



Arts & Culture Assessment For Summit County

supported by



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INTERVIEWS OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS



Summary of Results

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Methods

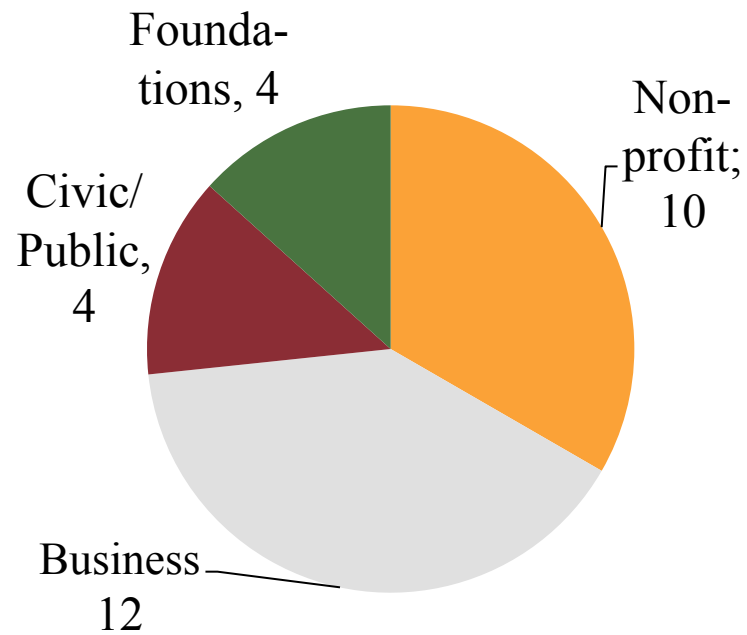
- Total of 30 stakeholders out of a possible 44.
- Universe was developed by the Steering Committee.
- Respondents were informed of the overall project goals and who was involved in the project.

Who We Heard From

Results – Who We Heard From

Stakeholder Groups

Respondents belong to one of the following four stakeholder groups.



Findings

Perceptions of Summit County

Q: When you think of Summit County arts and culture, what do you think of?

- Most commonly, a specific organization was named/venue was named:
 - Akron Museum of Art
 - Akron Civic Theater
 - EJ Thomas Hall
 - Blossom
 - Lock 3
- Overall, most felt that Summit County does have a diverse set of offerings, given the community's size
 - Notable concentration of historical offerings
- Major benefit: Arts impact the quality of life in Summit County
- Offerings focus on older/more established/wealthier individuals
 - Very provincial
- Lack of familiarity with 'smaller' orgs (but they know they are there)
- Cleveland is close – will go there for more appealing offerings
 - Cleveland is often where the “serious arts fans go”
- Widespread concerns about/awareness of lack of funding for the arts community
 - However, also a perceived lack of cooperation/collaboration among arts community members

Personal Participation in Arts & Culture

Please tell me a bit about your own participation in arts and cultural activities. What do you like to do? Where do you like to go?

- Participation was mixed: some admitted to not being “an arts person” yet still participated at some level.
- Participation is in and out of Summit County – and often WAY out of Summit County.
- A huge variety of interests – in and out of art/culture. Sports is very high on the list for many.
- The park system is beloved and seen as unique and extremely high quality (well-taken care of).
 - However, many hesitated to describe the parks as being part of arts & culture.

The A&C Community's "Image"

Feelings on Summit County Arts & Culture Offerings

How do you feel about Summit County's offerings from the standpoint of your own personal interests? Are you satisfied with what's here? Why/why not? If not, what's missing?

- Generally, most are satisfied with what they can find in Summit County, and if they can't find what they want, it is in Cuyahoga County or somewhere else nearby.
- No tension – No “why don't we have an X” “why not a Y?” No outcry for fixing something that is broken.
- Not enough...jazz, ballet, “things” for young people

“I don't put a boundary around summit county. It's all NEO.”

