

creation**IN**common

*strengthening communities through shared creativity*

## **RESEARCH BRIEF:**

# Internal Assessment of Operational Effectiveness

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## Overview

Creation In Common has been engaged by the North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA) to help create their next strategic plan. This report will provide an understanding of the overall operational effectiveness by the staff and board.

## Methodology

During February 22 – March 11, 2016, Creation In Common's Director of Research, Anne Jin Soo Preston conducted interviews with board and staff members. These conversations, included questions focused on the following areas:

- Ability to meet statewide needs
- Impact that is being created
- Operational strengths and areas needed to be developed
- Communications about service offerings and the role of the agency
- Alliances and partnerships
- Board governance and activities

## Participants

### **Board Members**

#### **Member At Large**

Chairman David "White Thunder" Trottier

**Region: 1** Shannon Fox

**Region: 2** Terry Jelsing

**Region: 3** Dr. Rich Johnson

**Region: 4** Emily Montgomery

**Region: 5** Brad Bachmeier

**Region: 6** Lana Schlecht, DDS

**Region: 7** Melissa Gordon

**Region: 8** Sarah Snavelly

### **Staff Members:**

#### **Executive Director**

Beth Klingenstein

Institutional Support, Special Projects, Artist Fellowships, Budget & Administration

**Administrative Officer**

Robin Bosch

General Agency Information, Grant Reporting, Payroll, Accounting

**State Folklorist**

Troyd Geist

Apprenticeship Grants, Folk Arts Projects, Art for Life, Trails & Rails

**Arts in Education Director**

Rebecca Engelman

Artist-In-Residence, Teacher Incentive, STE[A]M, Iceland Exchange

**Community Services/Public Information Officer**

Amy Schmidt

Professional Development, Community Arts Access, Presenter Support, Website, Newsletter, ADA Coordinator

## Acknowledgements

Creation in Common would like to thank all of the board and staff who took the time to participate in these interviews, as without their participation, this process would not be possible.

## Key Findings

Below are the key findings gleaned from the interviews, which will help shape the direction of the strategic planning process.

### Impacting and meeting the Arts needs in North Dakota

Identified by all internal stakeholders as the pillars of their existence, staff and board acknowledged the impact created from NDCA's wide-ranging grants programs. Without a process in place to identify priorities and help guide the staff in making decisions, the additional identified list of needs not being met, assumes that NDCA needs to be everything to everyone. A distinct factor for inhibiting priority decisions is the absence of extra time available to reflect and evaluate structure and process. In nearly all of the subsequent areas explored, *time* is a reoccurring issue.

### Grant Making Programs

For staff, the number of grants programs needing oversight and management is overwhelming. Staff expressed the amount of time spent on grants displaces and sometimes pushes the completion of other responsibilities. Just keeping up with the demand to field grants inquiries, helping with the application process, and oversight makes up the majority of their workday. Streamlining both the process and the number of programs could make workloads more manageable, allow space for reflection and adjustments, and most of all, complete their other duties while not feeling pressured. The Executive Director's workload is also overburdened with the responsibility for three of the grant making programs, in addition to the oversight, strategy, and high-level administration.

The interviews suggested that the transition to a new grants system has had significant impacts on staff's time and attention. Training and support from the new online grant vendor has been minimal and less than what was promised. Staff do not feel they have time to make the changes necessary to the programs they administer due to the amount of added effort it would take them implement changes online or thus creating more work for someone else make the changes for them.

### Staff Overload

Above and beyond their regular staff duties, staff clearly articulated the feeling of being overloaded without a clear sense for relief in the near future. Though not all of the the following factors impact staff equally, the transition of Executive Director over the last two years, overhauling the online grants system, adding additional systems to capture new reporting requirements from the NEA, strategic planning, the impact study,

anniversary planning, and upcoming biennial conference planning, has pushed staff to their limits. The board also supported these sentiments in their interviews that staff exhibits an extremely busy and heavy workload and expressed concerns about burnout. They also spoke to a desire for them to evaluate and streamline processes to help alleviate some of the burden.

