



***FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE...
REALIZING A CREATIVE CULTURE FOR ALL***

*Approved by Commission Board
December 10, 2020*

ENABLING LEGISLATION

The Commission for the Arts shall perform among others the following duties: Stimulate and encourage throughout the State public interest and participation in the arts and to make recommendations concerning appropriate methods to encourage participation in and appreciation of the arts to meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of persons in all parts of the State. VCA Enabling Legislation 1968 (Chapter 9.1.9-84.03).

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Virginia Commission for the Arts (VCA) was created in 1968 and is the state agency that supports the arts through funding from the Virginia General Assembly and the National Endowment for the Arts. The VCA is guided by 13 Commissioners appointed to five-year terms by the Governor and confirmed by the General Assembly. To ensure statewide representation, at least one Commissioner -- and no more than two -- is appointed from each Congressional district.

The VCA supports Virginia artists, organizations, schools and communities through grants for organizations, artists and schools. The VCA gives funding to nonprofit organizations with tax-exempt status under section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code that have been producing quality arts programs for at least three consecutive years. In some program areas, funding is available to schools, libraries or community groups.

In all program areas, VCA funding recommendations are determined by an advisory panel comprised of national and state experts who vary according to discipline and program area. Virginia Commission for the Arts awards become a "blue ribbon stamp of approval" to leverage additional funds from foundations, businesses and local governments, generating almost \$68 in matching funds for every \$1 invested, in 2019.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The VCA Strategic Planning Process began in 2018 when newly-appointed Executive Director, Janet Starke met with consultant Amy Nisenson to identify how to best execute the 2021-2024 plan. As the new Executive Director was just months into her position, though a strategic plan was due it was determined best to create a 2020 Bridge Plan that would largely extend the 2017-2019 plan, until appropriate development and execution of a full plan could begin. The 2020 Bridge Plan was used as a background and planning document for the 2021-2024 plan.

The VCA strategic planning process for this 2021-2024 plan began in August 2019 with 12 Town Halls on the Arts in all the regional areas served, which concluded in November 2019 with 304 attendees in total. The meetings included stakeholders from across the Commonwealth representing a range of sectors within and outside of the arts, including but not limited to: arts and cultural organizations, individual artists, local government, economic development representatives, businesses, corporations, chambers of commerce, school systems, higher education institutions, healthcare, social service organizations, military and veterans service organizations, foundations (private/corporate) and individual citizens. Meeting attendees were divided into four groups, with each discussing issues around four conceptual areas identified as: Arts in Education, Arts in Healing, Creative Economies, and Operational Capacity. In addition,

individual artists present at each convening were placed together and gave feedback to all four of the conceptual areas as they had experience (or not) in each.

In addition, a virtual survey was created and distributed through the agency's listserv, yielding 104 responses. Results from these methods of collection were compiled into a report that was shared with the Commissioners and the VCA staff in order to formulate the goals, objectives, and action steps of the plan.

Town Hall on the Arts

- **Area 1, Emory**
August 22, 2019
- **Area 3, Lynchburg**
August 26, 2019
- **Area 2, Martinsville**
August 27, 2019
- **Area 5, Charlottesville**
September 10, 2019
- **Area 4A, Lorton**
September 17, 2019
- **Area 6, Hampton**
September 24, 2019
- **Area 6, Virginia Beach**
September 25, 2019
- **Area 4B, Winchester**
October 2, 2019
- **Area 5, Richmond**
October 16, 2019
- **Area 3, Harrisonburg**
October 30, 2019
- **Area 4B, Arlington**
November 4, 2019
- **Area 4B, Fredericksburg**
November 6, 2019

A staff retreat was held in November 2019 to review the findings. A presentation to the Commissioners took place in December 2019 which also included a work session on the VCA's mission, vision and values. Following these meetings, Executive Director, Janet Starke and consultant Amy Nisenson worked together on the plan's first draft. This draft was shared with attendees at the VCA's Art Works for Virginia Conference in January 2020. Following the Art Works conference, Nisenson and Starke engaged in revising the plan to apply feedback from the conference, staff and Commission Board.

With the onset of COVID-19, work on the Strategic Plan was largely tabled as the Commission quickly shifted focus to new supports for the field through the CARES Act, and Emergency Relief Grant for artists and several virtual convenings and other ongoing communications with the field.

