



**ARTS MIDWEST
STRATEGIC PLAN
2012-2014**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2010, Arts Midwest staff, members of the Board of Directors, and key stakeholders engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process. Over the course of nine months, these individuals interviewed Arts Midwest audiences and constituents, reviewed operational documents including budgets and audits, collaborated with members of our state arts agencies, assessed Arts Midwest's programming portfolio, and identified core areas of renewal for the organization.

Throughout this process, Arts Midwest tracked the numerous environmental trends, challenges, and opportunities that will affect the organization in the next few years. These include shifting priorities at the national funding level, difficult economic realities and trends, an evolving understanding of the varied drivers for economic and community vitality, the globalization of our society, and more. While this research was by no means exhaustive, it formed a critical basis for understanding, negotiating, and planning for the environment in which we currently operate.

The purpose of this process was to draw on field expertise and research to develop a renewed direction for the organization that allows us to thrive in our continually changing environment. The resulting document, our 2012-2014 Strategic Plan, presents updated mission and vision statements, and outlines a set of values that will guide our work over the coming years.

Our mission is to promote creativity, nurture cultural leadership, and engage people in meaningful arts experiences, bringing vitality to Midwest communities and enriching people's lives. Our vision is that through a region-wide renewal of its historic commitment to creativity and innovation, the Midwest will prosper and remain a healthy and vital place in which to live. Guiding us as we establish goals and programs are the firmly held beliefs that

- Creativity is essential;
- All communities deserve meaningful creative experiences;
- All people have the capacity for creative expression;
- Midwest creativity shapes our nation's culture and vitality; and,
- The exchange of ideas and creative experiences inspires curiosity and understanding.

We believe that this new mission statement, coupled with our guiding values, retains our unyielding commitment to the arts and to serving residents across the Midwest, articulates a renewed responsibility to the vitality of our communities, and reasserts our role in the delivery of creative experiences. Over the next three years, we will use the following set of goals to guide us in our work:

- **Nurture Cultural Leadership:** Ensure that cultural leaders across the Midwest—and especially those at our member state arts agencies—have the skills, ideas, and networks they need to thrive.
- **Engage people in meaningful arts experiences:** Continue to create and support diverse, highly valued programs, providing opportunities for people to engage with arts and culture.
- **Provide leadership on behalf of the Midwest's cultural and creative revitalization:** Develop the human networks and organizational capacity necessary to craft and articulate a persuasive vision on behalf of our region's creative sector.
- **Sustain and strengthen Arts Midwest:** Ensure that Arts Midwest is robust, sustainable, and that we have the capacity we need to succeed in reaching our goals.

We look forward to the work ahead of us and to continuing to serve artists, arts organizations, and residents across our region and our world.

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past nine months, the volunteer and staff leadership of Arts Midwest (supported by a team of consultants from LarsonAllen, LLP), has engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process, the aims of which have been to:

- Review, test, and either affirm or revise our vision, mission and core values to better guide the organization into the future;
- Clarify and deepen our foundational relationship to our member state arts agencies (as those agencies themselves move through a period of seismic change);
- Reconsider the role Arts Midwest intends to play in the region’s cultural and civic leadership environment;
- Examine our current program and service mix, and identify potential areas for expansion or exit, refinement or refocusing;
- Develop clear plans for both board and staff renewal and succession as we move into our second quarter century; and
- Assess all elements of our infrastructure in order to strengthen and/or “right-size” our organizational capacity.

Towards that end, we:

- Examined (via interviews and face-to-face meetings) the status, challenges, and needs of our nine state arts agency members in order to (a) more fully understand their current and near-term environments; (b) measure their satisfaction with Arts Midwest current programs and services; and (c) consider additional strategies which we might employ on their behalf;
- Conducted extensive review of all critical organizational documents, including Arts Midwest’s current plans (as well as the planning documents for our member state arts agencies), program descriptions and guidelines, policy manuals, evaluations and final reports, budgets, audits, etc. to assess Arts Midwest’s current position and to provide deeper context for the planning process;
- Conducted confidential telephone interviews with an array of informed stakeholders (including recent, current, or potential funders, collaborators, or colleague organizations) to gain their insights into Arts Midwest’s strengths or weaknesses, as well as perceptions of environmental conditions which pose challenges or opportunities for our organization;
- Conducted an array of program-related focus groups and feedback sessions to garner field-level insights regarding trends and challenges;

Throughout the process, a strategic planning committee composed of board, state arts agency, and field leaders, worked closely with staff and other advisors in evaluating our current state; establishing big-picture expectations for the organization; and recalibrating our vision, mission, values, and goals for the future. The work of this committee was presented to and discussed by our member state arts agencies and board of directors via regularly scheduled meetings, and the input garnered from these discussions has significantly shaped the final plan.

