

Context, Mission, and Plan for the Visual Arts Consortium (VAC)

The presence of an active, healthy and growing community of artists makes an enormous difference in the livability and the prosperity of a community. The intrinsic value of the making and sharing of art in itself is crucial. So are the many significant ancillary benefits of artistic activity that relate to the economic, social, educational and even political development of our society. The case for these various benefits is well-documented and persuasive, and has led to a resurgence in citizens working to ensure that art and artists are welcome and well-supported in their communities, as can be seen in the 2003 study from the Urban Institute, [Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists](http://www.usartistsreport.org) (www.usartistsreport.org).

In late 2004, the Visual Arts Consortium met to begin a process of quantifying and qualifying the state of the visual art culture in Kansas City. Starting from the supposition that Kansas City is just an “ok” place for artists and arts professionals to live and work, a group of 40 leaders in the arts community - artists and arts professionals - began to focus on the future: to imagine Kansas City as a thriving magnet for artists and arts professionals and to imagine how to go about transforming Kansas City into this kind of center.

The leadership group gathered for an extensive and creative planning session last fall. The resulting plan was a list of 26 proposed projects and activities which the arts leaders felt would help artists and arts professionals in Kansas City.

In order to test these ideas on the wider arts community, a survey was created and distributed for members of the arts community to fill out. Surveys were distributed to the 40 leaders who in turn forwarded surveys to 400+ additional individuals. There were, in all, about 80 survey responses that comprised the data for the survey results. Beginning in the fall of 2005, some members of the VAC will organize themselves into work groups to strategize further on some of these ideas.

The mission of the Visual Arts Consortium is to make Kansas City a thriving magnet for artists and arts professionals by working to foster and improve the personal and professional lives of artists and arts professionals living in the Greater Kansas City area.

Twenty-Six Big Ideas for the Visual Arts in Kansas City

The Twenty-Six Big Ideas will help Kansas City grow to become even more of a thriving center for artists and arts professionals. In the list below, the ideas have been organized into six categories, based on an analytical framework that was established and documented in Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists (Urban Institute, 2003).

Validation/Recognition: To Recognize and Award Artistic Excellence

- Increase fellowships, grants and awards for local artists.
- Expand programs bringing visiting curators and critics to Kansas City
- Increase support for and cultivation of critical writing in Kansas City.
- Develop efforts aimed at local artists by the major Kansas City art organizations.

Demand/Market: To Cultivate Growing Interest

- Cultivate more local and national press for all aspects of the art scene.
- Increase participation of Kansas City artists and galleries at national and international art expos.
- Expand exchange programs to send Kansas City artists out and import non-Kansas City artists to town.
- Increase traveling exhibitions of Kansas City artists' work to other cities.
- Create collecting programs targeting architects and designers who regularly buy or recommend artwork for clients or providing "backroom" tours of local galleries.
- Host a national exhibition, such as a biennial or alternative contemporary art expo in Kansas City similar to the "Stray Show" or "Scope".

Material Support: To Sustain Artistic Activity

- Increase general grants for projects or sudden opportunities for local artists.
- Create tax incentives and abatements that benefit artists and arts-related businesses.
- Provide cooperative health insurance, retirement programs, credit union and additional financial services for artists and staff of small arts not-profits..
- Expand projects between businesses and individual artists that benefit each, such as allowing artists to use specialized fabrication facilities or technological resources.
- Enhance public art programs and opportunities.
- Develop more artists' space, including incubators, studios and art complexes.

Professional Training: To Increase Career Development Opportunities

- Support the creation of a studio arts MFA program in Kansas City.
- Create a non-profit residency program similar to Bemis in Omaha.
- Create programs to mentor art students while in school, providing access to working artists and arts professionals in the community.

Community: To Expand the Scope and Reach of our Endeavors

- Host more cultural conferences in Kansas City, such as the College Art Association Conference, the International Sculpture Conference or American Federation for the Arts Conference.
- Develop an outreach program about Kansas City's art community for hotel concierges and the Convention and Visitors Association.
- Encourage partnerships with visual artists and artists of other disciplines.
- Promote diversity in the arts community.

Information: To Provide More Information for Artists and their Supporters

- Create a comprehensive gallery guide for visitors and local community.
- Create an information clearinghouse on the arts in Kansas City.
- Create position of Visual Arts Coordinator at the metro level for Public Relations, Marketing and Advocacy.