As this final draft is shared for both public comment and (ultimate) approval by the Commission Board (December 10, 2020), it is intended that this plan serve as a working document—not only supporting the unforeseen (and yet still to be fully realized) impacts of the pandemic and necessary efforts by the VCA, but also as a continued aspirational instrument towards the long-held goal of \$1 per capita in funding for the arts, and cultural equity, in which the arts truly benefit all the citizens of the Commonwealth.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2024

MISSION

To invest in the arts in the Commonwealth by supporting, celebrating, and promoting artistic and cultural equity, in an innovative and creative environment to benefit all Virginians.

VISION

A creative culture in which equitable access to arts engagement and learning are fundamental to the lives of all Virginians.

VALUES

- The arts provide unique opportunities for individual creativity and expression.
- The arts should be accessible to every citizen of the Commonwealth of Virginia, whether as a creative worker, patron or student.
- The arts inspire ideas, imagination and vision, and help us see our world in new and different ways.
- The arts heighten and enhance learning and personal growth; they stir and awaken memories, emotions and aspirations.
- The arts provide insight, empathy and understanding of diverse people, customs and expressions that bridge differences and make a coherent whole out of many disparate parts.
- The arts communicate in real-time, and across generations.
- The arts intensify the experience of life and the conditions that encourage and stimulate discovery, invention and innovation.
- The arts provide the building blocks for a healthy and vital 21st Century creative culture in Virginia.

GOALS

- I. Cultivate intentional diverse and inclusive access to and within the arts by ensuring equity in policies, practices and leadership development to advance cultural equity throughout the Commonwealth.**

- II. Broaden investment in the arts and arts education that empowers communities to employ the arts for transformative change.**

- III. Increase awareness and visibility of the arts in communities, through engagement with peers, policy makers, participants and practitioners.**

- IV. Increase internal capacity to bring the highest quality services to the arts sector in fulfillment of the agency's mission.**

I. Cultivate intentional diverse and inclusive access to and within the arts by ensuring equity in policies, practices and leadership development to advance cultural equity throughout the Commonwealth.

➤ **OBJECTIVE**

Develop policy, processes and programming that supports principles of Cultural Equity and IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access).

ACTION ITEMS

- Design, adopt and implement policy that supports tenets of our [Statement on Cultural Equity](#).
- Institute intentional design in grantmaking (internally/externally).
- Ensure that grants processes do not present undue barriers to access for potential applicants.
- Apply principles of practice to new programming and initiatives as human and financial capacity allows.
- Strengthen and maintain agency practices with regard to hiring, and Commissioner appointment.

➤ **OBJECTIVE**

Increase education and awareness of IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity and access)

ACTION ITEMS

- Encourage and implement ongoing professional development for Commission staff and board.
- Provide professional development for external stakeholders at Art Works for Virginia (annual conference) and other convenings.
- Develop appropriate guidelines for funding that cultivate purposeful IDEA measures among applicants and grantees.

➤ **OBJECTIVE**

Increase diversity in the arts sector by cultivating leadership development among historically underrepresented groups.

ACTION ITEMS

- Provide mentorship opportunities among arts administrators of color, and other innovative supports for arts organizations whose programming addresses participants of color.
- Create connections and expand leadership opportunities for historically underrepresented groups including, but not limited to, people of color, people with disabilities, people who identify among LGBTQ+ community and others.
- Develop and support internship program for youth in arts education, arts administration and policy development.

II. Broaden investment in the arts and arts education that empowers communities to employ the arts for transformative change.

➤ **OBJECTIVE**

Invest in capacity-building for organizations/individual artists through statewide professional development offerings and showcases.

ACTION ITEMS

- Lead and engage in efforts to rebuild and strengthen the arts ecosystem, through dedicated funding, and convening and connecting stakeholders to identified resources.
- Create opportunities for greater awareness of and visibility of working artists, particularly through greater promotion of the Performing Arts Touring Directory and Teaching Artist Roster, in an effort to rebuild the gig economy.
- Increase investments in individual grant programs, while ensuring that they best meet the needs of the sector.
- Support and institute convenings on relevant topics to the field, as informed by the field, leveraging statewide stakeholder networks, including Local Arts Agencies to assist in ongoing needs assessments and information dissemination.

➤ **OBJECTIVE**

Invest in lifelong learning through funding, facilitation, and leveraging of networks, to cultivate a pipeline for equitable learning and engagement that benefits classrooms and communities across the Commonwealth.

