

HIGHLIGHTS FROM JANUARY FOCUS GROUPS

Overall Key Issues – from Focus Groups

Creative Economy (CE) Segments

We need to look more carefully at the data to get a clearer picture of the segmentation of the Creative Economy. Nonetheless, this is what emerged during the focus group meetings and the interviews.

Performing Arts

- Theater
- Dance

Entertainment/Media

- Film production
- Music recording and performance
- Video production

Culinary Arts

- Businesses like Native Seed
- Farmers Markets
- Tucson cuisine and restaurants
- Food-related fairs and festivals
- Culinary training programs
- Books with Tucson regional cuisine as theme

Visual and Craft Arts

- Painting
- Sculpture
- Folk art
- Pottery
- Photography
- Ceramics
- Jewelry
- Woven fabrics

Literary Arts

- Writers
- Writing programs
- Literary events

Wellness and Healing Arts

- Spas
- Canyon Ranch resorts
- Massage and healing therapies
- Some linkages to the Native American Medicine Man

Architecture and Design

- Interior design
- Product design
- Architectural design
- Landscape design

Heritage and Nature

- Native American culture
- Mexican culture
- Spanish culture
- Fairs and festivals
- Sonoran Desert Museum
- Zoological Museum

Cultural Institutions (a sample listing would be appropriate)

- Major museums
- Major cultural institutes
- Art centers
- Neighborhoods cultural organizations

Support Organizations and Resources

- TPAC
- Other arts councils
- Foundations and businesses
- Local and county government
- TREO may be more of a resource in the future

Strengths of the Creative Economy/Arts Base

- The diversity of the region's arts product makes the Creative Economy particularly strong—that is, it isn't concentrated in one or two principal art forms and products.
- The interplay of culture, art, heritage, and nature provides a very authentic artistic and cultural product, and makes the CE somewhat unique, even within the Southwest.
- Much of the Creative Economy, like Louisiana, is rooted in the culture and heritage of the people who lived here generations ago. So, the well-spring of the asset is in the people. It makes the industry sustainable, as long as investments are made in the people and the next generation.
- The U of A's programs, galleries, faculty, performance arts products, venues, and facilities are, in some instances, world-class, and they make a profound contribution to the strength of the CE.
- Since the Tucson region remains a very attractive place for people to live and work, it continues to draw a significant arts talent pool, enriching what is already here.
- The individuals who oversee many of the arts institutions and enterprises are seen as quite effective, giving the Creative Economy a solid base of leaders and leadership.
- Although there is competition for scarce resources among a plethora of arts organizations, there is considerable cooperation among those organizations, which is not found in other regions and localities.

Barriers to Growing the Creative Economy

Political System

- The political system is viewed as lacking maturity—the minutiae of projects are debated over and over, with little concern for vision and impact.
- The weak mayor system in Tucson makes it difficult to have decisive leadership at the top, and someone to hold accountable.
- Within the political culture there is a reluctance on the part of decision-makers to make hard decisions. Projects that would conceivably bring more cohesion to the arts, and to the physical fabric of the City, are often deferred. One consequence of this is the fractured and disconnected physical character of the City and the arts districts—it remains a “hodge-podge” of buildings and neighborhoods with little connectivity.
- Neighborhoods have extraordinary power in design and project decision-making. The result is that good projects, and projects that could benefit the neighborhoods and the arts, are sometimes watered down.
- There's a profound tendency toward “excessive egalitarianism,” which makes it difficult for high-end projects to be accepted. The excessive egalitarianism also creates bias against high-end, successful artists.

- Differences between the local political base in Tucson and the County make it difficult for a shared or coordinated vision for the arts.

The Culture of the Arts

- There are many effective and highly-respected leaders within the region's arts organizations and businesses, but none of them have taken on the mantle of leadership for the Arts & Culture industry/Creative Economy. There's a real reluctance because of the presumed charge of elitism or arrogance that would emerge from someone taking on a leadership role. The idea of lots of musicians but no maestro surfaced as a good image.
- The lack of a Cultural Affairs or an arts staff person in city government makes it difficult to get the attention of the political community, and it makes it difficult to coordinate arts-related projects through the political process. Although TPAC was viewed as having some of the functions of a Cultural Affairs staff function, having someone employed by the City in that role would make a profound difference.
- Although there is a significant amount of cooperation within arts organizations and some arts enterprises, there's not the kind of collaboration in place that would lead to a strengthened and well-organized arts industry.
- Several people noted that there are far too many nonprofit arts organizations in the City, all competing for a relatively small amount of money. Part of the reason for so many organizations is the inability of the local arts and political decision-making infrastructure to make hard decisions. In the absence of hard decisions, the response seems to be "let's create an organization."
- Even though my meeting with some of the arts faculty and program directors gave me a slightly different perception, the U of A is viewed as aloof and arrogant, and not very well-connected to the arts organizational infrastructure in the region.

