

FALL 2017

CENTRAL IOWA

REGIONAL
Cultural
ASSESSMENT



Executive Summary



▶ *Introduction and Background*

CENTRAL IOWA¹ has an impressive history when it comes to thinking big. Visionary leadership with collaborative, thoughtful planning is at the center of the region's recent success, and sets the foundation for a thriving, sustainable future. Accomplishments resulting from this intentional approach to growth and development are easy to find. National accolades, including recognition as one of the one of the best cities for job growth and economic strength, offer Des Moines a competitive advantage when attracting new residents and businesses.²

If economic development is the heart of Greater Des Moines' thoughtful approach to growth, then quality of life is the soul. Recognizing that communities need more than just strong businesses to thrive, Central Iowa has staked its claim on a robust arts and culture scene to attract, retain, engage, entertain and inspire residents and visitors alike.

Central Iowa boasts an impressive arts and culture ecosystem, including a professional symphony and opera, a zoo that serves nearly 500,000 visitors a year, an internationally acclaimed art center and sculpture park, a 14-acre botanical garden and an industry-leading performing arts organization. Additional assets enriching the vibrant cultural scene include unique entertainment venues, nationally-recognized individual artists, culturally diverse festivals, a growing live music scene and top-quality public art. All of this sustains an exciting arts sector supporting active community engagement and a strong creative economy. So strong, in fact, that the 2017 Americans for the Arts: Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 study showed that the non-profit arts and cultural organizations alone had a **\$185 MILLION** economic impact on the region in 2015.³



¹ Central Iowa is defined for purposes of this work to include Polk County, Iowa, and the communities of: Altoona, Ankeny, Bondurant, Carlisle, Clive, Des Moines, Grimes, Indianola, Johnston, Norwalk, Pleasant Hill, Polk City, Urbandale, Waukee, West Des Moines and Windsor Heights.

² <https://www.dsmpartnership.com/growing-business-here/statistics>

³ http://bravogreaterdesmoines.org/documents/cms/docs/IA_GreaterDesMoinesRegion_AEP5_CustomizedReport-FINAL.pdf

Recognizing that arts and culture are both “nice to have” amenities and “need to have” economic engines, Central Iowa has invested in the sector. Generous corporate and individual donors contribute millions annually in time, talent and treasure and, in 2004, Bravo Greater Des Moines was formed to provide reliable and sustainable public funding. Seventeen local communities commit a portion of their hotel/motel tax revenue to Bravo to leverage these funds to support arts, culture and heritage non-profits in the region.

To further strengthen the role of arts and culture as vibrant contributors for powering growth, progress and change, in 2016 Bravo commissioned a Regional Cultural Assessment. The goal was to shine a light on the region’s cultural assets and identify priorities to leverage those assets to enhance quality of life and economic development. Drake University President Marty Martin led a nine-member Steering Committee of community leaders alongside project consultants, Creative Community Builders (CCB).

MORE THAN 800 PEOPLE provided input through surveys, community conversations, stakeholder group interviews and meetings. Individual artists, educators, municipal and community leaders, activists and representatives of organizations working in the arts, culture and heritage sector weighed in to draw a picture of where the region sits currently and build a vision for a path forward. There was strong community engagement in the process and intense shared commitment to potential outcomes. This work defines opportunities for Central Iowa’s cultural community to thrive.



▶ *Enhancing Regional Priorities*

The Regional Cultural Assessment builds upon the extensive community planning work already completed, particularly Greater Des Moines' Capital Crossroads effort, launched in 2012 and refreshed in 2017. Capital Crossroads (CXR) sets out a bold but achievable vision for Central Iowa, pushing residents to dream big, think long term, work together and not settle for "good enough." More than 150 regional priorities were outlined with **EIGHT** identified as **CATALYST PRIORITIES** that will generate the highest implementation value for regional stakeholders.

As these catalyst priorities were already defined by the region as the most effective ways to drive quality of life and economic development, the Regional Cultural Assessment focused on identifying **WAYS ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE CAN HELP ADVANCE, SUPPORT AND GROW THESE EFFORTS**. Many existing arts organizations and artists are already positively impacting these priorities with hundreds of programs being offered in areas such as education, activation of public spaces, diversity and inclusion, and heritage, to name a few.⁴ Ongoing investments in this current foundation will continue to deliver important outcomes. However, opportunities remain to drive high-impact results. Arts and culture are not separate from these catalyst areas, but rather integral to their success.