Hearing concerns from both board and staff, there is a clear need for the organization to prioritize their operational goals and focus their efforts where they can have the deepest impact with the smallest investment of effort. Currently, staff is dedicating a lot of time and effort, feeling over extended, and not necessarily having the degree of impact they desire.

#### Building Partnerships and Allies

The interviews confirmed the strong abilities of staff for building and cultivating partnerships. One especially important strategy has been for staff to utilize more partnerships to leverage additional administrative and financial support to achieve deeper impacts. The absence of time proves to be one of the largest hurdles in cultivating and deepening the existing relationships and furthering the reach with others.

#### Communications & Public Engagement

Interviews united staff and board that more efforts are needed to mobilize and engage citizens statewide. By engaging more of a grassroots approach, it may also amplify the support for funding by both the legislature and may bring more statewide support from businesses and other agencies. A system or mechanism for both receiving and sharing more about the impact that the funding has on individual communities is key to reaching this outcome. It should be noted that staff abilities in this area are strong, but time also impacts the effort.

#### Board Influence and Governance

It was clear that the board exhibits strong but varying connections to their community and legislators in their regions. The interviews revealed that there is not a unified understanding of the role and governance structure of the board. Some of the factors identified were challenges with an articulated set of goals, activities that are expected, as well as the process in which these are determined and executed.

## Response by Question - Board & Staff

### 1. How would you describe where NDCA is most effective at meeting statewide needs?

- Reaching kids when they are young and in greater numbers (educational programs, artists in residence, Poetry out Loud)
- Working with traditional and folk artists
- Providing a service that would not be available anywhere else
- Arts and education
- Most efficient at providing local arts funding
- Healthy living
- Working in eldercare facilities
- Really strong in funding support
- Meeting the needs of non-traditional fine art
- Reaching out in rural communities
- Grants and granting funding to support arts activities (for individuals and organizations of all sizes that need it)
- Building relationships with DPI to understand best practices in arts education and go deeper into areas that they have not gone before
- Partnering with other organizations to create greater impact – Picture in Writing program with the Humanities Council
- Making one-on-one connections, having face-to-face meetings with grantees as so much now is done online
- Putting partners together (knowing who and what is happening and putting them in touch with each other)

### What are the needs that are not being addressed?

- Not enough time to cultivate and build new relationships and partners  
Much of the day is filled with too much administration of programs and projects, there is not much time leftover for deepening and strengthening relationships or creating new programs
- Technology  
Generational split with using technology
- More Proportional funding  
Large institutions are supported at a much smaller percentage of their overall budget than smaller organizations.
- Competition with similar sized organizations  
A tiered system does not exist which would allow similar sized organizations to compete with like organizations, right now, each organization competes for all dollars and against all organizations across the state.

- Compiling and hosting on the website a comprehensive listing of all individual artists in North Dakota  
Previously the Council hosted on the website Culture Pulse, a program that was featured on their website that listed artists from across the state.
- Regular regional meetings  
Currently it is challenging for more travel to be justified to hold regional gatherings to do more strategic thinking, brainstorm new ideas, gain support from a region
- Granting is mainly focused on organizations – Too few individual artists supported  
Limited numbers of artists are awarded in each discipline and within the granting year. Frequency and amount is also very low.
- Provide more resources  
NDCA currently does not have the capacity to offer and create resources, but they could be better at connecting individuals/organizations to those resources that already exist.
- Resources and impact beyond funding
  - Opportunities for training
  - Organizations need: grant writing, strategic planning, board development, fundraising, marketing
  - Individuals need: additional training to promote and network
  - How to work with cities to secure more funding (e.g. percent of sales tax etc.)
- Development and acknowledgement of a larger culture  
The community as a whole is a large part of the culture – those in the community are not acknowledged about what the impact is of cultural events.
- Not enough people power
- Awareness of what's out there  
There are pockets of talent that no one knows about – there needs to be more awareness to these areas.
- Marketing help for individual artists  
Getting their work shown on a regional and national level
- Not enough support and opportunities for art in schools  
Many school aged kids do not have art opportunities or have significantly less opportunities than they have in the past, especially for grades 6-12
- Smaller programs that are doing more interesting things
- For those who have never received a grant, the process is a little intimidating and may put people off
- Granting to regional organizations that take a cut for administrating the funds – can the funds be granted to the cities for capacity building that offers resources and tools?
- Push for higher quality programming
- Communicating the impact that is created through grant making

