships across the arts and culture sector.

Objective #1C: Aggregate learnings from outreach including an articulation of needs, assets and opportunities, creating a platform of data to fuel creative idea generation.

Goal #2: Facilitate buy-in on a shared vision and set of goals, serving as the supportive framework to lift up ideas, identify areas of intersection, and encourage collaboration.

Objective #2A: Source concepts from stakeholders for near-term, mid-term and long-term implementation, encouraging new and diverse voices to contribute to idea generation.

Objective #2B: Facilitate a process of narrowing to a set goals and tangible activities, creating a transparent, equitable process of ambition-setting.

Goal #3: Leverage financial and facility resources to serve as a conduit of the 'people power' of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County, leading a movement of 'people who do.'

Objective #3A: Activate a human-centered brand awareness campaign focused on channeling appreciation for the role of creatives and culture-makers, while creating a call-to-action for residents and visitors to get engaged.

Objective #3B: Build a new business model to fuel the movement, realizing increased contributed, earned and brokered revenue from a wider set of individuals and institutions.

Goal #4: Create new, systemic collaborations that cross-pollinate arts and culture into areas of tourism, education, economic development, and workforce pipeline creation, while working to solve the region's signature challenge of racial equity and inclusion.

Objective #4A: Develop and strengthen institution-centered relationships with systemic leaders, working to understand the challenges they face and seeking to deploy arts and culture resources in service to meeting their needs.

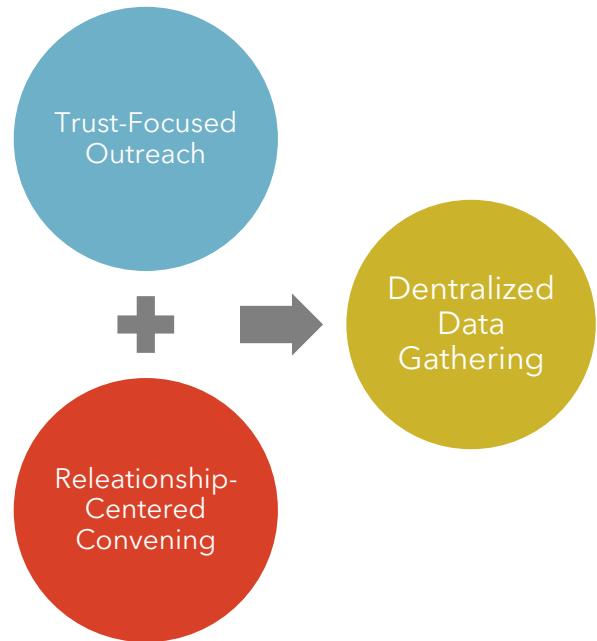
Objective #4B: Focus specifically and collaboratively on cross-sector efforts to increase racial equity and improve relations across difference, weaving this aim into all aspects of Arts Council's work.

Roadmap Detail

While much work remains to be done to translate the ambition expressed on the previous page into a workplan, Next Stage provides the following detail to frame how goals and objectives could be realized.

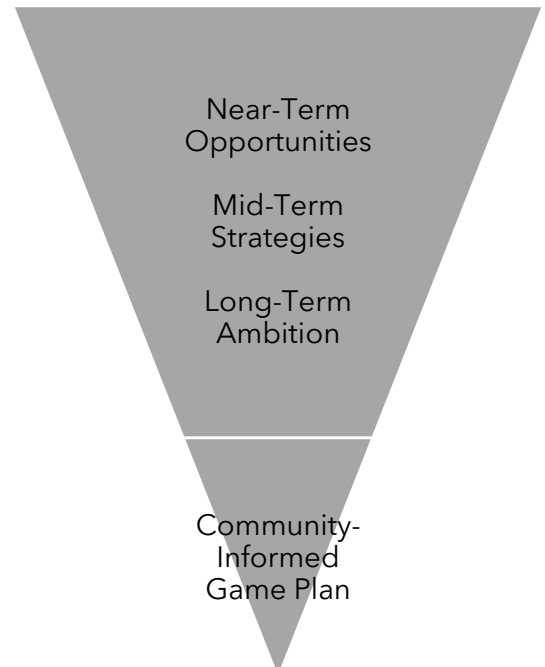
Goal #1: Build an equitable approach to engagement, ensuring fresh and diverse voices are not just heard but provided a platform.

- Trust-Focused Outreach - Creating engagement and buy-in on collaborative efforts will require a basis of trust. To achieve this, Arts Council's leadership volunteers and staff will need to demonstrate a willingness to 'go to' the community, getting proximate to those the organization aims to convene and serve, and focus on listening. Demonstrating a commitment to community voice is essential to developing a basis of trust.
- Relationship-Centered Convening - Regular efforts to convene should be focused on building familiarity and trust across members of the arts and culture sector. A regular calendar of engagement is needed that centers that convening in community, exposing participants to areas of the community they may not be familiar with and encouraging a spirit of exploration through relationship-building.
- Centralized Data Gathering - Outreach and convening efforts should be public-facing and transparent, with information shared captured as a part of a formal effort of building a needs assessment, asset inventory and opportunity idea board. This data collection is an ongoing process and will be the platform upon which catalytic activities will rest.



