

MONTANA ARTS COUNCIL

**STRATEGIC PLAN
2025 - 2030**

HOW TO USE THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

The Montana Arts Council is dedicated to **A Creative Life for All Montanans**.

We know the **Creative Industries Enrich Montana in Many Ways**,

but to maximize opportunities the **Creative Sector Faces Multiple Challenges**.

With statewide input, we asked ourselves some **Core Questions...**

To help us answer them, we asked Montanans. And **Montanans Have a Lot to Say**.

Their answers helped us ask **What Can MAC Do** for our work in the next five years.

Our solutions are outlined in a detailed path of **Stepping Stones** toward our goals.

Along the way we'll evaluate those solutions with these **Guiding Questions**.

And to let you in on our process, here's **How We Got Here**.

**PROMOTING NATIVE
AMERICAN ARTS IS
VERY IMPORTANT.**



**MORE FUNDING
NEEDED FOR
ARTS IN THE
SCHOOLS, MORE
PUBLIC WORKS
PROJECTS, MORE
ART EDUCATION!**

**SOMETIMES I JUST NEED HELP WITH
THE MARKETING PART OF THINGS.**

**FOCUS ON THE VALUE OF ART
NOT JUST MONETARILY BUT
HISTORICALLY AND CULTURALLY.**



**DRAWN FROM 52 PAGES OF COMMENTS
FROM MONTANA ARTISTS, PRESENTERS,
MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, FESTIVAL HOSTS
AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS**



**THE BARRIERS FOR
ME ARE THE NEED FOR
STEADY INCOME AND
HEALTH INSURANCE.**

**DON'T FORGET
EASTERN
MONTANA.**

Images, clockwise from upper left: saddlemaker Marc Brogger, Rodney Street mural in Helena, vintage sign at the Archie Bray Foundation, Queen City Ballet performance of The Nutcracker

A CREATIVE LIFE FOR ALL MONTANANS

MISSION

The Montana Arts Council is the agency of state government established to develop the creative potential of all Montanans, advance education, spur economic vibrancy, and revitalize communities through the arts.

VISION

In Montana, art will be seen as essential to the creativity, community, and entrepreneurship that makes Big Sky Country the best place to live, learn, work, and be inspired.

VALUES

Art and culture are central to human and community life, and play an important role in all economic and community vitality work. Art unites people through shared experiences that deepen our humanity, ennoble our spirits, and foster well-being in each other and in our communities.

Art is the perfect public and private partnership between artists, local governments, small businesses, and citizens to enhance livability, economic prosperity, innovation, creativity, and personal fulfillment.

THE GOAL

To expand the Montana Arts Council's leadership in supporting and promoting artists, arts and culture organizations and Montana communities, positioning them to be successful, sustainable, and a celebrated part of Montana life for residents and visitors. This strategic plan supports MAC's mission by nourishing the creative ecosystem; promoting awareness and appreciation of art and culture; advocating for arts participation in civic life; and growing new partnerships and networks.

NOURISH | **PROMOTE** | **ADVOCATE** | **GROW**

...► **CREATIVE INDUSTRIES ENRICH MONTANA IN MANY WAYS**

HELP DOWNTOWNS THRIVE BOOST SCHOOL ATTENDANCE SUPPORT PHYSICAL HEALING
HELP TREAT MENTAL HEALTH DEVELOP YOUNG MINDS SUPPORT VETERANS
TEACH PROBLEM SOLVING INSPIRE INNOVATION PROMOTE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING
PRESERVE AND CELEBRATE MONTANA'S HERITAGE CREATE JOY
ENGAGE OLDER MONTANANS HIGHLIGHT MONTANA'S INDIGENOUS CULTURES
AMPLIFY UNDER-SERVED COMMUNITIES



THE MONTANA ARTS COUNCIL SUSTAINS THEM ALL

The Montana Arts Council supports a vibrant statewide ecosystem of arts-based activities in classrooms, concert halls, civic spaces, and landscapes that nourish and celebrate Montana's unique cultural and creative identity, and foster a fulfilling, well-rounded life.

Ceramicist and CARES grant recipient Breena Buettner at work.



THE CREATIVE SECTOR FACES MULTIPLE CHALLENGES

Costs at every level are increasing, while arts funding—consistently low compared to its benefits—is flat or decreasing. What can the Montana Arts Council (MAC) do to support sustainability and prevent losses among our significant arts assets?

Montanans report **isolation, loneliness, mental health challenges**, and other wellness issues at a higher rate than most states. Data shows that there are myriad ways artists can help address these issues effectively at lower cost than other interventions. How can Montana improve citizens' physical and mental health through the arts?

