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Information, Research, Media

Many councils produce comprehensive arts resource directories of the artists and cultural organizations, performing and exhibition spaces, and other resources of the area — an extension of the idea prevalent from the beginning that, if nothing else, arts councils could be expected to coordinate the community arts calendars. Many still coordinate calendars, depending on other publications in the area. Some provide the calendar information that is published by the area newspapers. Those councils that provide a look at the events to come in calendar form many times publish a newsletter or paper, which provides fuller information about the arts events of the community and their own undertakings. Although these councils would talk of themselves as advocates for the arts, these communications sheets, distributed all sorts of ways (e.g., in Walnut Creek, California, the Arts Department has had space in the *City Scene*, distributed by the Walnut Creek Leisure Service program by mail to all 35,000 homes in the county), are information sheets by and large. Rarely is there true editorial material or discussion of issues.

Exceptions of note include *Houston Arts*, the quarterly newsletter of the Cultural Arts Council; the Seattle Arts Commission newspaper, *Seattle Arts*, which has included discussions of issues (most memorably the percent for public art laws and issues concerning individual artists); and the King County publication, which has treated similar topics from other angles. These sheets also communicate in depth about the programs and undertak-

ings of the councils in the Seattle area and provide information about public meetings, hearings, agendas, and reports — the business of the arts in the city.

The Cultural Alliance News, published by the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington (D.C.) ten times a year, also has taken on issues about the arts. Some of the articles are written by professional journalists. "Mail Laws and Nonprofit Arts," a series on the problems that handicapped persons face in gaining greater accessibility to arts programs and facilities, and "Media and the Arts" are examples of the subjects covered.

Such publications, while very informative, still do not reach the numbers of people who might make use of the information. More might appear in hotel rooms and grocery stores. Some from the private councils are distributed free (underwritten by local business), but others are available by membership or subscription only. In the case of city commissions, publications such as *Seattle Arts* have been available by request and free of charge.

Publications of the various councils are used for different reasons. Many arts council administrators have said that they are caught between getting publications that look too expensive and "Madison Avenue," on the one hand, and getting something that does not say by its design that its publishers are involved in the arts on the other. (Any publication of this sort *ought* to look well, be of good design, and say by design that it is produced by an arts council.) Being informative, current, usable, and ultimately *read* is as much a problem to these organizations as it is to any anywhere. As the advocates they say they are, it would be beneficial for those who produce these publications also to pose the issues. No other organizations are as suited to this task.

The Chicago Council on Fine Arts has issued publications to inform Chicagoans better about a range of matters. While the *Guide to Chicago Murals: Yesterday and Today* is a directory of the city's vast indoor/outdoor "museum of walls" and is not intended as a definitive scholarly study of the subject, it includes some historical material on mural art in general and the Chicago walls in particular. Far afield from this publication is a *Guide to Careers in the Arts* to assist people seriously considering a career in the arts. Others include a simple listing of the Chicago museums and "Your Guide to Loop Sculpture," a particularly handsome brochure.

Many community arts councils have researched and published economic impact studies, influenced by such documents as William Baumol's 1975 evaluation of the economic impact of the theater strike on New York City.¹ Arts councils seem a natural agency to sponsor, oversee, and even conduct some studies and surveys for their individual communities. And they have. Many times, as in the case of the arts facilities studies in Dallas, San Antonio, and Minneapolis, outside professional firms may be called in to do the work that is their specialty. The San Antonio Arts Council com-

missioned a reuse and feasibility study of six historic theaters in the downtown area — investigating the feasibility of establishing a performing and creative arts center that would use the theaters. The Cleveland Area Arts Council did its own feasibility study for a downtown gallery for traveling exhibits, and also supervised a study for a film festival. In the more complex area of preservation, the Council supervised a study on potential uses and ownership of the Old Arcade, a commercial and office facility on the National Register of Historic Places.

The research area that has been given most attention by community councils has been that of economics. As a “tool” for identifying in depth and in concrete terms the reasons why the arts should be supported, economic impact reports have been especially useful in approaches to the business community and legislators. As Charles F. Dambach, former Executive Director of NACAA, has pointed out in the introduction to the report *The Arts Talk Economics*:

To the surprise of some, economic impact studies have shown that the arts play an important role in the local economy. As this report indicates, the overall impact is quite significant. Employment rates, business enterprises, the local credit base, and the local government tax base are all affected by the arts. . . .