Arts Image and Identity

- This comment surfaced over and over again: "Tucson hasn't made a decision about what it wants to be."
- There's not been a successful branding and messaging campaign developed that provides a tangible and clear notion of the nature and character of the arts.
- There's a significant lack of marketing and promotion—very little is spent on the promotion of the arts.
- Perhaps rooted in the tendencies of excessive egalitarianism and anti-elitism is what many described as a serious inferiority complex among the arts in Tucson. The City often compares itself to Phoenix and Scottsdale, and usually comes up short.

Role of Business Community

- A common complaint is the lack of corporate headquarters and leaders in the City's and County's business community. Other cities, like Phoenix, have larger corporations and corporate headquarters. As a result, the arts are better funded, and the leadership is there in plentiful supply.

- Many in the business community fail to recognize the revenue and job-generating character of the Creative Economy. The banking community, in particular, is uninformed.
- TREO appears to have a better understanding of the connection between arts and economic development. Its strategic plan could be a bell-weather of how seriously the Creative Economy is taken in the future.

Highlights of Each Focus Group Meeting

Galleries

- People in the group estimated that there are about 100 arts galleries in the City and County. The Skyline Campbell area is fast becoming a prime location for galleries.
- The artwork that is featured and sold in the galleries is a combination of Tucson style, southwest, and contemporary. One gallery owner sold the art of deceased artists.
- Much of the product is sold locally, but the Phoenix and Southwest regions are also strong. Many galleries had customers throughout the U.S.
- Most of the gallery owners who attended indicated that business was very good this past year. Most seem to be doing well.
- Tucson is not recognized as an arts market or destination to the extent Santa Fe and Scottsdale are. These two locations appear to present the stiffest competition.
- The “art brand” isn’t very strong in Tucson, although the product seems to be quite high and competitive. Tubac has grown in importance as an arts market and destination, and has captured more attention than Tucson has.
- The fact that there is no centralized arts district in the City presents a real barrier to the galleries and to visual artists—that is, they can’t organize the kind of arts tours and walks that other cities have benefited from.
- A high-quality arts journal would make a profound difference to the galleries and the artists.

Design and Architecture

- A significant number of designers and architects are here because they attended the U of A—they got degrees in landscape architecture or design and decided to stay in the region.
- People at the focus group estimated that there are roughly 400-500 designers and architects in the region—around 100-200 are landscape and building architects, and another 300 are interior designers.
- The bigger markets, like Phoenix, attract larger design firms. The market in Tucson is not that big—as a consequence, most of the firms here are quite small, perhaps in the 1-2 person range.
- Most of the attendees put a premium on creating an authentic sense of place within Tucson and Pima County. There is a powerful connection to the environment and the

indigenous cultures. The sentiment seemed to be that if a client wanted a southwest, cowboy or native knock-off they can look somewhere else.

- Someone estimated that there is about 300,000 square feet of furniture and interior design showroom space in Tucson/Pima County.

Cultural Institutions

- Revitalization of the downtown is a major priority for the organizations in attendance—it would bring much more coherence and connectivity to the arts infrastructure, and it would give it much stronger visibility.
- The number of visitors to the organizations varied—a few were quite strong and holding steady. Others saw a slight decline. The Sonoran Desert Museum had 500,000 visitors last year, 75% from outside of the region. It has a membership base of 25,000 households. The Museum had, at one time, as many as 650,000 visitors.
- The Tucson Museum of Art does well in spite of itself. It's suffered from years of instability, but managed to stay in the black for much of the last 10 years.
- As a group of cultural organizations, "We're fractured and somewhat divided, even if we aren't hostile to one another."
- The Tucson Museum of Art has a \$3.2 million budget, the Sonoran Desert Museum has a \$6.2 million, and the Contemporary Arts Center's budget is \$200,000.
- The diversity of arts organizations is quite broad. This diversity gives us strength because we're not limited to 3-4 major organizations. But, it also weakens our ability to be organized and speak with a unified voice.
- There are too many nonprofit arts organizations in the region. Consequently, we're all running after a relatively modest amount of public and private sector money.
- Many of the larger organizations purchase goods and services from local and area businesses. Those purchases are generally for architectural services, printing, design, advertising, and some maintenance.
- The lack of strong corporate support hurts the long-term viability of the organizations.
- The lack of a central arts district hurts us.
- Two of our challenges: cultivating the next generation of artists, because the process is informal and not institutionalized; and, doing a better job of branding ourselves and marketing ourselves.

