

Creating a Cultural Experience
in
West Virginia's Kanawha Valley

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Greetings!

We are pleased to present *Creating a Cultural Experience: A Plan for West Virginia's Kanawha Valley*. This plan was made possible by a grant from the Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation.

The plan which you are about to read is the result of two years of work by many interested people and organizations. We are grateful to everyone who served on the Cultural Plan Advisory Committee, participated in an interview, attended a focus group, served on a task force, or provided assistance in a variety of different areas. This plan would not have been possible without this help and support from throughout the entire area.

When you read the plan, we hope that you will understand that it is meant to be a "living document." The plan was never intended to sit on a shelf, nor to serve as a concrete model for how cultural activities must be developed in the Kanawha Valley. Rather, it is meant to be implemented, scrutinized, changed, and reworked. It should be the basis for growth, discussion, and debate. The plan will always be living because as portions of it are implemented, there will be additional items which need to be addressed. It is our hope that this plan is seen as a great first-step to an ongoing process of cultural evaluation and growth in the region.

This plan is intended to assist the citizens of the Kanawha Valley – all citizens! It was meant to be inclusive of all the various backgrounds, cultures, and personalities that make the area such a wonderful place to live and work. So, please do not think that the Cultural Plan was written for someone else's eyes. If you are reading it, it was intended for you to do so. In that regard, please feel free to make notes, recommendations, criticisms, and the like. It's your region, and your culture!

We hope that you enjoy reading the plan, and we further hope that you will decide to play a role in the implementation process. Whether this is through an organization, local government, or as an individual, your talents in implementing the plan will be helpful and welcome.

Thank you for taking time to read the plan, and thank you for helping us assist the Kanawha Valley!

Sincerely,

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**CREATING A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE
IN
WEST VIRGINIA'S KANAWHA VALLEY**

CREATING A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE IN WEST VIRGINIA'S KANAWHA VALLEY

VISION STATEMENT

"The Kanawha Valley is composed of vibrant growing communities which celebrate their cultural diversity and multi-generational personality through the arts."

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Provide the organizational means and the support to implement the recommendations of the Cultural Plan, and provide for ongoing efforts in the cultural community

IDENTITY & MARKETING

Market the area as a cultural destination

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Engage the Cultural Community with the Educational System & Improve Communication

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Engage the business industry in the Kanawha Valley with the Arts & Cultural Community

PHYSICAL PLANNING

Ensure that facilities and housing in the area promote history and support the ongoing goals of the cultural plan

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FROM THE GREATER KANAWHA VALLEY FOUNDATION

"We have so many wonderful cultural opportunities in our community. A documented cultural plan will highlight and promote all aspects of the community's arts and culture."

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The Kanawha Valley area is fortunate to have already established itself as a leader for culture and the arts in the region. Throughout the region there is no shortage of cultural events, festivals, and organizations. The citizens of the valley are supportive of the cultural community, and the arts are actively promoted through the school system to younger generations of area inhabitants. It is in this environment that the Kanawha Valley Cultural Plan was developed in order to assess that which is already occurring, make recommendations for continued development, and provoke discussion to encourage what is already good to become even better.

WHAT IS THE KANAWHA VALLEY CULTURAL PLAN?

The Cultural Plan for the Kanawha Valley is the result of two years worth of work on behalf of many stakeholders. The plan is intended to provide a framework and attainable goals through which the region can strengthen its cultural community, and serve to reach new heights for the next three-to-five years.

The plan is not (and was never intended to be) a "be all, end all" document for the progress of culture in the area. Nor is the plan intended to be so rigid that any modifications to it would be seen as a failure. Instead, the Cultural Plan is a living and working document. It is understood that alterations will be made, new programs will develop, and a host of other factors may influence the implementation of these recommendations. However, it is hoped that this plan will serve as a general guide and that, by implementing the recommendations contained herein, the Kanawha Valley will be an even stronger cultural center for the state and region than when the process began.

HOW WAS THE CULTURAL PLAN DEVELOPED?

The funding for the Cultural Plan was made possible by a grant from the Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation to the Clay Center for the Arts & Sciences of West Virginia, Inc. In September 2007, the Clay Center contracted with the Cultural Resource Management Program at West Virginia University to provide support for the research and administration of the project.

In October 2007, an Advisory Committee was formed to help guide the project. The goal of this formation was to try and have members representing many different sectors of the public in the

area. This committee was made up of artists, local leaders, educators, government officials, and other interested parties. The committee played a very active role in every part of the process for developing the Cultural Plan.