Montana's creative industries provide 16,540 jobs, contribute \$2.2 billion to the state's economy, and comprise the 6th largest industry in Montana*. Arts organizations are often viewed as charities, and are not recognized as the innovative small-business powerhouses that they are. How can MAC advocate better for the field? *Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Montana's **public schools** are cutting the arts programs that are shown to build brains, boost attendance, and foster collaborative innovation. How can MAC help restore access to arts learning to Montana's students?

Montanans 65 and older represent the fastest-growing segment of our population (46.8% increase since 2010*). How can the arts in Montana support healthy, active retirement lifestyles, especially in our small, remote towns? *Source: MT Dept of Health and Human Services

Montana's **population** is increasing an average of 1% per year (since 2010*). The state is changing politically, socially, and culturally. Our most populous regions are seeing tremendous growth, while rural counties are emptying out. What can MAC do to identify, preserve, and celebrate Montana's unique cultural identity through our folk and traditional arts? *Source: U.S. Census

Many of Montana's creatives **labor far from markets, resources, and networks**. More young artists are leaving Montana to find work outside. Arts leaders and executive directors are retiring without younger leadership in place to take over. What professional development resources, new networking, and new leadership pathways are needed to make our artists more competitive and our arts centers more sustainable?

OUR CORE QUESTIONS

Given the multiple challenges Montana faces, and the proven efficacy of art in addressing multiple issues in contemporary life, what programs and partnerships can MAC deploy to **empower and champion the arts field** to generate the highest possible benefit to Montana? And how can we **maximize our budget** to accomplish these goals?



*Molly Ogan of Butte High
School, Montana's 2024
Poetry Out Loud state
champion*

MONTANANS HAVE A LOT TO SAY

**THIS STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK ADDRESSES THE OPPORTUNITIES
AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE FIELD**

RISING COSTS

- Facility maintenance
- Staffing and cost of living
- Increased cost of presenting and shipping
- Affordable healthcare
- Cost of financial and administrative professional development

FRONTIER DISTANCES

- Cost of hotel stays
- Need for statewide arts convening
- Unreliable broadband
- Need to strengthen artists' networks

MARKETS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Geographic distances and costs of travel
- Need to help artists find markets
- Need to find new funding sources
- Performing artists need tour coaching
- Need a central source for professional development

FUNDING AND FUNDRAISING

- Fundraising is getting more competitive
- Need to strengthen relationships with private funders and community foundations
- Need access to funders outside Montana
- Arts orgs are told to "find other revenue" ... where?

RECRUITING YOUNG ARTS LEADERS

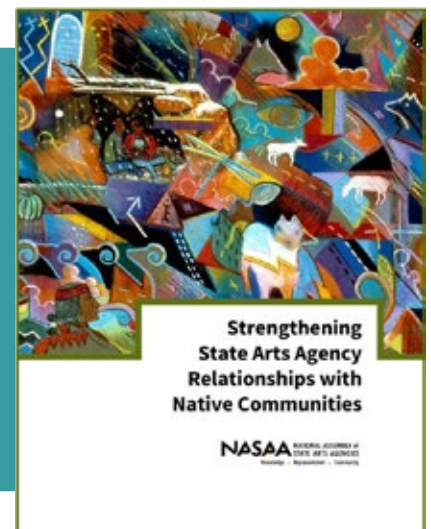
- Need for professional development
- Celebrate growth opportunities
- Address competitive pay and benefits
- Need to keep Montana's creatives in-state
- Arts work is real work

EXPAND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ARTS

- Greater recognition for the public value of the arts
- Engage art to solve civic and human problems
- Enhance perception of nonprofits as innovators
- Arts education is critical to all education

THE ENDURING IMPORTANCE OF FIRST PEOPLES TO MONTANA'S CULTURE

In all our work, MAC affirms the importance of serving Montana's Tribal communities and their creatives. We are proud that Arts Council member Sean Falcon Chandler, an esteemed Aaniiih culture carrier, educator, and artist, was part of producing this important document, Strengthening State Arts Agency Relationships with Native Communities, in 2024. Sean sits on the Board of Directors of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, producer of this report, and served as co-chair of the Circle of Advisors for this project.



.....▶ WHAT CAN MAC DO?