CAPITAL CROSSROADS 2.0 REGIONAL CATALYST PRIORITIES:

- Downtown and neighborhood vitality
- Good business and entrepreneur climate
- Creative and engaged workforce
- Model of leadership in diversity, inclusion, equity and access
- User-friendly, well connected regional transport system
- Different housing types, costs, styles and locations
- Collaboration among local and regional governing bodies
- Global leader in water quality and soil health

4 Regional Cultural Assessment Creative Sector Survey Results, March 2017

Cultural Priorities

From the research, community input, stakeholder conversations and steering committee leadership, **FOUR CULTURAL PRIORITIES** emerged as the most strategic opportunities to advance regional catalyst priorities. Although presented as separate and in a particular order, these four are deeply interconnected and success in one will directly affect success in others.

1

EVERY DAY, EVERYWHERE ART:

Generate more spontaneous artistic and cultural connections in new and different places.



3

CULTURAL TAPESTRY:

Support arts, culture and heritage as diverse, accessible, inclusive and equitable throughout Central Iowa.



2

STRENGTHEN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY:

Develop the talent and skillsets of creative entrepreneurs and artists.



4

YOUTH CONNECTIONS:

Ensure that all young people in the region have access to a rich array of creative and cultural experiences, both formal and informal, educational and recreational.



1

EVERY DAY, EVERYWHERE ART:

Generate more
spontaneous artistic
and cultural connections in
new and different places.



• **BEYOND PURCHASING A TICKET** or planning ahead to experience art in a gallery or theater, ongoing spontaneous “creative collisions” should be an expected part of living in Central Iowa. Community hubs, neighborhoods, trail systems, parks and civic centers across the region can buzz with new vitality and creative energy by adding elements like pop-up concerts, sidewalk-chalk murals, improv spoken-word performances, temporary public art installations or even a “town troubadour.” Arts and culture create more inviting and engaging public spaces and random, spontaneous and serendipitous encounters with creative experiences boost the region’s vibrancy.

While building on successful efforts such as City Sounds, Art Route, the “Public Art Bus” and Art Along the Trail, implementation of this priority will rely on creative placemaking practices⁵, new approaches to community design and expanding definitions of public art. Artistic and cultural connections deep within neighborhoods and in new and unexpected public spaces can be created, monitored and supported to grow and serve communities throughout the region.

True collaborations between cultural leaders, artists, regional planners, municipal governments, developers, neighborhoods, non-profits, corporate partners and others in generating more every day, everywhere art will result in:

- More active, vibrant neighborhoods and community hubs leveraging arts, culture and heritage to enhance social cohesion and celebrate diverse local identity and vibrancy.
- New opportunities for artists and arts, culture and heritage organizations to participate in regional planning and apply creative methods to address community priorities.
- Creative collaborations driving programming and experiences at a variety of community intersections so more people in more places become “continuously inspired.”

Initial actions that could help drive this priority include:

- Bringing artists and arts organizations together with civic agencies and other non-traditional arts partners to energize community hubs through “creative collision” pilot projects.
- Hosting a workshop for artists, arts organizations, business and government leadership and educators to create shared understanding of creative placemaking based on national best practices.
- Increasing collaboration to drive awareness of, and participation in, creative activities and the important role of “place” in those interactions.
- Completing an asset mapping process to highlight existing creative connections, strengths and gaps across the region.
- Providing an “artist-in-residence” training workshop for artists and businesses to learn how best to collaborate to achieve regional objectives.