Economic impact studies like these have taken their place in dozens of communities as part of the arsenal for building support for the arts in America. The fiscally conservative governor of a large Eastern state recently declared that he increased the budget for the state art agency by 45 % when he was shown that the state’s investment in the arts would reap economic rewards. This is both an encouraging and a disquieting development. To the extent that economic impact information helps generate understanding of the total role of the arts in society and to the extent that it helps make the case for increased support, it is a positive development. On the other hand, there are serious risks. . . . a management eye of economic impact could result in an imbalance in arts programming. Most of the positive economic impact can be attributed to a few major institutions that draw large audiences. Small, esoteric, avant-garde, and neighborhood programs rarely demonstrate a significant or positive financial return for the investment. Yet these programs are vital to the quality and diversity of cultural life in the community.²

There seems to have been two major ways of conducting this work. One surveys some arts organizations; the other is on a broader scale. One of the first, involving arts organizations, has been used by the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance and as a model by other arts agencies, such as the Indianapolis Metropolitan Arts Council. In Chicago, the *Survey of Arts and Cultural Activities*, done in 1977, was a broad survey (earlier studies had been done in 1966 and 1971) and had expansive goals — identifying art-

ists, arts organizations, and cultural institutions, as well as arts needs and expectations of the city as a whole. For this comprehensive study, a total of five surveys were conducted; on the basis of the results, a series of recommendations was made.³ Other cities and counties, such as Birmingham; St. Louis; San Diego; Worcester, Massachusetts; Toledo; and Dade County, Florida, have done economic studies through their councils.

Another model has influenced the field. In 1976 and 1977, a pilot effort was conducted in Baltimore; out of the creation of a model for assessment, the staff of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Metropolitan Planning and Research—in partnership with arts agencies in Columbus, Ohio; Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minnesota; Springfield, Illinois; Salt Lake City, Utah; and San Antonio, Texas—conducted six case studies. The variety of different types of museums and performing arts organizations of examined institutions is “an illustrative cross-section of some of the more well-known local resources in each city.”⁴ The project was supported by the Endowment, “with significant cost sharing and donated services by Johns Hopkins University and local sponsoring agencies.”⁵ A report of the total project, *The Arts Talk Economics*, is available and reviews procedures in each city and the data used.⁶ It is hoped that this work in summary will “lead to a better understanding of the economic effects of various types of arts activities in alternative community settings.”⁷ Because the six individual case studies dealt with a limited number of institutions selected by the local sponsoring organizations (in Columbus, for example, six of 170 nonprofit arts and cultural organizations), one must be careful not to interpret the results as studies of all local artistic and cultural activities.

It is recognized that these studies are limited in nature—focused on “direct dollar flows represented by the institution’s local expenditures for goods, services, and labor, and the expenditures of its guest artists and audiences.”⁸ Because of the limited, cautious, and conservative nature of the estimates, these studies uncovered only the tip of the iceberg.

The Johns Hopkins studies are not intended to be interpreted as judgments passed by the examiners on the role of the institutions involved, or as indications of support preferences. In other words, the individual cities involved need to use judgment and caution in interpreting the facts. There have been other economic studies, including those in St. Louis and Washington, D.C., and in New England.

In an article in the *Wall Street Journal* (July 14, 1978), Stephen J. Sansweet said, “Based on state and local actions to date, it seems clear that most officials see the arts as an area that is not only expendable, but one that doesn’t have a constituency that will fight back.”⁹ A month later, in Syracuse, an emergency meeting of the boards of directors and staffs of eight area cultural organizations was, it would seem, staged almost as if to refute that comment. The purpose of the meeting was “to reveal the results of a re-

cent study of the economic impact on culture of the community and to discuss what actions must be taken immediately to insure that public funding of cultural, historical, and human service agencies in Onondaga County be maintained at a healthy and meaningful level.”¹⁰ It was the first time the boards of the eight county-funded agencies had ever sat down together. Although the session was to share information, it was also called in response to challenges to county funding of the arts by members of the legislature. The agencies mounted a well-focused joint campaign, “Support the Arts: Culture Means Business,” to meet any future challenges. The session was not to plan any joint funding; it was rather to understand mutually the impact of the arts in that area, and to make the facts of the survey useful.¹¹ The facts and these people, armed with the force of concrete economic material, did convince the legislators.

In a first proposal, *Direct Support of Cuyahoga County's Cultural Resources*, submitted by 12 arts organizations under the coordination of the Cleveland Area Arts Council, the introduction emphasized the results of a recent survey showing the impact that total budgets, employment, purchasing power, and audiences had on the quality of life in the county, and also the manner in which the county was perceived by its citizens and by the rest of the country. An article in *Time*, depicting Cleveland's then dark economic and political future, praised the county's cultural assets. There were references in the proposal to the “ripple” effects on the local economy. It was part of a winning argument for the first tax monies for support of the arts organizations. Since then, the allocation has increased annually.