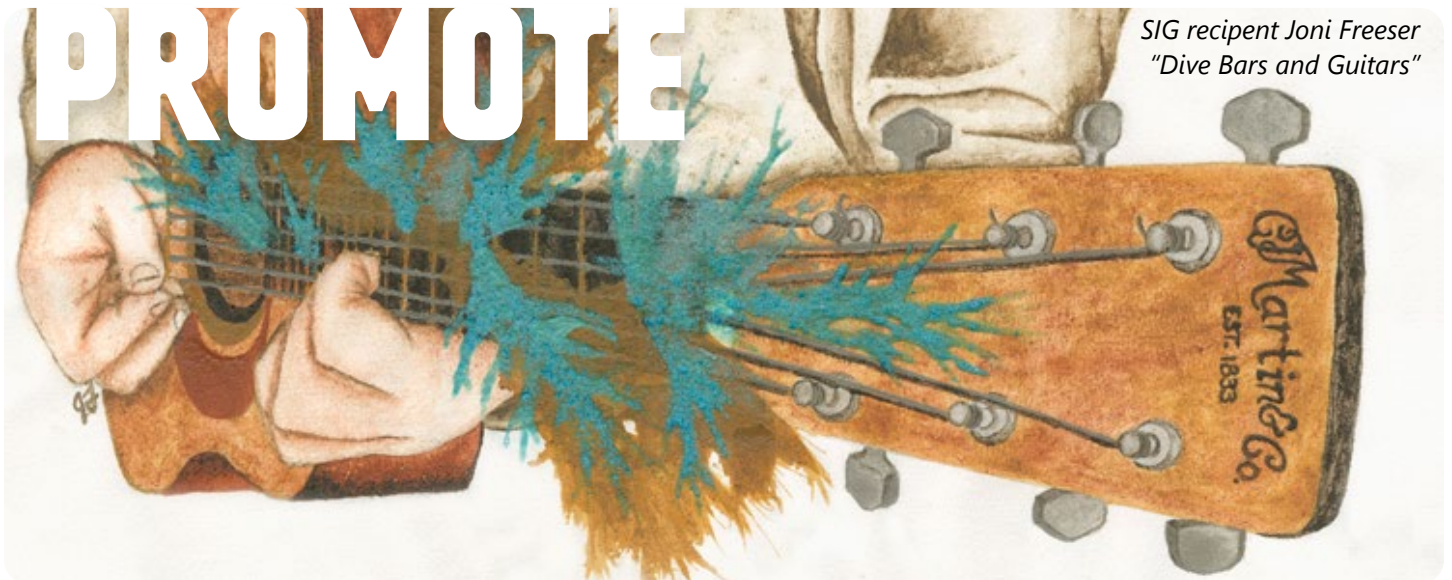
SIG recipient Morgan Irons'
"Curlew's Call"



NOURISH



Nourish the creative ecosystem: Create more ways to meet, convene, exchange knowledge, and gain professional development for artists, arts organizations and businesses, and communities.



SIG recipient Joni Freeser
"Dive Bars and Guitars"

PROMOTE



Promote awareness and appreciation of arts and culture: Strengthen our role as a leading hub and statewide resource of arts information, tools, knowledge, opportunities, funding support, calls for artists, communities of practice, and other resources.



Performers from Opera Montana meeting with students.

ADVOCATE



Advocate for arts participation in civic life: Work to expand public understanding of the many ways art can help address contemporary issues in society—especially community well-being, civic engagement, vibrant economies, and health.



MAGDA Annual Conference.

GROW




Grow partnerships and expand outreach: Help identify new funding opportunities, new partnerships, and new avenues to build long-term sustainability for Montana's artists and arts organizations.








THE STEPPING STONES

FOCUS	PLAN	ACTION	IMPACT
 NOURISH Nourish the creative ecosystem	Refine granting programs to achieve maximum benefit	This work is ongoing and cyclical through Public Value Partnerships, Cultural and Aesthetic Trust, and other programs	Arts grants of all kinds have high return on investment to Montana and the nation
	Update and expand current professional development programs	Revamp and update Montana Artrepreneur Program, and expand to include more disciplines	Artists and culture workers have access to tools that increase capacity and competitiveness
	Develop evergreen, shareable professional development tools for artists and organizations	Individual resources and trainings are curated and publicized	MAC's YouTube channel, online trainings, and in-person workshops become a statewide benefit
	Strategize hosting regional, statewide, or discipline-focused convenings	Launch as funds become available	Artists and arts organizations are more connected, collaborative, communicative
	Expand access to programs for arts learners of all ages and abilities, especially in Tribal and rural areas	This work is ongoing through Poetry Out Loud, Creative Aging initiatives, Artists in Schools and Communities, and other programs as budget allows	Montanans of all ages have access to creative activities in a wide variety of settings
	Deepen support for Montana's folk and traditional arts	Expand and refine Folk and Traditional Arts apprenticeship program; strengthen learning networks in the traditional arts	Montana's important cultural heritage carries forward into the next generation
	Create opportunities for community building around the arts and art practices	Schedule and support Communities of Practice, statewide service organizations, and other networks in response to need	Montanans leverage networks and relationships to broaden impact across Montana

OUR GUIDING QUESTIONS

These questions will determine progress toward the goals:

1. Do we have the financial resources?
2. Do we have the technical capacity?
3. Do we have adequate partnerships and alliances in place?
4. Do we have the necessary internal systems and capabilities?
5. Do we have industry buy-in?
6. Is this work applicable across geographies, community size, and Tribes and culture groups?