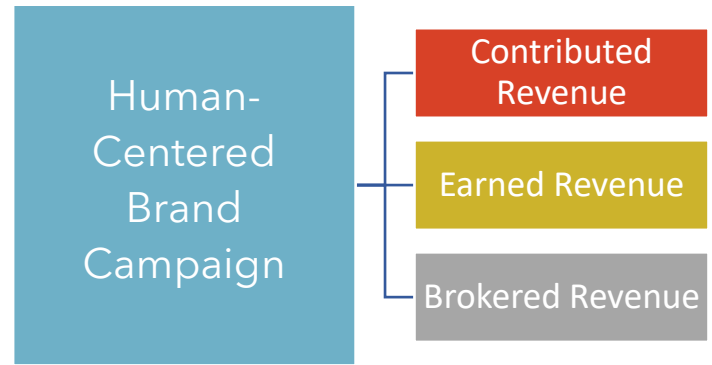
Goal #2: Facilitate buy-in on a shared vision and set of goals, serving as the supportive framework to lift up ideas, identify areas of intersection, and encourage collaboration.

- Source Collaborative Concepts - Building on the data gathered, Arts Council can realize a new approach to prioritizing activities, managing the activities that result in the articulation of ambition. Rather than serve as umbrella for this activity, Arts Council sees itself as undergirding these efforts, lifting up ideas, identifying areas of intersection, and encouraging collaboration in service to a community-wide expression of ambition.
- Narrow to a Goals & Activities - While all ideas have value, not all ideas can be feasibly implemented. Arts Council plays an important role in narrowing to a community-informed game plan. This will require leveraging the trust built through outreach and convening to achieve buy-in and a formal infrastructure for implementation.



Goal #3: Leverage financial and facility resources to serve as a conduit of the 'people power' of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County, leading a movement of 'people who do.'

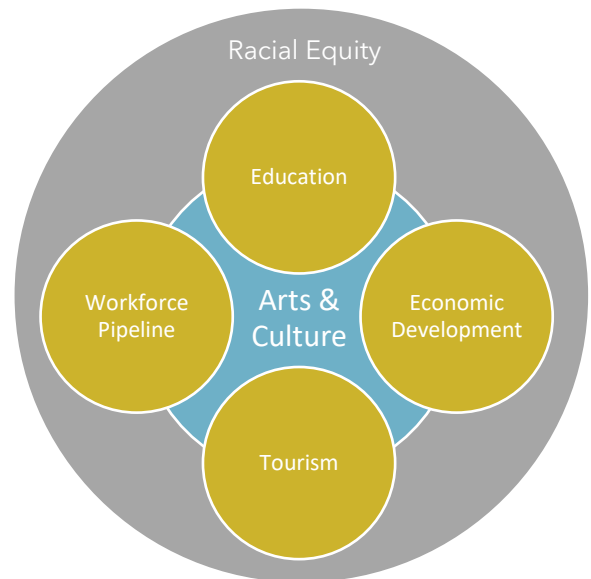
- Human-Centered Brand Campaign - Activating residents and tourists is a critical activity toward realizing any goals likely to be surfaced through convening and catalyst planning. A 'people who do' campaign would aim to lift up not only the creatives but also the residents who get engaged and support them. The future of Arts Council is one powered by the people, with the shared ownership of the model helping to realize the ambition to reach all members of our community.



- Reimagined Business Model - ARPA funding in the near-term creates an opportunity for Arts Council and the arts and cultural sector as a whole to build a new economic engine. Building the will of the people and increasing Arts Council's constituency will create new opportunities for financial resources, both directly from newly engaged audiences and from those who want to engage them. The campaign call-to-action will be key to unlocking this pent-up potential.

Goal #4: Create new, systemic collaborations that cross-pollinate arts and culture into areas of tourism, education, economic development, and workforce pipeline creation, while working to solve the region's signature challenge of racial equity and inclusion.

- Systemic Outreach - The arts and culture sector can be a part of the solution for addressing the needs of other sectors, but it will require a solution-minded approach that makes the needs of partners a priority. Building familiarity and trust across systems is an important place to start while gathering insights for how the arts and cultural sector can make a difference.
- Prioritized Focus on Racial Equity - The need for increased focus on diversity, inclusion, access and equity were strong themes of this visioning process. For new approaches to long-existing challenges to succeed, a prioritized focus on increasing racial equity will be needed. Annualized goals should be developed and publicized to demonstrate how Arts Council lives its guiding principles of "celebrating fresh perspectives and diverse voices" and "creating a culture of belonging for creatives and all residents."



Next Steps

This deliverable is the final step of a multi-month effort of discovery, assessment and planning. The next steps is for this vision roadmap to be endorsed by staff and board leadership ahead of the development of an implementation plan, formalizing strategies and tactics in service to it.