The level of scrutiny we have engaged in these past months has been intensified by the overall economic and political uncertainties within our operating environment. We have come to recognize more deeply through this process that we are not so much crafting an Arts Midwest which can navigate a *changed*

future, but rather crafting one which can thrive in a *constantly, rapidly, and dramatically changing* environment. As one colleague commented in a focus group meeting,

“We used to steer our organizations like rafts through episodic periods of whitewater—now, we must learn to kayak through constant and significant whitewater—without any meaningful break.”

Creativity, commitment to customer service and satisfaction, fast and effective response, and an overall adaptive capacity have been hallmarks of Arts Midwest throughout our first 25 years. They have provided the foundation for our success to date. As we look forward through the lens of this strategic plan, our intent is to strengthen these organizational assets even more, and in so doing, renew and deepen our commitment to our member state arts agencies and our region.

The following document summarizes key components of our planning research and assessment (documentation of which was presented to our states, planning committee, and Board throughout the process), and presents as well the broad brush strokes of our strategic plan for FY 2012-2014. Detailed metrics and operational components for the plan will continue to be developed in the months ahead, with an official plan start date of July 1, 2011.



*Year of the Horse,
Marrero, Louisiana (Firecracker Paper)*
Photograph by Wing Young Huie

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

There are numerous environmental trends, challenges and opportunities which will impact Arts Midwest in our current and near term. These include shifting priorities at the national funding level, difficult economic realities and trends (particularly as these impact government funding for the arts at the state level); an evolving understanding of the varied drivers for economic and community vitality; the globalization of our society; and more. While our planning process examined and analyzed an array of trends too numerous to report in this summary document, the following provide insight into key areas of concern or opportunity which have informed our planning and strategic direction in critical ways.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS FUNDING AND PRIORITIES

Both in terms of our core operating revenues as well as our total revenues, it is clear that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is a key supporter (and currently, the largest contracting partner of Arts Midwest). The political health and strategic orientation of the NEA thus has significant implications for the organization.

- The NEA has experienced a period of sustained growth, which has allowed the agency the opportunity to begin to recover funding levels lost during the culture wars of the 1990s. In the past decade, the NEA's budget has increased by \$69.4 million (71%).
- Nearly forty percent of this increase is awarded by formula to state and regional arts organizations. In this same period, Arts Midwest's partnership award (our operating support grant) from NEA has grown from \$495,500 to \$649,600 (31%).
- Concurrently, NEA support for our touring programs has grown from \$453,400 to \$1,001,800, a remarkable growth rate of 121%.
- These increases have allowed Arts Midwest the opportunity to (a) maintain and even expand core programming to constituents in our member states, and (b) invest in new program innovations—even when faced with static funding from our member states.

That said, given both the current political climate and the general state of the economy, we do not anticipate such continued growth levels. We should anticipate flat, if not decreased funding levels from the NEA.

In a similar vein, between FY 2003 and FY 2009, the National Endowment for the Arts introduced a series of major national initiatives. Arts Midwest successfully managed the first of these (Shakespeare in American Communities), and leveraged that experience and capacity into the opportunity to manage several more (including Operation Homecoming films, The Big Read, The Big Read Films, continued iterations of Shakespeare, and Jazz Masters Live).

- Total revenue connected to these initiatives (much of it in the form of pass-through grants or sub-contracts) grew from \$650,000 in FY 2003 to more than \$8 million in FY 09.
- These initiatives are currently either (a) evolving towards reduced, yet more sustainable funding models; or (b) they are phasing out.
- As these changes occur, total revenues for these activities in Arts Midwest's FY 2010 budget decreased to \$4.3 million, and anticipated revenues for FY 2011 will decline again to approximately \$2.8 million.

IMPACTS AND QUESTIONS FOR ARTS MIDWEST

In terms of operational and touring support from the NEA, Arts Midwest has benefitted from a decade of stability and growth. Moving forward, in the absence of consistent NEA growth, how should we balance core program stability with the critical need to invest in research and development of new program models? How do we best nurture our own organizational vitality and growth?

Similarly, as many of the recent NEA initiatives scale back, how might Arts Midwest internalize the competencies we nurtured through this period and re-deploy these on behalf of other, perhaps more regionally specific, services?

Finally, with public climate trending towards smaller government, less federal spending, etc., how might Arts Midwest best utilize its resources to re-frame and help deliver a powerful message on behalf of the value of public arts support?

THE ECONOMY AND STATE ARTS AGENCIES

According to analysis conducted by the National Association of State Budget Officers:¹

- Fiscal 2010 presented the most difficult challenge for states' financial management since the Great Depression. The upcoming fiscal year 2011 (beginning July 1, 2010 for most states) is expected to present states with similar fiscal challenges and elected officials will need to make tough choices. Spending and revenue is unlikely to return to pre-recession levels until fiscal 2012 or later.