CAPITAL CROSSROADS PRIORITIES SERVED:

- Civic centers and neighborhoods
- Business and entrepreneurial climate
- Engaged, creative workforce
- Transportation systems
- Diversity/inclusion/equity
- Regional cooperation

⁵ For the past decade, the arts community has joined forces with city planners, developers, community leaders, and others to create more vibrant towns, neighborhoods and cities. They have rallied around a newly coined practice called Creative Placemaking. As described by economist Ann Markusen and arts consultant Anne Gadwa in a 2010 white paper for the National Endowment for the Arts: *“In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.”*

NURTURING THE CREATIVE SECTOR OF CENTRAL IOWA

could expand one of the fastest growing segments of the overall economy⁶. Doing so directly contributes to a more vibrant and livable region and more competitive business environment. Perhaps as importantly, a strong creative economy that supports the development of artists, start-up arts organizations and creative skills reinforces the reality that Central Iowa is a place where creative businesses can thrive.

Building the creative workforce begins with a supportive climate for artists and for entrepreneurship. Central Iowa has grown many successful enterprises built on the ideas, talents and drive of entrepreneurs. By focusing targeted workforce and leadership development efforts on creative individuals and businesses, a collaborative creative workforce and entrepreneurial climate will grow. If individual artists and organizations of all sizes have access to technical, developmental and financial resources and long-term sustainable support, the result will be new aesthetic and entertainment options and more creative enterprises and nonprofits to teach, perform, exhibit and build appreciation for creative and cultural forms of all types.

When successfully embraced, a strong creative economy will yield:

- A healthy community of self-sustaining artists thriving in Central Iowa.
- Support networks for creative businesses, individuals and entrepreneurs spawning new creative enterprises and stimulating the business sector in new and dynamic ways.
- National recognition that Greater Des Moines offers a supportive creative environment.
- Acknowledgement that the creative economy is an essential driver of Central Iowa's overall success.

Initial actions that could help drive this priority include:

- Development and support for physical and virtual artist hubs for networking, training, mentorship and support services including artist working spaces, maker-spaces and independent gallery and performance venues.
- Completion of a needs assessment and viability study for a multi-purpose mid-level (400-1000 seat) exhibition venue.
- Creation of an action plan for a full range of business development learning.
- Review of municipal codes (permitting, zoning, etc.) affecting creative businesses, independent artists and sole proprietors and strategies to remove barriers that are inhibiting business.

2

STRENGTHEN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY:

Develop the talent and skillsets of creative entrepreneurs and artists.



CAPITAL CROSSROADS PRIORITIES SERVED:

- Civic centers and neighborhoods
- Business and entrepreneurial climate
- Engaged, creative workforce
- Diversity/inclusion/equity

⁶ <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DITC/CreativeEconomy/Creative-Economy.aspx>

3

CULTURAL TAPESTRY:

Support arts, culture and heritage as diverse, accessible, inclusive and equitable throughout Central Iowa.



A SIGNIFICANT REGIONAL GOAL FOR CENTRAL IOWA

is to become a leader in building a diverse, inclusive, equitable and civil community.⁷ Although the overall population is still more than 90% white, longstanding communities of color and new immigrant and refugee residents are well-represented. The Des Moines Public Schools serve a student population that is 40% white, 26% Hispanic, 20% African American and 8% Asian and that speaks more than 109 languages.

Arts, culture and heritage present a unique platform for bringing diverse people, perspectives and experiences together. In Central Iowa, various communities of color and immigrant communities have organized events, festivals and nonprofits to assert the region’s growing tapestry of distinctive cultural identities, expressed in varied and impactful ways. However, while there is passionate interest in cultural diversity, many existing cultural organizations indicated that their efforts to offer diverse programming and access are scattered and not well coordinated. Further, although passion and interest are high, many just don’t know how to engage diverse audiences or to build organizations and programming that are authentically inclusive. In order to build understanding of the value of diversity and capacity to support the cultural expressions of both long-term communities of color and newly arrived diverse communities, this focus area addresses a set of challenges Central Iowa faces to become a holistic and authentically inclusive community.

Creating a cultural tapestry can be uniquely leveraged by an active arts and culture sector in partnership with business, government and education so that:

- Arts, culture and heritage are consistently defined to include the traditions and expressions of the many cultural groups across Central Iowa.
- Barriers to engagement in the arts, culture and heritage sector are acknowledged and removed for people of all ethnicities.
- A growing cohort of cultural organizations based in diverse communities and demographics can meet the needs of previously underserved populations.
- More frequent engagement in arts, culture and heritage activities are experienced by more people and more diverse communities across the region.