- Acknowledgment of partnerships
- Lack of connection for artists that live in less densely populated areas
- Many artists do not identify themselves as artists – what they do is so integrated into their life
- New initiatives
- More funding for visual and performing arts
- Programming seems piecemeal
- Streamlined process for applying for a grant
- Communicating the community value through high quality arts programming
- Challenges in reaching out to the entire state
- Staff is overwhelmed and challenged with the workload
- Individual artist fellowships are too few and are offered too infrequently
- Opportunities for bringing in more performing arts (statewide network)

**What are the prominent opportunities that are being missed?**

- Communicating better across the regions and throughout the state
- Artists working more together to support one another
- Value of creativity and thinking outside the box for maximum places for impact especially
- Promoting more public art
- Economic development
- Creative opportunities – especially for smaller towns
- More visibility

**2. How would you describe NDCA's statewide impact?**

The impact of the grants are statewide

Dollars are granted to artists, arts organizations, educational institutions, and through partnerships across the state

- Attendees to the arts are 1.5 times larger than the population (may be old statistic)
- Doing good things
- The arts are important to everyone
- Support for making art experiences available for as many people as possible
- Offering a lot of grant programming in a small state
- By supporting the arts, they reach every North Dakotan
- Smaller organizations are more significantly impacted and grants are utilized very well
- Without NDCA, several arts organizations could not exist
- The arts can enhance: quality of life, health/wealth, heritage and culture
- There are so many people and places that the arts have touched
- So many individuals have real stories to share
- Good with artists and arts organizations

- Through partnerships
- Through relationships
- Art for Life
- Connecting personal stories with the data in the story

### **Why is the impact important to North Dakota today?**

- The State has changed
- Art is important to keep in the schools
- People would find other things to do with their time, thus talent would be wasted
- Partnerships are being formed with other agencies, organizations, and institutions and therefore a greater impact can be had through these partnerships
- If you have previously moved away, you can now come back and live in North Dakota and feel good about it
- As the economy flexes, Arts can make the state shine.
- When younger generations lose the arts – the arts are lost and it takes a lot more work to make them thrive.
- Art has a role and impact and it is an integral part of their life  
It is a part of their community and the respect for it needs to be elevated. It has been removed from the perception of everyday life
- It will take us out of the dark ages  
If people understand the possibilities and we know the needs, then we can connect them when funding and support is available.

#### Art has Benefits

- Art has an impact on the economic vitality of the community. If there is art, there are more interesting opportunities and more activities to choose from
- Art impacts lives especially on a reservation
- Art facilitates a connecting with amazing people which can lead to visions and dreams for the future
- Connections to community
- The money spent for art goes back into the communities
- Recruiting and retaining talent throughout the state
- Families want to have a high quality of life and an environment that gets them out and enjoying their community

### **What does the next level of impact for NDCA look like?**

- Creating more out of the box partnerships
- Connector/Incubator for more for artists/organizations to partner and create a larger impact for their communities
- Adding staff could improve the service to grantees
- More visibility about the impact of what the arts do across the state to the legislators/policy makers
- Help more individual artists and organizations

- Offer more trainings
- Infusing art into community and everyday life
- Acknowledgement of public appreciation and what the arts do for individuals, especially when they are young (building self confidence, instilling creativity)
- Groundswell of stories from the communities
- Direct link to the economy
- Being seen as an important partner to the State
- Creating deeper relationships with more influence with DPI
- More engagement with the aging and disability population
- More communications
- More collaboration with other groups
- Continue to meet the challenges as budgets are cut and there is less to be had
- More visibility in more prominent places
- Awareness in general
- A legacy fund
- Continue to recognize the needs for artists and arts organizations
- Capacity building for local arts organizations (tool kits, conferences, education, webinars)
- Additional funding
- More advocates and grassroots effort among North Dakota citizens
- More impact from Arts North Dakota
- Bridging the gap between the Eastern and Western sides of the state, ensuring that there are things happening around the entire state
- More forward thinking
- Funding creativity through all disciplines
- Vibrancy to communities
- Creating more out of the box partnerships
- Connector/Incubator for more for artists/organizations to partner and create a larger impact for their communities
- Adding a staff position could improve the service to grantees
- More visible with the impact of what the arts do across the state to the legislators/policy makers
- Help more individual artists and organizations