Specifically within the Midwest:

- A Rockefeller Institute of Government analysis of personal income tax collections during the critical January-to-April period found that collections (nationally) were down 26 percent between 2008 and 2009. In the Midwest, the revenue declines ranged from 34.4 percent in Michigan to 0.6 percent in Kansas. North Dakota was one of only three states showing an increase in personal income tax collections...
- The Council of State Governments Midwest Office noted that "...nine of the 11 Midwestern states (all but Nebraska and North Dakota) had to make a total of \$4.3 billion in cuts to *previously enacted* budgets. Nationwide, more than three-quarters of the states made reductions totaling \$31.6 billion in FY 2009."

Obviously, such fiscal conditions result in painful budget realities for our region's state arts agencies (many of which had not fully recovered from the 2002 recession when this latest downturn began in

¹ "Stateline Midwest." Council of State Governments, Vol. 19, No. 4, April 2010.

2007). According to the *Legislative Appropriations Annual Survey 2010*, published by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies:

- State and jurisdictional arts agencies reported \$297.0 million in legislative appropriations for fiscal year 2010, a 10.0% decline from \$329.8 million in 2009. However, this figure includes a new appropriation of \$21.7 million in one state, Minnesota. Excluding these funds, total appropriations to state arts agencies declined by \$54.5 million, or 16.5%.
- Thirty-seven state arts agencies reported decreases for fiscal year 2010 with a median decrease of 19.0%. Most state arts agencies report that their cuts are proportional in size to reductions made to other government agencies. The most significant cuts took place in Michigan (80.5%), Florida (65.1%) and Illinois (52.7%). Combined, these three agencies represent an \$18.9 million loss in state funding for the arts.
- State arts agency appropriations currently stand at \$0.96 per capita, down from \$1.07 in 2009 and falling far short of the 2001 historical peak of \$1.57.²

In Arts Midwest's nine state region specifically:

- Total general fund appropriations to state arts agencies (excluding dedicated-revenue source funding such as the Minnesota Legacy Amendment monies), declined more than \$55 million dollars from FY 2001 to FY 2010, a reduction of more than 62%.

Further strains have been placed on our member agencies when one considers the deep cuts taken to their staffing and program management:

- From 2001 until 2010, our nine member state agencies have seen their combined staffing shrink from 188 FTEs to 90 FTEs, a reduction of 52%. Certainly a portion of this downsizing can be attributable to effecting administrative efficiencies. At the same time, however, a significant portion of this loss directly reflects elimination of programming and constituent service lines.

Historically, like many organizations, state arts agencies have been somewhat self-renewing—i.e., employees enter an agency through a program coordinator position (e.g., education, touring, or community development coordinator, grants manager, etc.); gain experience and knowledge; and move up the ranks into senior leadership roles. Recent cuts have severely limited not only such entry portals, but also the stepping stone positions an individual might move through to achieve a leadership role. In this environment, even such former perks as being allowed to travel to national conferences for peer meetings, professional development training, etc. are very limited as states have cut away at travel lines, and all but eliminated the potential for out of state travel.

Overall, these funding cuts have caused massive restructuring of programs and reductions in grant making and services across our region. Our state arts agencies and their leaders have responded heroically to the many challenges placed in front of them throughout this period. That said, it also should be noted that the process both of *managing* these reductions, and/or *mobilizing constituents* to resist the potential of even greater cuts (or outright elimination of the agencies), has to a certain extent sapped our membership's energy and limited its capacity to innovate, re-imagine a different future, and move forward. Providing a supportive environment for that effort will be critical in the months and years ahead.

² Sphar, Shannah. "Legislative Appropriations Annual Survey, Fiscal Year 2010." National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2010.

IMPACTS AND QUESTIONS FOR ARTS MIDWEST

As our states struggle to re-invent—or even survive—Arts Midwest must recalibrate its role from being primarily a State Arts Agency-partner in constituent service and program delivery to being our memberships' key collaborator in a multi-year re-visioning and reinvention process.

As we move forward, we need to clarify the most appropriate role for Arts Midwest to play in nurturing State Arts Agency leadership in our region—both at the senior level, as well as among emerging leaders, council and board members, etc. We will need to understand how this role synchs with other service providers working on a national level (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Americans for the Arts, etc.). And we will need to ensure that we have the right human and knowledge resources in place to succeed with this rapidly changing set of service demands.

