

Connecticut Office of the Arts

Strategic Plan 2013 – 2016

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Introduction

As part of a series of governmental mergers accomplished in 2011, the Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) now operates within the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). COA began a new strategic planning process shortly after the consolidation of the Commission on Culture and Tourism (CCT) into DECD. As part of a former merger in 2003, CCT had included the arts, historic preservation, film, and tourism.

The strategic planning process was the result of a new direction, articulated early on during the implementation of the merger, which focused COA's funding primarily on creative placemaking. Merger responsibilities and planning were carried out by COA staff under the direction of DECD Deputy Commissioner, Kip Bergstrom.

This plan is a transitional planning document based, in part, on COA's former plan, but is primarily the result of a collaborative effort between the Connecticut Office of the arts and a network of partnering regional cultural service organizations, namely; the Arts Council of Greater New Haven, Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County, Cultural Alliance of Western CT, Greater Hartford Arts Council, Northwest CT Arts Council, Shoreline Arts Alliance, Arts & Culture Collaborative of the Waterbury Region, and Windham Arts. Through these partnering organizations and COA's own outreach efforts, many constituents and citizens contributed their voices, opinions and ideas to the dialogue.

Mission

The Office of the Arts develops and strengthens the arts in Connecticut and makes artistic experiences widely available to residents and visitors. Through its grant programs, the office invests in Connecticut artists and arts organizations and encourages the public's participation as creators, learners, supporters, and audience members. Through its' program and services, the office connects people to the arts and helps to build vital communities across the state.

Vision

The vision of the Office of the Arts is to invest in arts-based cultural projects, activities and infrastructure in ways that will advance the attractiveness and competitiveness of Connecticut cities, towns, and villages as meaningful communities in which to live, work, learn and play. In implementing this vision, it is COA's objective to provide a majority of its support to those individuals, groups and organizations whose primary purpose it is to create, perform, present or otherwise promote the visual, performing, literary or folk arts.

As is stated in the DECD Economic Development Strategy (July 2013 edition), "Connecticut also possesses an unparalleled quality of life." The over arching DECD plan lists the creation of sustainable communities among its major objectives, citing "vibrant neighborhoods" as a key task of the agency. "The vision for Connecticut is one of innovation and excellence in people, places and organizations – in other words, vibrancy. This vibrancy will attract talented people and grow businesses. In order to create vibrant regions throughout the state in today's economy, economic development strategies require investments that support and entrepreneurial economy – one that looks beyond job growth and also focuses on integrating social and economic wellbeing of individuals, businesses, communities and regions."

Executive Summary

On July 1, 2011, the Commission on Culture & Tourism was consolidated into the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). The reorganized Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) has since operated within DECD. With the merger came a new direction, namely, a focus on creative placemaking and a greater emphasis on partnership-based project support. COA's new direction encourages a multi-faceted approach to arts access, engagement and community development. In January, 2012, COA published a [New Direction Statement](#) to clarify a new unified vision.

Five State-wide Forums

Key to COAs' transitional strategic planning process, the arts staff conducted five state-wide forums throughout February 2012 that reached more than 800 constituents. COA engaged its key regional service partners to plan, organize and conduct these significant assemblies. Each two hour forum communicated the agency's new direction and engaged all participants in facilitated, small group planning discussions. COA staff led brief training sessions with all of its volunteer facilitators and provided each discussion leader with a formal agenda, prompts, guidelines and facilitation guidance. Each small group (up to 25 breakout tables of approximately 8-10 people each) was prompted for:

- a) What from the presentation and follow-up discussion resonated with you about placemaking in your work/experience?,
- b) How can we (state and region) work together to leverage the state's creative sector to improve your community's economic condition & quality of life? (top three ideas captured from each),
- c) What needs to be in place in CT for our state to be a national model for arts-based placemaking in ways that make our cities, towns and villages attractive to the innovative talent that will grow our state and national economy?, and,
- d) Who is not currently participating in the discussion that should be? Each forum ended with a plenary "top three ideas swap."

COA had successfully energized a statewide placemaking discussion and generated an abundance of strong "top three" ideas with which to forge a new grant program design.

17 Working Sessions

Throughout March and April 2012, the arts staff conducted an additional 17 working sessions around the state. These strategic conversations sought input from the field regarding the design of new creative placemaking grant guidelines and program parameters (*approximately 35 to 12 participants per session*). Each session presented COA's Investment Priorities and gathered feedback and suggestions concerning applicant/partner eligibility, use of grant funds (eligible expenses, required match, administrative expenses, etc.), evaluation (reporting requirements), and grantee responsibilities (what's fair?). All session notes and suggestions were compiled by the arts staff and ultimately formed the basic ideas and information of a new framework, namely, the Arts Catalyze Placemaking (ACP) grant program.