An early, and very important, decision by the advisory committee centered around what form the Cultural Plan should take. The committee reviewed plans from several different areas, including Northampton, Massachusetts and Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Northampton plan was very detailed, and it was felt that if this model was used, then any deviation from its specific points would be seen as a failure. Conversely, the Albuquerque plan was overly broad and did not provide enough information to sustain an ongoing process of cultural development. The committee finally centered on a model used by Portsmouth, New Hampshire. This model was not extensive in length and used general goals with specific recommendations for implementation. Because the Kanawha Valley had never before gone through a process of cultural planning such as this, the advisory committee felt that this model offered the best hope for both creation and implementation.



All of the stakeholders participating in the development of the plan had maintained a keen interest in ensuring that input from the public was been considered during every portion of the plan's development. Great care has been taken throughout the entire process to be as inclusive as possible. Every effort was made to include individuals, organizations, and populations at each phase, and any feedback that was provided has been weighed as an important part of the development of the plan.

Data gathering interviews were conducted with a wide variety of stakeholders in the community. Many of these had direct connection to the arts such as educators, philanthropists, and individual artists. However, there were others who did not have a significant involvement in the arts, including interviews conducted with representatives of minority and underserved populations.

Focus groups included an open forum sponsored by the Charleston Area Alliance, Generation Charleston, a group representing many cultures, and a group of artists and representatives of arts organizations.

The interviewees and focus groups were asked to respond to questions regarding the area's cultural assets, weaknesses, reputation, threats, and needs for change.

Once the advisory committee reviewed the responses to these questions, it set up task forces to address the issues which had come to the fore.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Through the interviews, public forum and focus groups, the committee found a number of strengths in the cultural community:

- The variety of programming
- Quality of events
- Good reputation within the region
- Good accessibility
- Venues are in safe areas
- Art Walk
- FestivALL
- The Clay Center
- Mountain Stage
- Vandalia Gathering
- The West Virginia Symphony
- The large number of cultural organizations
- Outdoor dining
- The perception that there are many opportunities for cultural involvement for an area of our size
- Lots of interest in the arts

Areas of concern included:

- Lack of a shared vision and coordinated plan
 - Arts groups not working together
 - Lack of collaboration between the different cultural communities
 - Lack of communication between arts groups
 - Lack of coordination in scheduling activities
 - Lack of an identity as a cultural center
 - Lack of centralized marketing and awareness for all arts programs
 - Lack of a centralized website dealing with the arts
 - No coordinated calendar of events
 - Inequality of exposure among all groups
 - Low participation by people from outside the area
 - The negative effect of No Child Left Behind legislation on arts education
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- Lack of diversity / variety in the arts
- Exclusivity of cultural events/programming (perceived or real)
- Aging demographic coupled with low participation in the arts of the younger generation
- Perception (perceived or real) that “People with all the money make all the decisions”
- Lack of a vibrant downtown
- Lack of affordable housing
- The area being too “vehicle dependent”
- Limited financial resources
- Not reaching out to national foundations
- Focus on old ways of doing things

Using the information gleaned from interviews and focus groups, this plan was developed to address some of the shortcomings while maintaining the community’s strengths. Specifically this plan focuses on:

- Developing a structure to coordinate efforts and implement the plan
- Developing and marketing the cultural identity of Kanawha Valley
- Expanding education and outreach into the community
- Engaging the business community and developing a reliable funding stream
- Planning for adaptive reuse, affordable housing, and studio space

HOW IS THE CULTURAL PLAN ORGANIZED?

This plan makes recommendations for addressing each focus area. Although each section considers specific areas to develop, these were not exclusive of each other. Therefore, some recommendations blend into other areas. Also, during implementation, one may find that certain objectives work well with others in ways that were not seen during the planning process. This is all part of the Cultural Plan serving as a “living document.” There are not necessarily right or wrong ways to set about making the plan happen.

For the people involved in producing the Cultural Plan, the most important part has been the process of bringing individuals and groups together for such an exercise. The words on the pages are important, but these cannot compare with the impact created by open communication, transparency, and moving forward with a shared vision. These are real and extremely significant aspects of the Cultural Plan, although they may not be reflected as words on the page.

The Vision:

"The Kanawha Valley is composed of vibrant growing communities which celebrates their cultural diversity and multi-generational personality through the arts."

IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

PROVIDE THE ORGANIZATIONAL MEANS AND THE SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CULTURAL PLAN, AND PROVIDE FOR ONGOING EFFORTS IN THE CULTURAL COMMUNITY

Establish an Arts Council of the Kanawha Valley. Its initial board will be composed of:

- Naomi Bays – Artist (Chair)
- Mickey Blackwell – Principal, Horace Mann Middle School
- Paula Durst – Board of Directors, Fund for the Arts
- Larry Groce – Artistic Director, Mountain Stage & Executive Director, Festival
- Mel Hoover – Clergyman
- Margaret Lieberman – Executive Director, Fund for the Arts
- Kim Pauley – Executive Director, Charleston Ballet Company
- Susie Salisbury – Vice-President of Community Development, Charleston Area Alliance
- David Wohl, Dean of Arts & Humanities, West Virginia State University
- Judy Wellington – President & CEO, Clay Center for the Arts & Sciences of West Virginia
- Additional representatives from community, education, business, and artist sectors

The Arts Council’s initial focus will be:

- Establish a 501(c)3 organization called the “Arts Council of the Kanawha Valley.”
 - Seek clear and adequate annual funding for the operations of the council from a variety of sources (including both public and private).
 - Advocate for a portion of the council funding from the hotel-motel tax (as is authorized under state law).
 - Establish committees on education, business & economic development / finance, community outreach, marketing, and other needs as directed.
 - Engage the younger generation in arts planning and programming.
 - Establish the initial mission of the council to be to enhance communication, develop a website, conduct an asset inventory, and serve as a coordinating body for organizations and artists in the area.
 - Support the continuation of Fund for the Arts as an organization to raise revenue for general operating support of arts organizations.
-

Empower the arts council to implement and revise the Cultural Plan, with such coordination and partners as is appropriate.

Support the arts council as a major vehicle for cultural growth and development.

Establish communication processes maintained by the arts council, with a website as a major and immediate focus.

- A website should be the heart of the organization and all of its services because of the ease of communication.
- The website should feature a comprehensive inventory of all arts organizations in the county with links to all current websites.
- The website should contain a blog for discussion groups.
- A community arts calendar should be a central fixture of the website, and should be updated on a regular basis.
- The website should provide “success stories” of implementation of the cultural plan and of the arts council’s activities, as well as concrete examples of projects stemming from the Cultural Plan.

Encourage the council to reach out to the business community, and to support the efforts of the for-profit arts sector.

Organize an initial group to meet immediately upon presentation of this plan to found the arts council, and establish a goal of having it operational within one year.

IDENTITY & MARKETING

MARKET THE AREA AS A CULTURAL DESTINATION

In order for the cultural richness of the Kanawha Valley to be preserved, it must first be recognized as an area of cultural activity. This requires the promotion of cultural opportunity, which requires a commitment in both time and money. This commitment will only be made with a collaborative effort and acknowledgment of the area as a cultural region. These are the first steps necessary for active involvement.

Establish an “identity” for the Kanawha Valley

- Acknowledge that the area is already overloaded with symbols. Do not attempt to create something new to overlay on what is already there. Use symbols and systems that work now, and develop them into the area’s identifying marks.
- Promote inclusiveness, pride, and spirit.
- Utilize non-mainstream ideas and methods.
- Work to change any negative perceptions of the area.
- Adopt a slogan or promise statement to be the arch over all arts related activities, and even for the community as a whole
- Develop a specific logotype (which may have different versions for use in various situations), and provide strict usage guidelines.

Utilize the strengths of the area to develop marketing plans

- Promote the beautiful setting of the Kanawha Valley.
- Support cultural and heritage development along the Elk River.
- Promote the fact that Charleston and its surrounding communities are emerging into a great metro area.
- Acknowledge that families and togetherness are important aspects of the whole area and the state.
- Promote diversity wherever possible.
- Utilize artists and cultural organizations to assist with marketing plans.
- Establish a calendar of cultural events to be maintained on the Arts Council website.

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

ENGAGE THE CULTURAL COMMUNITY WITH THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM & IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

The children of the Kanawha Valley deserve the opportunity for continuous exposure to the many positive benefits of the arts. They need to feel invested in the cultural community and its available resources. To make this vision a reality, a collaborative effort must be made by the cultural community, parents, and schools—each party must believe the arts are a fundamental necessity in a child’s education and growth.

Integrate the area’s cultural life with the needs of the regional (Kanawha County and surrounding areas) education system (pre-K, K-12, and higher education).

- Increase collaboration between arts and the school systems, such as working with specialists at the local boards of education.
- Involve the cultural community in ways to wrap arts into the curriculum for 21st Century Learning.
- Work with the educational system to address the need for the inclusion of “non-traditional arts” (such as media arts) into the life of the school system.
- Where possible, assist educators in developing lesson plans, activities, etc. which integrate cultural activities into the classroom.
- Help content area teachers find connections between their subject matter and the arts.
- Increase service-learning opportunities for all students (such as working in non-profit arts organizations).
- Encourage the use of ethnography (oral history, creative writing) with the younger generation.