THE ECONOMY AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Arts organizations large and small in our region have also been hard hit by the economic downturn and concurrent financial losses—not just from public agencies (state and local chief among them), but also from corporations, foundations, and individual donors, all of whom have seen their giving capacity shrink or disappear. Consider just a few examples of this trend:

- In Michigan, the Detroit Institute of the Arts—one of the key anchor organizations in the state—received a grant of \$9.2 million from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs in FY 1998. In the current year, the same organization still received the largest operating grant possible from the council, but that amount was only \$20,000.
- In the same state, the economic hardships that have befallen the Big Three automakers have also impacted their corporate giving programs in major ways. General Motors Foundation has eliminated its support for cultural organizations moving forward (focusing on other community priorities instead), and while Ford Motor Fund continues to support the arts, their overall giving budget has declined from \$98 million in 1999 to less than \$34 million in 2008.
- Most private foundations have been forced to reduce their grants budget in the wake of significant losses to their endowment levels following the collapse of the stock market in 2008. As these funders generally set their awards budgets based on a rolling three year average of asset value—and since the markets have only partially recovered their losses sustained—foundation support will be suppressed, if not diminished—for the foreseeable future.
- And individual donors, worried about their own economic health, are hard-pressed to maintain gift levels, let alone make up for losses from other sources.

IMPACTS AND QUESTIONS FOR ARTS MIDWEST

By mission and intent, Arts Midwest is not in a position to provide sustaining support to local organizations. However, our mission can only be served if there is, indeed, a vibrant creative and cultural community. Given our experience as a convening force in the region, and the capacity we have developed as a builder and manager of knowledge and learning communities, what might our role be in developing or coalescing training, leadership development, and capacity building programs for arts and cultural organizations region wide—especially in this time of change? And on a more internal level, how do we adjust and improve our own development efforts to maintain and diversify our private donor base in the current environment?

Other Trends and Opportunities

In the context of these challenges, it is also important to recognize those areas of our operating environment where Arts Midwest may have opportunities for growth or diversification of its service to its members and the field. Planning research identified two areas for Arts Midwest to focus additional resources on in the period ahead. First, encouraging renewed region wide support for creativity and innovation (in their many manifestations); and second, building upon current organizational strength and capacity *vis-à-vis* nurturing international cultural programming and exchange.

ARTS MIDWEST'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2012—2014

VALUES

Arts Midwest firmly believes that:

- **Creativity is essential;**
- **All communities deserve meaningful creative experiences;**
- **All people have the capacity for creative expression;**
- **Midwest creativity shapes our nation's culture and vitality; and,**
- **The exchange of ideas and creative experiences inspires curiosity and understanding.**

While this marks their clearest and most direct articulation, in fact these values have evolved and become more integral to our work over our first twenty-five years. They have shaped our behavior, our programs and services, and have become embedded in organizational practice, guiding our approach to problem solving; staff recruitment and development; board development; and more.

VISION

Through a region-wide renewal of its historic commitment to creativity and innovation, the Midwest will prosper and remain a healthy vital place in which to live.

For generations, the Midwest has been home to many of our nation's leading centers of creativity and design, research and innovation. While certain sectors of this universe have been significantly challenged in recent years, the underlying core elements remain in place. That said, there is at present a significant need and opportunity to bring the many disparate perspectives and players together (across disciplines and sectors) in an effort to build public and private support for a renewed commitment to building the necessary frameworks which will support and sustain a forward looking, creative, and innovative Midwest.

MISSION

**Arts Midwest promotes creativity,
nurtures cultural leadership,
and engages people in meaningful arts experiences,
bringing vitality to Midwest communities
and enriching people’s lives.**

While retaining many of the key elements of our mission statement in place over the past decade, this updated iteration has evolved in important ways. First, the verbs employed are significantly more action-oriented—we will *promote*, *nurture*, and *engage*—rather than *connect* and *share*. More than tonal, this shift reflects for our board and membership the demands of the era in which we are operating. Second, with those demands in mind, the intent or outcome of our work is more clearly and fully articulated in this next generation mission statement: our work will bring vitality to Midwest communities and enrich people’s lives.

The commitment to the vitality of our communities marks a progression in terms of how Arts Midwest understands its role. Over time, we have evolved from a commitment to encouraging our region’s cultural and artistic resources, to engaging people (i.e., audiences) in meaningful artistic experiences, to a statement of responsibility—and opportunity—to make a meaningful difference in the very vitality (economic, cultural, creative, environmental, etc.) of our region. This commitment will define our work for the next phase of our organizational life.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The Strategic Plan 2012—2014 sets forth four goals:

NURTURE CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

Ensure that cultural leaders across the Midwest—and especially those at our member state arts agencies—have the skills, ideas, and networks they need to thrive.