Folk Arts, Heritage and Culture

- Floral design has been a lucrative business for some people in the Tucson neighborhoods—the design element of this business comes out of the tradition of the Mexican community. Weddings, funerals, proms, and holiday celebrations are a particularly good market. Perhaps more people in the community could take advantage of this kind of business if there were floral design training programs available.

- There are a number of fairs and festivals in the region that provide a deep grounding in the folk culture of greater Tucson. Events like Tucson Meet Yourself, the Family Arts Festival, Juneteenth, the Tamale Festival, and others give people an opportunity to have a face-to-face experience with people from different cultures. Finding the right space, however, can present logistical problems and challenges. Keeping a year-round calendar for these events would help, as would a general website, but there don't appear to be adequate resources for this. There are too many festivals and too many organizations competing for limited dollars.
- The Yaqui Tribe and casino make it a policy to partner with other arts and culture organizations in the region. In fact, "12% of our revenues are directed back to local community events and organizations." The Tribe understands how culture can be an economic engine, but there needs to be respect, at the same time, for the history of the Tribes, and the need to blend culture and spirituality. Cultural conservation, and the various forms of artistic expression among the Tribes, can't always be given a price tag or exchanged in the marketplace.
- One of the challenges of the Tribes is keeping the culture alive—oftentimes that means saving the land, and making sure the next generation holds on to the language and customs. The younger generation, however, doesn't always feel the same level of commitment to keeping the culture as the older generation.
- The Miner's Project is another attempt at preserving the older culture in Arizona—mining was an intrinsic part of the state's economic, social and technological history. The Project is trying to capture this segment of the state's history and culture through digital media, photography, and sound recordings. One of the challenges has been to get miners to tell their story—they have often felt that their story has little value and is of little interest to people.
- The University is a rich cultural asset in many different areas of cultural heritage and tradition, some of which aren't well-understood or publicized. Is it possible to make the University's assets more available?
- Food is becoming an increasingly important component of the region's economy—it's very much tied to the region's heritage and culture. Different varieties of corn, for example are deeply rooted in the Native American tradition, and their value as a "specialty food" has grown. Chefs like Janos, and the Tucson Originals, have added to the attractiveness of regionally and cultural-based cuisine. The export and revenue-generating potential for foods that are within the cultural tradition of the region is significant, but it is not fully developed. A shared commercial kitchen facility would make a big difference in small entrepreneurs' ability to produce these specialty foods.

U of A

- The Theater Program and AZ Repertory Theater: 130 faculty, 125 staff, a \$15 million budget, and receives \$3 million from grants and from fundraising each year.
- The Dance Program: gives 25 dance performances a year (more than most dance programs throughout the country), rents their theater to community-based organizations in the region, offers its facilities for fundraising benefits to roughly 25-30 nonprofit organizations, and organizes tours of its dancers in 8-10 countries each year.