Improve communication among stakeholders in the community.

- Focus on outreach to other constituencies, such as conducting sessions to educate governmental officials (especially local boards of education) that arts and culture are not frivolous, and to work with parent-teacher organizations in a proactive way.
- Support organizations that provide in-service training for teachers, and professional development opportunities whenever possible.
- Work with school systems to see that each school has a designated person to gather and disseminate information and serve as a liaison with the cultural community.
- Encourage more programming which travels to schools, in an effort to reduce costs to the school system.
- Make use of a website in order to let community stakeholders know about cultural goals and objectives, as well as provide an easy method for getting information to schools.
- Foster more collaboration among arts groups (such as joint performances or projects).

Improve communication among stakeholders in the community. (cont.)

- Encourage business leaders to “buy in” to the creative economy (creative enterprises, which may include for-profit and non-profit organizations, and individuals that provide a significant contribution to local economies by creating and distributing cultural goods and services).
 - Promote the fact that the arts arena is the central focus of the Creative Economy, which is the economy of the 21st Century.
 - Encourage broad participation, innovations, and newness with organizations and activities.
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BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ENGAGE THE BUSINESS INDUSTRY IN THE KANAWHA VALLEY WITH THE ARTS & CULTURAL COMMUNITY

As the economy fluctuates, it is important to create partnerships with cultural organizations and businesses. These partnerships promote the value of arts and culture in the community and promote cultural opportunity, diversity, and the fact that the community is a rich place to work and live. Ultimately, the benefits of business industry investment in the arts will make the Kanawha Valley an attractive place to be.

Find opportunities to enhance the involvement of the business sector with the cultural community.

- Promote communication and awareness of the need for the business and cultural communities to work together.
- Provide a compendium of all arts and cultural activities for businesses to use with marketing, recruitment, etc. (like an “Arts & Culture” calendar and website).
- Define business incentives and help educate businesses about involvement in the arts. This could be achieved through the use of a website that could feature, among many other items, “success stories” of this nature.

Promote investment in the area’s cultural community as a tool for continued economic development.

- Emphasize that cultural events and activities are for the benefit of the community as a whole (a website featuring these events can promote success stories and encourage dialogue).
- Seek financial support and “buy-in” from local governmental entities (not just to provide project specific funding).
- Continue broad communication through the continued use of task forces, think tanks, etc.
- Find ways to show businesses the benefits of having a true interest in cultural organizations. The use of a website will assist in this area.
- Provide an assessment of the economic impact of the area’s cultural entities.
- Support the establishment of “Arts Zones,” (similar to efforts in Maryland) and promote tax incentives, such as the historic tax credits and the Neighborhood Investment Tax Credit Program.

Find creative ways to promote profit-making ventures, and creative funding mechanisms for private development in the area of culture and arts.

- Provide information to show that the return on a cultural investment may not be judged in standard monetary terms, but may provide programs for the greater good or opportunities for civic engagement.
- Strive to legitimize artists as an integral part of the mainstream business community.

Seek ways in which the cultural community can assist with various needs in the business community.

- Encourage businesses to utilize the cultural community in various ways (like having key arts stakeholders play a role in business/employee recruitment efforts, etc).
 - Utilize a website to informative items in this area. This could involve such information as interviews with artists who live here and speak about the assets in the community that keep them in the area.
 - Link websites to the Charleston Area Alliance and the Convention & Visitors' Bureau.
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PHYSICAL PLANNING

ENSURE THAT FACILITIES AND HOUSING IN THE AREA SUPPORT THE ONGOING GOALS OF THE CULTURAL PLAN.

Acknowledge preservation, physical revitalization, and adaptive reuse issues.

- Help develop a comprehensive “tool kit” for use by individuals and organizations addressing planning and resource needs.
- Assist in the facilitation of programs to encourage revitalization, adaptive reuse, and preservation, and find ways to make these programs available to the general public. These programs can include venture capital programs, revolving loan funds, incentives for property improvements, etc.
- Encourage entities to promote the use of zoning, overlay districts, etc.

Focus on physical planning and cultural issues.

- Maintain a commitment to preserve the area’s cultural physical assets.
 - Encourage communication among interested stakeholders to develop partnerships, etc.
 - Support links and coordinated transportation to cultural facilities and programs (such as by collaborating with KRT, the school systems, private transportation, etc).
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CREDITS

CREATING A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE IN WEST VIRGINIA'S KANAWHA VALLEY

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