ENGAGE PEOPLE IN MEANINGFUL ARTS EXPERIENCES

Continue to create and support diverse, highly valued programs, providing opportunities for people to engage with arts and culture.

PROVIDE LEADERSHIP ON BEHALF OF THE MIDWEST’S CULTURAL AND CREATIVE RE-VITALIZATION

Develop the human networks and organizational capacity necessary to craft and articulate a persuasive vision on behalf of our region’s creative sector.

SUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN ARTS MIDWEST

Ensure that Arts Midwest is robust, sustainable, and that we have the capacity we need to succeed in reaching our goals.

To a great extent, our most recent strategic plan placed its emphasis on continuing and enhancing our programming mix, and simultaneously raising the bar for the organization in terms of how we would do our work—i.e., improved collaboration with our varied partners, improved financial management, stronger communications capacity, etc. During the timeframe covered by the current plan, we have certainly addressed these goals, but we also began an evolutionary cycle that very much informs our work moving forward. As we continue into the 2012—2014 cycle, while maintaining our commitment to the highly-valued core programs of the organization, we are also embracing critical challenges in terms of leadership development for our field and crafting and articulating the public value inherent in the work of the creative sector. While not representing a complete paradigm shift within our organization, these new directions are more than cosmetic, and will require significant re-tooling and re-focusing of organizational resources and strategies. At the present time, the plan sets forth both its goals and broad-brush stroke strategies. Staff and board will continue to frame operational plans, as well as outcomes and metrics for the plan in the months ahead.

A new colleague learns about the artistic and programmatic offerings at the 2010 Midwest Arts Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana.



GOAL I: NURTURE CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

Ensure that cultural leaders across the Midwest—and especially those at our member state arts agencies—have the skills, ideas, and networks they need to thrive.

BACKGROUND

Our current array of professional development and training activities provides us with both a preliminary knowledge base as well as a modest delivery capacity to address this goal. However, fully achieving the intent of this goal will require an expanded investment of human and financial resources. We need to clearly differentiate between training and leadership development. We need to shift programmatic intent for such efforts. Current training programs are considered either supporting elements for core arts delivery programs or stand-alone opportunistic projects (such as our work with Wallace Foundation, ArtsLab, etc.). Moving forward, Arts Midwest will embrace these efforts as core components of our organization which hold a key to our organizational success.

STRATEGIES & TACTICS

While strategies will continue to evolve for this goal as knowledge and situations warrant, we have identified and will pursue the following initial strategies to further our work in this area:

- **Develop a regional plan for state arts agency leadership renewal and development.** Over the next twelve months, work closely with our member state arts agencies' executive directors, their senior staff, and their key board leaders to define the knowledge, skills, and support needed to become healthy organizations with the ability to thrive within a changed environment. This could entail convening region-wide gatherings of a broader range of State Arts Agency leaders; nurturing on-going communities of practice to foster peer-to-peer learning; development and documentation of best practices and field trends; research on key regional issues, etc. In achieving this goal, we should collaborate as appropriate with other service organizations, including the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Americans for the Arts, etc.

- **Employ our role as a regional convener to bring together the varied providers of training and leadership development programs in the Midwest.**

Midwest arts administrators have the opportunity, through a variety of national, state, and local programs, to access professional development. In the current environment, however, many are still not receiving the support they need to thrive, nor is there a systematic delivery of innovative educational programs. Furthermore, there is extensive redundancy in the system, and too little sharing of knowledge resources, training approaches, etc. As both a provider of content and a regional network builder, Arts Midwest has the potential to help clarify roles and approaches to the training and technical assistance field in the Midwest cultural community.

- **Extend as appropriate our current leadership development and capacity building programs to a broader segment of the region.**

Through the work we have accomplished with the Minnesota-based ArtsLab project, and the Twin Cities-based Arts Learning Xchange, we have crafted both a solid delivery framework and content approach which could benefit the broader region. Keeping in mind the need to collaborate and avoid duplication (as noted above), Arts Midwest will initiate a gradual market expansion of our flagship leadership development and capacity building programs.

- **Ensure that our work in this arena cuts across internal organizational silos, and that the research, training, and leadership development approaches we develop as stand-alone ventures also inform and enhance other programs.**

Beyond the aforementioned projects which are directly and solely about building new knowledge and capacity in the field, Arts Midwest will continue to develop and manage an array of other programs which require training and education components. Our organizational structure and philosophy moving forward must eliminate program-to-program silos to strengthen knowledge and capacity sharing.

- **Using knowledge gained during the initial phases of this strategic program expansion, explore and (if warranted) develop the infrastructure for a Midwest center for cultural leadership and innovation.**

While more *virtual* than *physical*, such a center would be intended to cultivate learning and exploration of ideas within both current and next generation leaders. It would seek to gather knowledge resources from multiple sectors of the field and region for sharing, and could provide a clearinghouse, of sorts, for information regarding training and educational opportunities.