**Beyond financial barriers, what is inhibiting NDCA from reaching their desired impact?**

- Lack of staff
- Not enough incentives
- Not being active enough on social media
- Art is perceived as an extra – we celebrate people who leave (attitude). We need to make sure that talent does not leave

- Kids need more of a case for supporting and encouraging participation
- Humbleness, not recognizing themselves as artists or thinking that they should receive support (North Dakotan mentality)
- Efforts from collectors of artists from across the state
- Too many small granting programs
- Invest in activities that have had a larger impact
- Not enough acknowledgement of grantees in the public
- Limited time of board members
- Needing permission to be artists and creative at any level – arts is for everyone not just in a large museum experience or for the elite
- More marketing and PR
- Adults are backing away from participation
- Low value of artists
- Education based support
- More community leader support
- Lack of clear direction in messaging
- Lack of communication efforts from the greater constituencies of North Dakota
- Limited/not enough staff capacity
- Too many grant programs – losing ourselves in the process
- Grants support
- Not enough public information talking about the impact of arts across the state going out to the larger constituencies
- Changes with the online grant system
- Added larger projects that are outside of the normal cyclical programming and administration
- Time is demanded too much for grants/granting process
- Added reporting/tracking from NEA
- Time to be creative and explore more opportunities.
- The need to meet more people of influence throughout the state
- Awareness
- Reaching as many people across the state
- NDCA has grown in reach and scope, but has never evaluated or prioritized what they do
- Efficiency – are they operating in the most efficient ways

**What method or approach is most effective at delivering the impact?**

- Aligning to the work to the five priorities of the State
- Granting funds to individuals and organizations
- Adding to the education of other agencies and legislators
- Partnering with other organizations – what money NDCA can bring to the table is then leveraged by the partners and can influence and create a greater impact

**Where is the bulk of NDCA's time and energy placed?**

- Grants process through all stages (revisions to the information, inquiries, application, review, monitoring, disbursements, reporting)

**If you could reallocate how time and resources are focused, what changes would you make?**

- Focus on partnerships and develop creative/innovative projects
- Having someone at the desk who can staffing the office (8-5)
- Administrative assistance
- Support from the grant vendor  
The systems vendor for the grant over promised and has not provided enough training, solutions, and support for any of the staff.
- Change grant administration structure
  - With each staff member overseeing several grant programs, the entire process from assisting grantees with inquiries, helping with application process and answering questions, conducting the grant selection, monitoring, and overseeing disbursement and reporting is taking up too much time.
  - Take grants off of Beth's plate
  - Get more staff (PT or FT) be devoted to grants who can help with the application process and inquiry
  - Too many little grants/bundle some grants which would reduce admin cost and time

**3. What are NDCA's operational strengths and what are areas that need to be strengthened or developed?**

**Strengths:**

- Staff are really strong and very dedicated
- Beth is a strong leader and very detail oriented
- Board takes initiative
- Great core of staff
- Switch in the communication and message of the impact of the arts
- Providing valuable information (newsletter)
- Staff are very talented and competent in their areas of expertise
- Ability to build relationships is very strong
- Creative staff
- The power of relationships that have been cultivated over time

**Strengthening/Needs Development:**

- Encourage staff to continue to do good work

- Sponsored events throughout the state to increase the communications to draw more artists, musicians, and culture in their region and bring it to the forefront.
- Staff is underpaid
- More PR (images, photo video)
- Greater/stronger brand presence (both in logo and message)
- New information
- Refresh of design communications to feel more contemporary
- Posting more on social media
- Better documentation of grantees projects
- More creativity with documentation
- More hands-on points of contact
- The PT person is making a difference – explore more opportunities for this
- Innovation and new ideas
- Things focused on individuals less information about grants
- Roster of artist on the website provided legitimacy and the ability to find where they are located
- More ambassadors throughout the state
- Identifying what is taking a lot of staff time that is inefficient
- Efficiency of systems and processes (mostly around grants)
- More support for the functionality of the grant system