Initial actions that could help drive this priority include:

- Creating a “diversity partnership” to build relationships and recommend an action plan that defines and improves how the arts and culture sector can better address issues of diversity, inclusion, accessibility and equity.
- Reviewing current policies and practices across the arts and culture sector with the goal of increasing access and inclusion for the wide array of cultural offerings in our region.
- Providing more professional development for individual artists and for arts, culture and heritage organizations with an emphasis on developing emerging leaders of color.

CAPITAL CROSSROADS PRIORITIES SERVED:

- Civic centers and neighborhoods
- Business and entrepreneurial climate
- Engaged, creative workforce
- Diversity/inclusion/equity
- Regional cooperation

⁷ Inclusion is defined through the Central Iowa’s Capital Crossroads Social Capital initiative as “Racially and ethnically diverse communities, students, young professionals, women, LGBTQIA persons, all faith perspectives, persons with disabilities, immigrant and refugee populations, low-income, and other historically underserved communities.”

4

YOUTH CONNECTIONS:

Ensure that all young people in the region have access to a rich array of creative and cultural experiences, both formal and informal, educational and recreational.



RESIDENTS OF CENTRAL IOWA CARE DEEPLY that young people have opportunities to connect with and engage in meaningful arts, culture and heritage experiences that contribute to vital skills including creativity, problem solving, respecting differences, innovation and critical thinking. Arts education and participation are widely recognized as fundamental to performance at school and at work, and essential to leading a rich and engaged life. This priority aims to build on the arts and cultural experiences currently available to youth and expand engagement across Central Iowa, from schools, community centers, museum galleries and concert halls to gardens, computer labs, parks and neighborhoods.

Successful implementation of this effort will yield:

- Increased access to arts education and programs that meet youth where they are physically, economically, developmentally and culturally.
- Broad recognition and appreciation for the long-term positive impacts of arts experiences on young people.
- Enhanced in school, out of school, formal and informal opportunities for young people and their families to engage with quality arts, culture and heritage experiences.

A wide array of agencies is already working to address arts educational strategies for Central Iowa youth. Building on a complex network of existing programs in arts and cultural education across school districts, multiple nonprofits and various public and private service programs requires a high-level effort to collect and share information, align providers, eliminate redundancies and achieve shared programmatic objectives. This is enormously important but complex work.

Improving youth connections to the arts will require collaboration with school districts, youth centers, for profit and nonprofit creative organizations and a variety of social service and other community agencies. Initial actions that could help drive this priority include:

- Work with Education Drives our Great Economy (EDGE) to establish a creative education strategy that will enhance coordination, focus and advocacy for quality, effective arts, culture and heritage education programming.
- Complete an assessment of currently available in-school and out-of-school arts education experiences and programs in the region to determine areas of success and opportunity.
- Review existing school district arts education strategic plans and identify opportunities to support outlined objectives.

CAPITAL CROSSROADS PRIORITIES SERVED:

- Business and entrepreneurial climate
- Engaged, creative workforce
- Diversity/inclusion/equity
- Regional cooperation



▶ *Next Steps*

With strong economic growth and deep appreciation for quality of life as key ingredients to Central Iowa's success, now is the time to build on the region's strong social connectedness and desire to strengthen and build community with arts and culture at the center. Cultural and community leaders, artists, regional planners, municipal governments, developers, neighborhoods, employers, funders, entrepreneurs, residents and advocates must continue to come together to proactively infuse the arts into decisions, plans and actions to realize this vision.

The purpose of the Regional Cultural Assessment was to identify how Central Iowa can leverage arts, culture and heritage to drive quality of life and economic development so as to create and sustain an ongoing vision that recognizes the critical role the creative sector can play in lifting the region to new heights. The Cultural Capital of Capital Crossroads 2.0 will coordinate and convene ongoing activities to support the Assessment's priorities. Entities like Bravo Greater Des Moines, Drake University, Capital Crossroads funding partners and others will continue to take leadership roles to support existing organizations, programs and resources and nurture new efforts that advance the priorities in this report.



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