“Do we have enough cool restaurants? No. Local music venues – no. Use to have the 'Akron sound.' There used to be places to play. There really isn't now.”

Intersection with Arts Community

Impact of Arts & Culture Sector on Business Sector

Does a strong, robust arts and culture sector “matter” to your organization? Does it have an impact on your organization’s success in any way?

Thinking about your organization and not about your personal interests, would it make any difference at all if Summit County did not have a viable arts and culture sector? Why/why not?

- People will SAY it is important, but not *pay* for it.
- Priorities in the community are on health and human services
 - There are MANY needs in Summit County and arts/culture is not a priority
- Businesses patronize the arts to build client relationships IF the clients like arts/culture – they customize their client entertainment based on the tastes of the client
- However, in the more abstract, businesses *do* see the importance of art and culture to portray a high quality of life in Summit County
 - Is commonly, but not always, used in recruiting talent (but CLE is very close and is used, also)
- Young people and older people value different things
 - Young want a vibrant, exciting downtown. Akron doesn’t have that
 - Older people want the “majors”
- Overall, arts and culture matter personally (if it does matter) more than professionally
- Healthcare highlighted connection to art the most strongly
- Consensus that children need art in their educational lives

There’s nothing really to grab onto in arts and culture here. (Business sector respondent)

Intersection with Arts Community

Impact of Arts & Culture Sector on Business Sector (continued)

Does a strong, robust arts and culture sector (meaning strong institutions, quality programming) “matter” to your organization? Does it have an impact on your organization’s success in any way? (prompts: think about business development, recruitment/retention of employees).

Thinking about your organization and not about your personal interests, would it make any difference at all if Summit County did not have a viable arts and culture sector? Why/why not?

Would it be really bad if the A&C community disappeared in Summit County?

- Mixed answers – mostly said ‘yes,’ but mainly for quality of life and Akron’s “image.”
 - A city the size of Akron *should have* some arts and culture. And that is what it has: some arts and culture.
- Some sense that, while the sector is struggling, it isn’t going to disappear. There was somewhat of a ‘survival of the fittest’ mindset:

“You just can’t kill it. It’s a part of humanity. You may lose an institution, but something else would come up.”

Opinion on Strength of Arts & Culture Sector in Summit County

Would you consider the arts and culture sector in Summit County strong?

- Very mixed results – from overall assessment of “not financially strong” to “doing fine” to comments on the balance sheets of specific organizations.
- Different definitions of “strong” though...

“We built a \$35 million facility – it must be strong”

“I look at Cleveland Orchestra and CMA and what they do to get funds. I compare down here “They are doing bake sales”

“I guess I don’t consider it a sector. There’s no sense of an arts and cultural movement that could support an arts levy or appeal”

“No, it doesn’t act like a sector.”

“The schools have reached out to us – usually a teacher has a project idea – but the professional art community, not really.”

(Are they a sector?) “Yes, but its fragmented because of personalities.”

“There is strong leadership individually, but I don’t know about collective leadership”

The Arts and Culture Sector

Changes to Arts & Culture Sector to Better Serve Business Needs

How, if at all, could arts and culture in Summit County be changed in order to better serve the needs of your organization?

They said it best:

Make a real connection: *“Build a relationship with me before asking for my money”*

“Lack of leadership or interest from the arts orgs. Every time I have lunch with someone, I never hear from them again.”

“Make the case to us on how what you do will help our business! Come and meet with us? Get to know us! Make the case and show us how you can improve things for us. Also, talk with us how to really have a partnership vs. just asking us for \$\$”

Provide services for employee families: *“Would have to assist employees and make their lives better. Hard to quantify. Happy employees are important. Could they affect that?”*

Communicate better: *“Making things more visible that which is there would help.”*

Identify needs: *“Doing a gap analysis to ID what are the things that presently exist and could be improved and made more attractive. So they become places to visit”*

Build the sector’s image: *“If I did heavy lifting and pressed my board, I could get 30 kids per month into something arts related, but why should I? They don’t even collaborate with one another.”*

“They are in a box. That’s what we’ve run up to. There’s a laziness or complacency.”