Mitch and Leo from Marquette, Michigan are captivated by the quick movements and sounds of Japanese musician Agatsuma and his shamisen during the 2011-2013 Arts Midwest World Fest tour.

GOAL II: ENGAGE PEOPLE IN MEANINGFUL ARTS EXPERIENCES

Continue to create and support diverse, highly valued programs, providing opportunities for people to engage with arts and culture.

STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Arts Midwest is already pursuing this goal with great success. Our programs reach more than one million people each year, and each program incorporates educational and/or audience engagement components. Some, such as our current Arts Midwest World Fest and the soon-to-be launched initiative with the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Arts, provide significant contextual background to strengthen audience understanding and engagement. In order to continue these successful ventures in the future, Arts Midwest will recommit to ensuring the artistic quality of its programming content; employ continuous improvement practices in all program management activities; and continue to research and invest in new approaches to program delivery and support. In the period covered by this plan, Arts Midwest will focus on the following strategies:

- **Continue to manage an array of high quality, Arts Midwest-designed arts *delivery* programs across multiple disciplines.**
Specifically, these will include:
 - ✓ Arts Midwest World Fest
 - ✓ Performing Arts Fund
 - ✓ Touring visual arts exhibitions
 - ✓ Special project ventures such as the Major University Presenters/China Exchange and the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Arts initiative
- **To ensure a strong delivery infrastructure for performing arts touring, continue to produce the highly-successful Midwest Arts Conference on an annual basis.**
- **Assess and renew Arts Midwest's programs to more clearly align with our revised values, vision and mission.**

Throughout our planning process, the feedback we received from constituents, funders, program partners, and others consistently verified that our core programs and services were well-regarded and of high value. That said, as we move forward, it is imperative that these same programs and services continue to evolve and refine, adjusting to both the changing environment and the evolving role of Arts Midwest itself. Each of our programs will be examined through this lens, and adjustments and refinements will be made as appropriate.

- **Conduct thorough evaluations of the Midwest Arts Conference and the Performing Arts Fund to ensure that these critical programs are well positioned for our changing environment.**

Over the coming three years of this planning period, we are committing to and will invest in in-depth evaluations (and potential refocusing) of two of our largest programs, the Midwest Arts Conference and the Performing Arts Fund. In the case of the former, we will build upon insights already gained from research commissioned from EmcArts to examine the changing nature of the touring field and the concurrent pressures placed on projects such as the conference to address new challenges. In the case of the Performing Arts Fund, an array of questions present themselves for deeper exploration, including: the role and impact of the grant awards on community capacity to engage arts programs; the potential impact of the fund to encourage and support in-region performers and creators; the relationship of the fund to touring and support mechanisms at state levels in our region; the potential of the fund to encourage creative artists and art forms beyond the performing arts; etc.

- **Conduct a thorough examination of our overall programming matrix to identify improved approaches for strengthened ventures in the visual, literary, design, and media arts.**

While our programming in terms of visual arts exhibitions has historically been of high quality and well-received by audiences, it remains ad hoc in nature. In terms of the other media, our work to date has been weak. While recognizing that Arts Midwest cannot operate equally across all discipline platforms, it is important that we examine how we might nurture these creative forces within our region as part of fully embracing our mission and vision.



Midwestern artists, agents, and arts organization representatives participate in engaging professional development, leadership, and capacity building sessions through programs such as ArtsLab, Arts Learning Xchange, and the Midwest Arts Conference.

GOAL III: PROVIDE LEADERSHIP ON BEHALF OF THE MIDWEST'S CULTURAL AND CREATIVE RE-VITALIZATION

Develop the human networks and organizational capacity necessary to craft and articulate a persuasive vision on behalf of our region's creative sector.

STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Both throughout our planning process and in an array of meetings over the course of the past eighteen months, our member state arts agencies, regional arts service and advocacy organizations, and regional policy and planning groups have identified the need to coalesce and articulate a clear and dynamic vision on the importance of creativity and innovation to the future of the Midwest. This vision must incorporate not only the arts and artists, but broader realms of the creative community, as well as leaders from technology and scientific communities. Model platforms exist to support this dialogue in other countries and other regions (e.g., the membership base for the Creativity World Forum), but that conversation has yet to take root in the broader Midwest region. While there are likely political advocacy tools which could emanate from this strategy, it is important to note that it is not our intent for Arts Midwest to become an arts advocate per se through this endeavor. Rather, we continue to see this activity as being aligned with our core competencies in convening, knowledge development and sharing, community of practice management, etc.