**4. Please describe the narrative that NDCA communicates to stakeholders about the arts in North Dakota and the agency's role?**

- Granting to organizations
- Technical information about the grants process
- A lot about the grants process
- Folk and traditional arts and crafts
- Main supporter for the Arts
- Organization to go to for special projects funding
- Promotion and featuring: individual activities, stories, new research, events across the state, and resources offered from other sources (through press releases, social media, newsletters, other media)
- Shares the value of the relationships and networks
- Respect of the grantees (individuals/organizations)
- Grant deadlines
- How many grants and to whom they were awarded

**How does that narrative need to change to direct constituencies?**

- More face-to-face intersections
- Interacting with younger people and older people for lifelong learning
- More success stories – more about the people, less about the Council

- Building a culture of the arts that highlight all of the arts disciplines equally
- Grassroots – getting people more connected and/or people who are more connected to the legislature
- Continue to be positive, with funding dwindling
- Heightened profile of what NDCA does
- Perception that art is frivolous
- Breaking the division between east and west
- Support should be from the community
- Arts/culture = vibrant communities
- Art changes and advances communities
- Using firm evidence for the economy, leadership and communities
- Connecting the data to more personal stories and how they have impacted communities
- Educating everyday people about the importance of arts in the schools and exposure at a young age
- How arts improves learning, curbs bad behavior
- They can do art and sports
- Promoting creativity instead of arts
- Arts seems disconnected to daily life
- There is a disconnect with what grantees are doing with the grant money and the messages that they are sending out to the public
- The story needs to be conveyed through more channels and more consistently
- Reciprocity of support – 2-way street

**How does the narrative need to change to legislators and policy makers?**

- Being more organized around frequency of contact
- Building stronger relationships
- Confidence
- Offering more direction about the message or targeting a specific message
- Focus more on the value art creates and what it can do for the community
- More stories and research
- Connect to economic development, cultural heritage/preservation
- Adopt a legislator program could create more opportunities for educating them
- Educate more people to get involved – next generation is the future
- Appeal to their sensibilities
- Using stronger messages from impacted individuals which can be directly sent to legislators
- Continue to show the impact on specific communities
- Support from the individuals in each of the regions
- More personal stories connecting the data and showing the impact

- Continue to emphasize the practical ways that NDCA aligns with the state goals. Parallel importance.
- More concrete examples (personal relationships, personal examples, personal stories and personal connections)

**What do you think are the most important measurement indicators that NDCA should be tracking and communicating?**

- Economic impact
- Who and how many people attend events
- Sharing the reason and what draws them to the events
- What is important to them
- How we help others understand the importance of the arts
- Satisfaction with the grants process
- How do the grants impact the lives/communities of North Dakota – how is NDCA making a difference
- Documenting and sharing the personal stories

**5. Who are NDCA's most powerful allies?**

- Arts Midwest
- NEA
- State Senators
- Directors from the grantee organizations
- Grantee artists, arts organizations, schools
- Partners
- Superintendents, teachers, administrators, principals
- STEAM
- Governor's wife
- Artists
- Hal Gershwin
- Grantees - Individuals and organizations that receive funding and assistance
- Regional Arts Organizations
- Arts North Dakota
- Parks
- Humanities Council
- Heritage Center
- National Parks & Rec
- Working on tourism
- Hjemkomst Center
- DPI

**How is NDCA effectively partnering with these allies? What needs to be improved?**

**Effective:**

- Connecting to more community
- Senators can be reached directly
- Reaching a large amount of organizations
- Communication is good (but not across the board)
- Collaborating to leverage more dollars for a project
- Continual cultivation of the relationships
- Partnering with them to promote grant programs and communication
- Providing expertise where the partner may not have it
- Exchange of needs
- Initiations to speaking at conferences
- Good communication
- Attitude and openness to creativity