“I think that something that would benefit us is some kind of revitalization of downtown. Adding the Aeros has been great. Now someone will build a hotel. I think we need to get back to basics before “add ons” like arts and culture. If city were more vibrant after hours with more young professionals, that would be a major help to us.”

“Come together as a sector and have strong leadership. Work with us; work outside arts and culture.”

Business Sector Participation in Arts & Culture

Has your organization participated, formally, in arts and culture in any way? If so, how? For which organizations? How has that changed over time? Why has it changed?

- One or two high level staff members are often engaged in the arts and *they* initiate the involvement with the sector.
 - Therefore, involvement for any organization is sporadic – not part of corporation’s community engagement in the long term
 - Organizations strongly encourage participation (in any non-profit activity), but do not dictate type of involvement
- Board involvement is common – but, again, has to be matched to personnel’s interest
- Sponsorship of major event (tables, etc.) is very common
 - Often because a client is involved
 - Lots of interest in supporting what their employees support, too.
- Sponsor fundraising events occasionally
- Non-profits will integrate art experiences into many of their efforts (their own fundraising efforts, programs, etc.)

“We try to support first those organizations that are clients. Then we also look to customers and how this gets to them.”

Organizational Benefits From Participation in Arts & Culture

(for those who have supported) What benefit does/has your organization receive(d)?

- Important to provide corporate support to the personal causes of key employees
 - Rank-and-file employee base benefits, too, when corporations support well-liked community initiatives
- Can be a networking opportunity
- It is the right thing to do
- Opportunity to display leadership

Affiliation With Leaders of Arts & Culture Institutions

Q: Do you, personally, know the leaders of the major arts institutions in town? (e.g., Civic, EJ Thomas, Akron Symphony, Art Arts Museum? Do you ever interact with them?

- Very mixed (from “I know none” to “I know all”), but mostly stakeholders are familiar with just a handful of people, and it tends to be the same handful of people).
- For the most part, there is not a high level of familiarity with the landscape of arts & cultural leadership. It is very personality-driven.

Insight on Low Participation in Business Community Roundtable

In recruiting focus groups for this study, we did extensive outreach to the business community. This outreach yielded a very small number of people, leading us to conclude that the business community is relatively uninvolved in arts and culture. Given your knowledge of the community, can you provide any insight into this?

Hypotheses.....:

- Lack of sense of responsibility among corporate leaders
- Younger, rising stars, have not been exposed to the arts at the same level and have different interests
- Because large businesses have stopped giving as a corporate entity, the leaders have lost interest too.
 - Not as engaged once the source of the money is personal
- Not enough time (business demands are greater now)
- They have other priorities
- They see no need to connect to the arts community
- Some were befuddled that the business community wasn't more easily engaged - their impression was that the community *does* engage with the A&C community at a reasonable level
- Very little evidence that the business community is more interested in Cuyahoga County arts organizations (unless there is an unfilled personal interested)

Ways to Engage Business Community in Arts & Culture

What do you think it would take to engage the business community at a deeper level?

- Connect their service/product with the direct needs of the businesses.
 - E.g., provide a way for them to entertain clients, prospective employees, etc.
 - Don't wait for your capital campaign to get to know people

“There would need to be a tangible benefit. Not wishy washy. “

“Maybe leaders need to talk to folks w/o trying to sell them something. Don't just come to us to pitch a capital campaign.”

“Pick up the phone instead of sending a newsletter”

“If arts and culture delivers the right product, people will come and others will follow.”

“I would say it is because of Arts. The business community is fully engaged around many business interests and health and human services. In light of the arts, I think they only target those with lots of time and lots of money. Retired people. On the tail end.”