- **Convene our region's state arts agency leadership at the Creativity World Forum to identify state and regional strategies in support of strengthening creativity.**
As a first step in this process (and even in advance of the "official" start of this plan period), Arts Midwest will provide funding to convene delegation of twenty-five of our member State Arts Agency leaders (two per state); board members, and senior staff at Creativity World Forum this November in Oklahoma. Following two days of the forum, our team will re-convene on our own to identify what tools, networks, and knowledge resources we need to begin to shape our own regional platform for this discussion to continue.

- **Identify and strategically align with others who have a stake in the Midwest’s creative success (e.g., cultural, political, educational, scientific, financial, and business leaders).**
Arts Midwest’s current network is strongest within the arts, culture, and philanthropic sector. As we move forward in this arena, it will be necessary for us to embrace a deliberate and strategic process to identify key thinkers, leaders, and voices throughout the region who both have a stake in the success of this effort, and a belief in collaborative, cross-boundary projects.
- **Raise the visibility of the Midwest region as a creative and innovative force.**
Arts Midwest has consistently been a valued and successful convener of people and organizations for regional and national ventures. To succeed in this effort, we will also need to become a “convener” of ideas and stories that provide cross-sector examples of innovative excellence. Once gathered, we will need to build our own authority as a provider of such information, and effectively disseminate it to the public and decision makers (a) directly, through our website, social media, public presentations, etc. and (b) indirectly through other media and spokespersons.
- **Continually refine these strategies to adjust to new opportunities and challenges.**
Since this is a significantly new area for Arts Midwest engagement, and as such will require additional skill sets and partners, it is imperative that we commit to an on-going process of assessment, refinement, and adaptation to ensure that our efforts are not bound by written strategies which may not be the most effective—or most efficient—approaches to reaching our goal.

Chicago arts patrons experience the unrestrained sounds and energy of TAO from Fukuoka, Japan.



GOAL IV: SUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN ARTS MIDWEST

Ensure that Arts Midwest is robust, sustainable, and that we have the capacity we need to succeed in reaching our goals.

STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Arts Midwest marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of its creation (from a merger of two predecessor regional organizations) in September, 2010. Its first quarter century has been remarkably successful, and several of the key, underlying principles for *why* it was created (i.e., to reduce system and structural redundancies; to craft a forward looking and lean organization; and to invest cost savings achieved in innovative solutions on behalf of the region) have been realized. In fact, those underlying principles remain true today.

That said, the organization has arrived at a moment in which it must advance to its next level of maturity. Our planning process has shown us clearly that we are poised at that cyclical juncture (natural for all organizations) wherein we must either renew and re-invest or face a gradual process of decline. Operational systems need to be re-invigorated, our board of directors needs renewal and diversification (from multiple demographic vantage points), and succession planning at both board and staff leadership levels is required. Our planning team articulated the situation thusly: “To succeed moving forward, Arts Midwest must align its governance, management, program and operational staff, technical, and financial capacities at the developmental axis between *high growth* and *maturity* in order to build capacity within an ever changing environment.”

Beyond these concerns (which are cyclical rather than episodic in nature), Arts Midwest is facing the same environmental challenges as any not-for-profit organization in the current economy. With all of these points in mind, our plan sets forth an array of strategies to ensure not just the *viability*, but the *vitality* of Arts Midwest for the years ahead.

- **Renew, strengthen and diversify Arts Midwest’s governance.**

The structure and composition of Arts Midwest’s Board of Directors has evolved over our twenty-five years, shifting from one in which member state arts agencies held a majority of seats (18 of 35),

to one wherein our members entrusted strong and respected regional leaders with the task of acting as fiduciary stewards of the organization, and states influenced program and policy development through an active partnership dialogue. Our current board has 17 voting seats. In the recent past, we have developed new mechanisms to strengthen board engagement, and we currently have a strong, engaged, and supportive board. At the same time, our board is generally long-tenured and has not, until recently, proven adept at self-renewal. Additionally, while the board is broadly representative of the geography of our region and the field we serve, it lacks diversity in terms of both race and age. Through strengthening its self-evaluation processes as well as its recruitment and nomination efforts, the board is committing to strengthening its capacity to govern the organization in the years to come.

- **Continue to strengthen our financial position and financial management.**

In the past three years, Arts Midwest has made significant strides in improving its overall cash flow, unrestricted fund balance, cash on hand, and more. We have made additional improvements in financial policies and procedures, as well as in enhancing the engagement of our board in fulfilling their fiduciary responsibilities in a knowledgeable and timely manner. Moving forward, we intend to work closely with our board (especially via the Finance and Audit Committee), our financial team, and our auditors to craft a set of clearly measurable metrics and objectives against which Arts Midwest can benchmark its financial progress and overall health. Additionally, we will work closely with our finance staff to strengthen our capacity to provide improved financial forecasting, as well as to more actively engage program managers in monitoring their own fiscal activities in a timely and clear basis. Finally, we will continue to explore approaches to strengthen the so-called passive return on our unrestricted assets to maximize their value while protecting our principal.