**Improvements:**

- More communication about what is happening with the partnerships
- Continue to nurture Tourism
- Educating senators about the impact of the arts across the state
- Get more grantees to attend conferences and events
- Getting connected to new partners – the combined total is more than the whole.
- Visibility is the problem – more visibility (statewide billboard, or TV billboard)
- Reaching more individual artists within an organization
- Creating more touch points hits the hot topics
- Combine resources – highlights arts and ND what is happening throughout the state (festivals, pow wows etc.)
- Putting more emphasis on the North Dakota who is creative
- Working with grantees – educating why it is important to share the messages of the work and impact they are creating
- Building out the networks of the local arts councils
- Openness to creativity and innovation
- Continue to work on the relationship with Tourism
- More communication and collaboration
- Meet with the regional arts organizations to do more strategy, collaboration, and support each other
- Time to nurture and deepen the relationships
- More time for coordination with partners
- Tourism – getting the organizations throughout the state to list local events on the tourism website
- Getting a seat at the table

### **What potential partners is NDCA not reaching and why?**

- VSA North Dakota
- Oil companies
- Big businesses
- Engineering company
- Time
- Mayors for speaking about arts in their cities
- More with Parks and Rec
- Utility companies
- Happy Harry's Bottle Shops/Hal Gershwin(Grand Forks) – not a consistent supporter, but has been a huge supporter in the past
- Malls
- Ralph Engelsted
- Fish and game – how can we connect with them
- Department of Health
- Collectors
- Microsoft (Fargo)
- Other state agencies
- Community leaders, commissioners, legislators, businesses

### **Why?**

- Partnerships have to be mutually beneficial

### **What would strengthen the partnership with allies?**

- Having more time to connect with partners to check in and dialogue
- Developing deeper relationships and being more creative
- Tap more into people and resources who are willing to promote and preserve the arts throughout the state.

### **6. How is the board most effective in helping NDCA achieve its goals?**

- Have a way to communicate what was discussed in meetings that happen with legislators
- Offering their expertise
- Very engaged
- Ask lots of questions
- Do what they can to promote the work of the Council
- Attend arts events as their schedule allows
- Help to keep focused on achieving goals
- Bring a lot of great ideas to the table
- Knowing and talking about what is happening in the region
- Valuable input
- Offering guidance and accountability

- What they bring; their expertise and energies
- Informative and can see the excitement and commitment from the organization
- Conversations and ideas when they are all together at board meetings
- Strategic thinking

**How can the board's governance function enhance the advancement of NDCA impact on the state?**

- Be choosy about who is brought on to the board
- Finding people who are knowledgeable in the goal areas so they can give input and insight on process (e.g. what goes on in education and can point out the difficulties and places for wins in the schools)
- Meeting more often possibly adding one additional meeting
- Committees structures with people who are experienced and can help set goals
- More advice and informing from the expertise they hold
- Clarification of how the board should be working functions (governance policies, clear roles, executive committee)

**What needs to improve about board activities in order to advance NDCA's efforts?**

- Having more regular meeting times
- Getting materials in advance so board members can be more prepared (at least one week in advance)
- Willingness to be more involved with larger initiatives
- More communication from staff on what is going on administratively
- Opportunities for the board to communicate with the organizations in their region
- More political clout for lobbying
- Having an agenda for advocacy would be helpful
- More social media outreach
- Making the content that is received more easily sharable
- Marketing – keeping NDCA in the news
- Can the board help with grant making decisions?
- System for getting the content from the regions to the staff
- Tasks/action items at the end of meetings
- Focus on the areas where Arts ND has little or no representation
- Direction or overall agenda for the board with defined roles and specific activities
- Better liaisons to the NDCA staff members
- Time is a challenge
- They do not necessarily always know the ways that they can help
- More clear roles and tasks -
- What are the goals they should be focusing their energies
- The board may not always have all of the information they need to make decisions.

- There are not clear processes or mechanisms to collect what is happening in their regions
- Getting the word out about what NDCA does and the impact on the communities throughout North Dakota
- Being a strong advocate in their region with legislators who are making decisions about the appropriations to NDCA
- Cheerleaders/Champions (especially leading up to legislative session)
- A formalized process for evaluating the ED
- Get more feedback about what is happening in their regions
- Formal accountability
- Traction to help get people to adopt a legislator
- The board doesn't always follow through
- Help in developing their story so they can make a stronger case in their promotion and advocating for NDCA