Some cities and counties have been assessing the state of their cultural affairs for some time, and it would be wrong to diminish the contribution of these earlier studies (done in the 1960s) to developments that came after they were done, such as the *Report of the Mayor's Committee on Cultural Policy* (1974), which recommended the restructuring of the coordination of New York's cultural affairs. Many communities, such as Chicago and Syracuse/Onondaga County, had formerly studied their cultural affairs. These more recent studies are interesting in that some have been used for the specific ends indicated.

One impressive example of careful work is the feasibility study for the creation of an arts center done by the Huntington (Long Island, New York) Arts Council. While the study showed that the arts center would be feasible, the Council, after assessing the amount of money available and needed to accomplish such a feat, decided *not* to go through with the project. “It was feasible at what price? The other major organizations had performing halls, so it just did not seem to make sense,” explains the Director. The story is a rare example of denial in an era of expansion.¹²

In Minneapolis, a study that resulted in the expression of a need for

space led the Arts Commission to seek a project that would lend itself to arts needs and the city's economic development priorities. The Masonic Temple was identified as highly desirable, since the interior spaces were easily adaptable to dance and theater uses, and the city had plans for Hennepin Avenue to become a cultural and entertainment center. The Temple would be the catalyst for further development on Hennepin Avenue. The Endowment Design Arts funded the feasibility study for the development of the Masonic Temple as an arts center, and in 1979 Hennepin Center for the Arts opened its doors. Minnesota Dance, Cricket Theater, and eight other organizations took up residence and began to operate downtown. Commercial activity on the basement and first-floor levels has been expected to offset the low square-footage charges to arts users. The Minneapolis Council envisioned other studies or plans for use of other unused spaces for artists' studios, community arts, and small presses. One such possibility was the exploration of a program that would allow the Board of Education, through these uses, to retain and keep open schools that have been slated for closing.

Studies and planning grants to councils at various stages of their own development, many times under the auspices of the Endowment City Spirit programs, have formed the basis of concrete information for stronger and more effective council work. The Monadnock Arts Study, now published as *Marketing the Arts in a Rural Environment*,¹³ proved in 1977 that

People would like to see an increase in the availability of performing arts and cultural activities in their communities and understand the need to support these very costly activities through public funding. A substantial majority indicated that they would be willing to pay additional tax dollars to support performing arts and cultural activities.¹⁴

Thus, the potential function of research by arts councils themselves, or research conducted under their supervision, has been verified. In one sense, if a council were consistent about studying community need, research would be an ongoing function. Specialized research takes professional assistance, but councils seem more than willing to seek it.

The media have found the work of arts councils a difficult subject to get a handle on if the work is not heavily "program-oriented." The elements of human interest in festivals, classes for special constituents, and the visits of dignitaries are easily covered; the services and advocacy work are less so. Few arts councils have investigated, let alone used, the potential contributions of the local media to the achievement of their ultimate goals. Many have weekly programs, ranging from five minutes to one hour, over radio or television. They mostly cover artists or arts events of the community. Few try to deal with issues involved in the arts. One five-minute segment on

arts issues heard weekly in Washington, D.C., written and narrated by the Director of the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington, has been particularly effective. He has discussed such subjects as the effect of the new bulk-rate mailings on arts organizations.

In New Orleans, a National Public Radio hour-long weekly radio program has involved many artists and arts institutions in its magazine format. The Arts Council there also saw the value of using *paid* spots (assuring better time slots than public service spots) on commercial radio to feature local artists and arts organizations. The arts organizations felt additionally supported by the Council through this means.

In Westchester County, New York, the Arts Council has included in its informational services public service announcements on radio that have run seven times daily on four stations. In Macon County, North Carolina, there is a weekly two-hour classical music radio program donated by the station and presented by the Arts Council.

Some councils have reported that the inclusion of media people on their boards of trustees has helped their own attempts at greater visibility, both through counsel and influence. Some discuss the fact that the local media have one reporter who is a particularly strong arts advocate and has helped the arts gain media coverage.

One council that has become involved in media work is the Department of Cultural Affairs in Atlanta. During 1981, about \$5,000 (from the cable TV franchise fee) was spent for workshops with artists who might wish to make use of public access channels. The complexities of the whole area of cable television have brought out the need for expertise in telecommunications, and in the future the Telecommunications Department of the city government will work to implement such ideas. The potential for council work in the area of cable programming has been discussed by many councils. They see it as an area where cooperation and coordination of activities may be needed, where expanded awareness of cultural activities can be created, and where council expertise can assist the smaller institutions especially.*

Several types of programming can be reported — from occasional art magazine shows to ongoing reports of city programs, continuous listing of arts events, arts programs in traditional broadcast formats, documentaries, lectures, and the use of video itself as an art medium. In Austin, Texas, for instance, 14 percent of the local access programming is cultural-

*The newer Fulton County (Georgia) Arts Council in the same area has arranged for the cable TV franchise fees to be allocated to the arts. It will be used to produce programs for television, using local talent, that could be marketed nationally to produce revenue for local artists and arts groups.