- The Visual Arts Program: has 900 majors, has a visiting artist program, exhibits the artwork of outside artists and art students in its galleries, offers workshops by distinguished artists from around the country, and conducts research on the visual arts.
- The Arizona State Museum: houses one of the largest collections of Mexican folk masks, collaborates with 22 Native American Tribes in Arizona as well as other state and historical museums, has an annual budget of \$2.5 million, brings in another \$2 million to \$5 million in grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements, has 65 full-time employees and 100 part-time employees and a volunteer corps of 50 people for special events. In addition to a collection of artwork and artifacts from Arizona, the Museum has collections of Japanese and Chinese costumes, West African sculpture and masks, Philippine pottery baskets and armaments, artifacts from the Middle East, prehistoric Andean textiles, and Old World stone tools. The Museum will be building a 79,000-square-foot facility that is estimated to cost \$62 million. This facility will be more publicly accessible.
- Arts Education: the College of Art works with K-12 public school systems in the region and in the state. It provides workshops and art instruction throughout the school year and in the summer.
- The School of Music: organizes approximately 220 concerts a year, with an attendance of about 50,000, has music and instrument collections, houses the AZ Opera, and has a variety of alliances, e.g., the Tucson Schools, with area churches and music groups, and with Steinway piano company. The School graduates about 40 music students each year.
- UA Presents: puts on 40 shows each year of University-based performing arts, and another 50 performances by artists and performers from throughout the country, has an annual budget of roughly \$4 million. More than 100,000 people attend events and performances each year. AU Presents rents its space out to a variety of organizations, and it has a strong relationship with the K-12 public schools. About 12,000 students attend rehearsals and performances, and a summer institute is held for teachers in the school systems.
- Although the University's principal responsibility is to its students, it does have connections and relationships with the wider Arizona community. The arts and cultural assets of the University are important to the quality of life of the County and the state, and to the long-term economic health of Tucson and the County. The new president of the University will be appointing a VP for External Affairs, and that individual should help to raise the visibility of the University and strengthen its relationships with the community.

CPLC Meeting

Demographics

- The demographics of the City and County are very important to understand: there are now roughly 1 million people in the Valley, about 500,000 in the County, and around 150,000 in the City.
- The population is a very transient one, and the impact of this needs to be better understood.

- The population in the hills is often afraid to come into the city center—this has to be overcome for their sake and ours.
- There are pockets of an older and wealthier population in some parts of the County, and a heavy concentration of young people in others, particularly in some of the urban wards.

Place

- There's a concern that if the Rio Nuevo project succeeds it could lead to gentrification and push artists and low income people out of the neighborhoods.
- The venues and facilities that we currently have in the city center for arts are not up to par, and this distracts from the attractiveness of the city center.
- We need both a central arts district to make the City more appealing, but we also need satellite arts districts to broaden the arts landscape.

Arts/Creative Economy

- The Tribes have not been well-integrated into the arts and culture landscape. This needs to happen for the sake of the Tribes and for the sake of the arts.
- The arts community isn't as well organized as it should be.
- The U of A has been aloof and somewhat disconnected with the arts. The new president could change this dynamic.
- The arts community should be paying more attention to audience cultivation. With a million people in the Valley, a more strategic focus on audience development could pay significant benefits to existing arts organizations.
- The region's obsession with egalitarianism and anti-elitism could lead to a diminishment of the overall arts product in the region.
- Our Welcome signage is not good—could we address this issue and bring artists into the process of improving our signage?

Areas to Think About for Recommendations

I'm sure we will spend a considerable amount of time developing a set of strategies and recommendations for strengthening the region's cultural assets/Creative Economy. However, these are some of the ideas that surfaced during my interviews and focus groups.

- Create an Office of Cultural Affairs, or something similar to that.
- Develop a strong leadership group for the Creative Economy—establish a Creative Economy or Pima County Cultural Council, for example. The relationship of this to TPAC would clearly have to be discussed.
- Develop a better market/branding/promotion campaign for the region's arts and cultural assets.

- Create a central arts district in the City, and make sure the Warehouse District gets the right resources and strategic development that it deserves. Actually, linking the two efforts is important.
- Make sure the Rio Nuevo project moves forward, and make sure the arts are tied into it in an integral way.
- Integrate the University, in a more institutional way, into the arts/Creative Economy.
- Organize a Tucson Art Show.
- Create a Tucson-area arts website—not sure how this would fit within existing sites, but I don't think a high-end, comprehensive site exists.
- Develop a high-end Arts Journal for the region.
- Organize a bi-monthly Art & Cocktails event for the arts community and the business community.
- Develop a program that would help nonprofit arts organizations function in a more entrepreneurial fashion, i.e., more innovative product development, cost reduction strategies, developing independent revenue streams, cultivating and aggressively pursuing new markets/audiences, etc.
- Find new strategies to grow/integrate the leadership of the Tribes and the Latino community into the predominantly white arts leadership base.
- Provide encouragement and support for cultural institutions to more effectively cultivate and expand their audience and customer base.