“Those who are active in business are consumed by other non-profits. And the universities. The business community is very engaged in community activities – just not the arts”

The Arts and Culture Sector

Thoughts on Investment in Summit County Arts & Culture Sector

Let's say \$50 million were given to Summit County to be used for some community benefit. Should arts and culture get some of that? Why/why not?

- Arts would get some, but a small proportion.
- Other needs are more critical
 - Education tops that list of critical needs
- Some, but limited, sense that the arts sector is 'undeserving' or guilty of not being good financial stewards.

Conclusion: While a few saw the connection between arts/culture, quality of life and economic development (you can't have strong economic development without a high quality of life, and you can't have a high quality of life without a strong arts and cultural community), most did not. Instead, the focus was on providing for core life needs.

The Arts and Culture Sector

Support of Dedicated Tax / Dedicated Private Fundraising Initiative

There are many communities that have recognized that arts and culture organizations cannot survive on patron-driven revenue alone. Would you, personally support an arts and culture dedicated tax or dedicated private fundraising initiative to generate more support for the sector in Summit County?

- Personally, most were in favor (a few strongly NOT in favor) of a tax.
- Most agreed that it would be a long and difficult road:
 - Too many other competing needs in Summit County
 - Voters would need a concrete reason why arts and culture is important, and that concrete reason is difficult to articulate
- No one who wouldn't personally/professionally benefit from it was enthusiastic about this idea.

Additional Thoughts On Summit County Arts & Culture Sector

- A better approach to marketing is needed.
 - Needs to be *marketing*, not *sales*. Build long term relationships with the community members.
- Moderate sense that venue rental rates are really high – accused of not giving back to the community themselves.
- University of Akron isn't very engaged – although they are a big player in the community.
- Those who “step up” are creative and take chances – can and have succeeded in Summit County.
 - Many gave kudos to those who tried something new.
- The arts community was not the only one knocked around:
“[On lack of cooperation among funders] There are a lot of barriers to funders getting on the same page. They don't bring business reasoning to it”

Key Messages

Key Messages

- ❖ Lack of cooperation/collaboration within the arts community was highly visible.
- ❖ The Business Community is unfamiliar with the Arts & Cultural Sector, for the most part. They are therefore unengaged in it.
 - They *are* engaged in the health and human services community, as that is seen as being more ‘necessary.’
 - They are not “anti-arts,” they just don’t know you.
 - They have taken advantage of the arts community when it is perceived to be a benefit to their business.
- ❖ In that same light, Business Community accuse the sector of not being good at developing long term relationships, either with them or with the community-at-large.
- ❖ Stakeholders (who are community leaders of various types) have not placed a high value on engaging with the arts & culture community via governance (board seats, etc.)
- ❖ Other non-profits “know” the arts community much better.

Key Messages (continued)

- ❖ Stakeholders share the same impression of the arts & cultural sector that the general population holds:
 - For the most part, the offerings in Summit County are just fine.
 - Otherwise, there is always Cuyahoga County.
 - There are some shortcomings (“young people” offerings, jazz, downtown night life).

- ❖ What benefit does the arts and cultural sector bring us?
 - Quality of life –
 - 1) Recruiting to Summit County is a very hard sell without it
 - 2) Happy employees are very important

- ❖ General agreement that the arts and cultural sector is struggling financially, but they do not seem all that concerned about it.

- ❖ Those outside of the arts & cultural community are open to building a relationship – but you have to make the first (and second and probably third) move.
 - They respect you – they just don’t know you.

Key Messages (continued)

- ❖ Personal interest in some sort of public support of the arts was fairly high – although it was viewed as being a long, uphill battle.
 - That being said, stakeholders showed little interest in protecting the *status quo* and instead wanted new funds to go to creating the “new” and “different.”
 - Unfortunately, few expressed the sentiment that the current cultural assets need to be protected.
 - There were no stated concerns that the arts community would not be a good steward of money.