FOCUS	PLAN	ACTION	IMPACT
 PROMOTE Promote awareness and appreciation of arts and culture	Create (in partnership) statewide multi-layered arts event calendar	Launch as funds and technological capacity are feasible, and publicize widely	Montanans and visitors have a central, widely known source of arts event information
	Build out a powerful communications plan using multiple media outlets	Provide vertically integrated communications to all constituents	Montana creatives are better informed, connected, and engaged
	Amplify the work of Montana's arts and culture assets	Continue to refine and expand audience for State of the Arts report	Montana's art, creativity, and cultural assets are known and celebrated statewide
	Support arts education and engagement for all ages and abilities	This work is ongoing through arts education grants, Creative Aging work, and other programs	Learners of all ages have opportunities to engage in arts activities
	Amplify promotion of Montana's folk and traditional artists	This work is ongoing through Montana Circle of American Masters program	Montana is known for its traditional arts and artists
	Elevate contemporary Indigenous arts as a cultural asset of Montana	Focus social media, grant funds, and networking efforts to support Indigenous artists and designers	Montana's unique cultural heritage is widely known and celebrated
 ADVOCATE Advocate for arts participation in civic life	Create trainings for artists and arts organizations to work with and communicate with local and state leaders and lawmakers	Launch pilot programs as funding and partnerships allow	Local leaders view art as an innovative, effective resource, and understand the importance of access to art in all communities
	Evaluate available economic impact studies to assess return on investment of the arts in Montana	Champion the impact and economic benefits of art and culture to Montana communities	Creative industries are valued as small businesses and sources of important jobs
 GROW Grow partnerships and expand outreach	Expand opportunities for art experiences for people of all ages, abilities, and communities	Create new partnerships with health, mental health, veterans' and disability communities, and local government organizations	Non-arts agencies and organizations gain robust, creative partners in their work
	Develop new tools and opportunities for Arts in Health programs	As funds are secured, launch pilot programs pairing artists with local community organizations to address specific needs	Montana's health and mental health networks are strengthened



The Montana Arts Council devoted much of 2024 to studying the current state of the creative industries in Montana. We partnered with the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies to conduct a statewide survey in February-March 2024. With almost 900 responses reporting from every Montana county and all seven Indian Reservations, we received a comprehensive reflection of the state of the arts field in Montana.

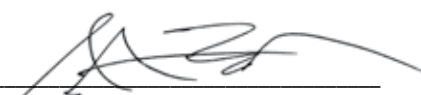
Respondents could answer questions either as an individual artist, a representative of an arts organization, or a community member. Acknowledging the multiple roles many key people play in their communities, we encouraged respondents to answer questions from multiple perspectives. The [analysis](#) comprised 91 pages of thoughtful, heartfelt responses—some celebrations, some challenges to do better, some outright pleas for help.

Following the survey, MAC staff hit the road for a series of community visits, crisscrossing the state to talk to community leaders, Tribal groups, arts leaders, individual artists, and key stakeholders. These meetings and interviews allowed for deeper discussions and helped clarify the needs, challenges, and dreams of the arts industry, a significant player in Montana’s civic and economic life.

One of the messages we heard was overwhelming thanks that the State of Montana and the National Endowment for the Arts continue to support the Montana Arts Council. With 16,540 Montanans employed in this industry—plus an uncountable number of amateur artists and creatives and volunteers who invest themselves in this work—all spread over 147,000 square miles of Montana’s amazing and sometimes lonely landscape, the services the Arts Council provides to sustain and celebrate and support the arts are deeply appreciated.

The 15 Governor-appointed members of the [Montana Arts Council](#), together with our team of seven [professional staff](#), remain deeply committed to supporting the arts in Montana as they rise to the challenges of this moment. We recognize the capacity of the arts to speak every language, to overcome social divisions, to bring pride to every culture, to rally hearts and voices together, and to strengthen and inspire the spirits of all people. We know the arts build economic vitality, community well-being, and physical and mental healing.

On behalf of all Montanans, from Fort Peck to Paradise, from Eureka to Ekalaka, the Montana Arts Council dedicates itself to strengthening and inspiring Montana in all the ways that art can do.


Steve Zabel
Chair


Krys Holmes
Executive Director