- **Ensure the alignment of our organizational structure and staffing to support our strategic plan directions and programs moving forward.**

As Arts Midwest assumes new programming directions and activities, and as certain areas of current activity are reduced in scale (e.g., certain of the NEA national initiatives, etc.), we have the opportunity and need to re-focus both our human resources and organizational structure to support our new realities. This will entail not only refinement of job responsibilities, but also likely re-deployment of personnel to new tasks and functions. Inherent in this process will be the simultaneous need to:

- ✓ Deepen staff engagement with overall organizational strategic direction to maximize productivity, break down interdepartmental silos, and increase overall knowledge sharing and adaptability; and,
- ✓ Develop a new, more strategic approach to staff development and training.

Work towards this goal will begin prior to formal launch of the plan period in July, 2011.

- **Advance organizational systems to the next level of maturity.**

Arts Midwest's operational systems (i.e., our data base, information technology, telecommunications systems, etc.) have been adequate for our work to date. However, as we move into the next level of organizational maturity, and as we add new stress to the systems overall as a result of diversifying and expanding our programmatic tactics, our systems will likely be overwhelmed. This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that, at present, internal leadership on these many issues is dispersed, with no clear, central authority designated to provide overall vision and leadership. Moving forward, Arts Midwest will explore how best to improve its internal leadership on this critical area of growth, and build a practical, achievable, yet forward looking plan to improve our operational systems.

- **Plan for succession at all levels of the organization.**

Arts Midwest leadership team (including both key board leaders, as well as the executive and assistant directors) are long-tenured and deeply identified with the organization (and in turn, the organization is deeply identified with them). At present, there is no succession plan in place which (especially at the staff level) causes meaningful vulnerability to our well being. A clear, thoughtful succession plan needs to be developed for Arts Midwest's leadership to protect against unforeseen, as well as planned transitions. (As regards the latter matter of planned transitions, the planning process also noted that there are no such anticipated transitions during the period covered by this strategic plan.)

CONCLUSION

In July 2012, Arts Midwest begins its second quarter-century. During those first twenty-five years, our arts touring programs and exhibitions, funding investments and conferences, and research and leadership development efforts have brought vitality and new knowledge to communities and cultural leaders across our region, the whole of the United States, and more than twenty countries throughout the world. We are proud of our accomplishments, and prouder still that our work is consistently recognized for its quality, creativity, and passion.

At the same time, while our past accomplishments have made a permanent contribution to the lives, perspectives, and memories of millions of individuals, we are clear in our understanding that our continued success in the future depends on an active recommitment to organizational renewal, curiosity, innovation, and adaptation.

This understanding has driven the development of our new strategic plan, a plan rooted in ensuring that:

- Imagination and creativity remain not just at the center of our own work, but also are renewed and celebrated as valuable assets of our region.
- Continual evaluation and "listening opportunities" are incorporated into Arts Midwest practices in order to ensure our continued relevance to our many clients and audiences.
- Our closest partners at our member state arts agencies benefit from Arts Midwest's continued success, and through our work together, the Midwestern region remains a vital and dynamic place to live and do business.

We know that not every step we take as a result of this plan will, in fact, be a step forward—some of our efforts will not succeed, others will require course adjustments as we move forward. However, we are committed to ensuring that every step we take will be thoughtful, intentional, and will be valued for what it might teach us.

We believe in the future of our vision and our work, and we are grateful to all of our members, supporters, partners, and colleagues for joining us on this path. Thank you for your support.

Photo credits (Front): An Da Union performs during an Arts Midwest World Fest engagement, photo by Tiffany Rodgers; Midwest Arts Conference attendees network in Indianapolis, Indiana, photo by Tiffany Rodgers; Luna Negra Dance Theater performs at the 2010 Midwest Arts Conference; photo by Tiffany Rodgers. (Inside): *Year of the Horse, Marrero, Louisiana (Firecracker Paper)*, photo by Wing Young Huie; A Midwest Arts Conference attendee looks over Conference materials, photo by Tiffany Rodgers; Agatsuma performs for two young boys during Arts Midwest World Fest, photo by Shigeyo Henriquez; Conference attendees participate in professional development sessions at the 2009 Midwest Arts Conference, photo by Tiffany Rodgers; TAO performs as part of a Performing Arts Fund engagement with Chicago Human Rhythm Project in Chicago, Illinois; photo courtesy of TAO and Chicago Human Rhythm Project.