ly related. Arts groups are beginning to "choreograph" or write for video and have been training the camerapersons at the local studios to be sensitive to their needs. In Bloomington, Indiana, a playwright's project has allowed playwrights to "showcase" parts or all of a new work, and to learn from the experience. Tapes are stored and can be reviewed or erased as the playwright wishes. In essence, the challenge of creating for cable, addressed properly, can be looked at as developing a new art form. Arts discipline organizations thus far have been envisioning rather narrow uses of cable in the traditional broadcast format, which is immediately inhibiting because of cost and quality considerations. However, there needs to be greater vision about the unique possibilities of the medium, and in communities small and large, that vision is beginning to be tested.

Programming of a broader nature, such as the 13-part series on the arts broadcast in New York City over Municipal Channel A and produced by the Cable Arts project of the New York State Council on the Arts, points to one kind of community council programming potential. Segments include "Art in Public Places," "Televisionaries," and programs on jazz, crafts, and dance. The goal is to demonstrate that government TV channels can be used to enhance the cultural life of the metropolitan area. It would seem that such programming might make sense to community councils throughout the country, for there will be many hours to fill and a great need to come up with high-quality, interesting, and potentially significant programs. The councils could be the catalyst for coordinating and generating this material. The potential for being helpful to cable programming, once the local political hassles over franchise settle, seems important for arts councils to examine. Many are examining this area, as cable entrepreneurs find the councils knowledgeable about the cultural scene and as arts organizations look for coordinated activities related to their needs. Cultural coalitions are considering sharing production expertise, studio space, and equipment; this is a natural development in order to plan optimum programming at minimal cost. Cultural programs, like any others, need careful planning and artistic skill if they are to be artistic and successful.

By franchise agreement,* the publicly designated, private New Orleans Arts Council is scheduled to advise the city on the distribution of about \$160,000 annually over the next few years to cultural groups.¹⁵ (Another amount will be distributed for telecommunications production through another agency.) Primarily due to the efforts of Denise Vallon, Director of the National Cable Arts Council located there, and also Vice-President of the local cultural channel, New Orleans looks like it may be the

*The Municipal Endowment Fund for Arts, Humanities and Community Services.

locus of a central resource on cable opportunities for cultural agencies.

In the short term, the National Cable Arts Council is researching the use of cultural channels for marketing arts, using not only listings but imagery to allow the public to know the daily cultural schedule at locations such as airports, sports arenas, and so on. The group is researching the development of the cultural image of a city through the use of cable, and is developing an aesthetic and practical prototype TV studio for the development and production of cable cultural programming.¹⁶

All of this has potential for arts councils only if there are persons on their staffs assigned to become expert about the capabilities and potential of cable television. The technical aspects of the field are complex and changing rapidly; the political and sociological ramifications are immense. "Knowledge is power" in this field—and knowledge requires time and priority.

NOTES

1. William Baumol, *The Effect of Theater on the Economy of New York City* (Princeton, N. J.: Mathematica, 1975).

2. National Assembly of Community Arts Agencies, *The Arts Talk Economics* (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1980), introduction.

3. Chicago Council on Fine Arts, *A Survey of Arts and Cultural Activities in Chicago* (Chicago: Author, 1977).

4. Johns Hopkins University Center for Metropolitan Planning and Research, *The Economic Impact of Six Cultural Institutions on the Economy of the Columbus SMSA* (Baltimore: Author, 1980), p. 2.

5. Ibid., Section I.

6. NACAA, *The Arts Talk Economics*, p. 4.

7. Johns Hopkins University Center, *Economic Impact*, p. 4.

8. Ibid., p. 34.

9. Stephen J. Sansweet, "Proposition 13's Impact on the Arts," *Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 1978, p. 11.

10. Notice of a special meeting, to boards of directors, professional personnel, and affiliated organizations of eight arts organizations in Syracuse and Onondaga County, signed by their presidents.

11. From materials furnished for the meeting described in Note 10.

12. Interview with Cindy Kiebitz, Huntington Arts Council, 1980.

13. George Miaoulis and David W. Lloyd, *The Monadnock Arts Study: Marketing the Arts in a Rural Environment* (Monograph Series no. 4) (Dayton, Ohio: Wright State University, 1979).

14. George Miaoulis, *A Report on the Impact of the Arts in the Monadnock Region of New Hampshire* (Monadnock Arts Study) (Keene, N.H.: Grand Monadnock Arts Council, 1977), p. 2.

15. City of New Orleans Ordinance No. R-81-346, September 1981, establishing Municipal Endowment for the Arts and Community Services Fund.

16. Interview with Denise Vallon, Director, National Cable Arts Council, 1982.