ACTION ITEMS

- Increase VCA investments (grants) in arts education initiatives, for Pre-K – 12, higher education and adults, in support of lifelong learning.
- Partner with agencies and networks such as Virginia Department of Education and the Coalition for Fine Arts Education in data collection and analysis to inform policy and support equity-based decision-making and collaborative planning.
- Serve as an active partner in awareness and understanding of Virginia's [Fine Arts Standards of Learning](#) (adopted 2020), particularly among Teaching Artists.
- Cultivate opportunities for professional development to help teachers and teaching artists strengthen arts programs.
- Remain engaged in national trending in arts education for Pre K-12, higher education, adults and seniors, to inform agency programming, and to share with statewide stakeholders.

➤ **OBJECTIVE**

Explore opportunities to develop more formal structures of programming (including grantmaking) that supports arts and the military/veterans, arts and healing, Creative Placemaking, and more.

ACTION ITEMS

- Create dedicated investments, including resources and funding in new areas that reflect national trends and support the needs of communities across the Commonwealth.
- Strengthen the formal coordination of the [Creative Forces Networks](#), to include existing and new partners.
- Develop a community of practice in arts and healing that supports shared practice, and exchange of ideas.
- Serve as a catalyst and convener for organizations and artists working with people with disabilities, seniors/aging, incarcerated individuals and other underserved populations.
- Explore opportunities to develop communities of Creative Placemaking through identified national funding, resources and collaborative partners.

III. Increase awareness and visibility of the arts in communities, through engagement with peers, policy makers, participants and practitioners.

➤ **OBJECTIVE**

Strengthen understanding of evolving impacts *of* the arts and *to* the arts in communities across the Commonwealth, in order to provide most relevant supports to the field.

ACTION ITEMS

- Leverage statewide stakeholder networks (i.e. Commission Board, Local Arts Agencies (LAAs), Virginia Presenters Network, etc.) for more effective information gathering and dissemination.
- Promote research, methodologies and impacts on subsectors of arts ecosystem (i.e. healing arts, creative aging, Creative Placemaking) among general public and policy makers.
- Educate stakeholders about and encourage active engagement in advocacy for the arts among arts leaders and participants.

➤ **OBJECTIVE**

Leverage local, state and national relationships to cultivate new opportunities for artists, arts organizations and communities.

ACTION ITEMS

- Work with Virginia Humanities (VH) to strengthen and grow Virginia's Folklife Program, building from VH's storied development of the program and enhancing with VCA's existing resources such as Touring Artist Directory and Teaching Artist Roster.
- Establish productive working relationships with Virginia Tourism Corporation, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Virginia Housing and Community Development, and other state governmental bodies to help expand and enhance tourism, job creation and commerce.
- Create a system and process for sharing additional funding opportunities for artists and arts organizations from national networks and affiliations.
- Cultivate relationships with national foundations that recognize the strong foundation for arts programming in order to generate support through funding and research.
- Explore opportunities for relationship development among university system to support research and data related to the arts and arts impacts.

IV. Increase internal capacity to bring the highest quality services to the arts sector in fulfillment of the agency's mission.

➤ **OBJECTIVE**

Strengthen methods of communication to engage key stakeholders, sharing opportunities, best practices and more.

ACTION ITEMS

- Develop and launch new website that best communicates the mission of the agency, with web applications and functions that are focused on the end user.
- Identify and promote platforms for the best practices and other information sharing among stakeholders.
- Develop and implement an annual Communications Plan that incorporates key activities, programs (including grantmaking), and other functions, and utilizes multiple communications channels.

- **OBJECTIVE** Develop, strengthen and employ methods and processes in all areas of operations that maximize efficiencies and ensure compliance with all state and federal policies.

ACTION ITEMS

- Strengthen and develop new policies to support agency compliance and ensure all staff are appropriately trained.
- Identify and engage new resources that strengthen efficiencies in ongoing operations, relative to finance/budgeting, IT infrastructure, grantmaking and more.
- Benchmark other state arts agencies with similar funding/appropriations, including staffing and grantmaking/other programming initiatives.
- Strengthen grants program to develop efficiencies in the process.
- Ensure that grant programs (categories) continue to best meet the field's needs
- Invest in professional development that supports efficiencies in operations, and also provides new information, knowledge and ideas among staff and Board in order to be a leader among state agencies and national state arts agencies.
- Identify and secure additional financial and human resources to support the growing work.