COA's investment priorities:

1. *Community Impact and Market Development,*
2. *Position the Arts / Cultural Enterprise as a Catalyst for Change,*
3. *Relevance to Community and*
4. *Strength in Diversity*

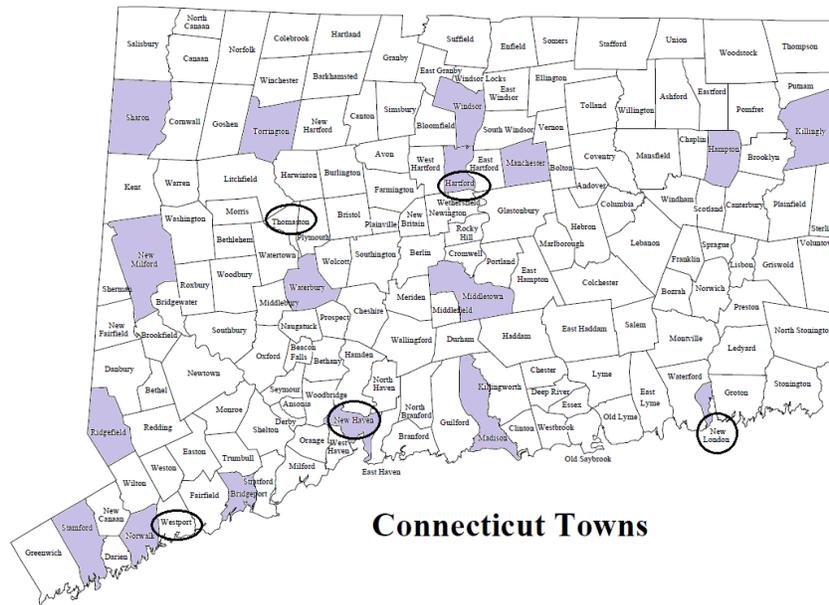


Figure 1: Map of CT indicating outreach of 5 state-wide forums (circled) and 17 working sessions (noted in purple)

Evaluation Support

In May, COA contracted [WolfBrown](#) to support the agency’s ultimate goal to develop an outcomes-based grant program. COA worked with Alan Brown and Jennifer Novak-Leonard in this first phase of evaluation support to finalize the design of the application process and its evaluation components. COA’s transitional strategic planning process, and its crucial work with WolfBrown, inaugurated a formal application process that requires every applicant to “makes their case” for funding and provide a plan to measure the proposed project’s outcomes by utilizing ACP’s [Goals & Priority Outcomes Table](#), a product of our work with WolfBrown. While the new application process is evolutionary, the requested information markedly shifts attention to the collaborative planning employed to determine what cultural activities or services will be most relevant and effective in engaging the community and project partners identified. COA’s new ACP grant program was launched as a pilot program in FY13 and supported small to large project grants in addition to an operating support option.

COA Goals developed to measure the Arts impact on Placemaking

- 1. Community Relevance & Civic Engagement**
- 2. Arts Engagement, Artistic Excellence & Creativity**
- 3. Market Development**

During the summer of 2012, arts staff held five additional statewide forums to launch the new ACP grant program and provided constituents with a basic introduction to the new programs and parameters. As the number of changes from past COA grant programs were significant, follow-up from the earlier New Directions 5 statewide forums and 17 working sessions was necessary to complete the transitional

planning process. COA once again worked closely with its regional service partners to organize and conduct these forums.

To best support constituents' understanding of ACP's new outcome goals, WolfBrown was contracted again to help design and to conduct two 90-minute, interactive webinars in September & October 2012, prior to the new application deadlines. The webinars provided constituents with:

- a) greater context and clarification regarding how to best approach the ACP program's new self-reporting requirements,
- b) an overview of how to use the ACP Outcomes Table and the Activities, Goals & Outcomes Worksheet,
- c) a context for placemaking, and,
- d) helpful information about outcomes and indicators.

The Powerpoint presentations were made available post-webinar to benefit the widest number of potential applicants and remain available to constituents our [Arts Catalyze Placemaking](#) home page.

Program Development

To provide stronger customer support, COA developed a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page with a dedicated email account acp.questions@ct.gov to deliver consistent responses to the field. COA also transitioned to e-granting and is now using a grants portal to administer all grants program applications and final reports.

In August, 2013 COA published its 2014 ACP grant guidelines and application after a noteworthy redesign based on constituent, review panelist and staff feedback. For FY2014, COA has strategically decided to operate a "short year" grant period (January 2013 through June 2014) in order to return to its state fiscal year cycle (July through June) which had to be adjusted due to merger challenges. The current grants, which include a new grant opportunity with our partner State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), are transitional to plans already underway for COA's FY2015 ACP program.

New Alignment

The former CCT strategic plan (pre-merger) was aimed at unifying three distinct lines of business (Tourism, Historic Preservation and the Arts) into a cohesive unit. The consolidation into DECD shifted COA away from the former internal, operational focus and redirected each office within the agency toward a more independent planning process. As part of management restructuring which resulted from the merger into DECD, the Office of the Arts and the State Historic Preservation Office were consolidated under a single manager, the Director of Arts and Historic Preservation (formerly titled the Director of Culture). While COA and SHPO function independently, they increasingly interact as partners in planning and implementing [Arts and Historic Preservation cross-sector creative placemaking strategies](#). COA and SHPO continue to find new and innovative ways to develop their partnership within state government.

Post 2011 merger, COA continues to contend with several challenges, of which the most significant are:

The Magnitude of the Merger – presents challenge and opportunity for COA as it responds to significant changes which include decreased staffing and a lower budget appropriation, new internal procedures, new computer systems and office technologies, the loss of former programs, the reorganization of staff responsibilities to serve geographically rather than by discipline, and the charge to consolidate grant programs into one new overarching funding program under a decidedly accelerated schedule.

COA has persevered and excelled under an inundation of change. With a dedicated Director of Arts and Historic Preservation in place as of July 2013, the end of a long transitional period is beginning to recede. Staff's strong relationships with DRISO's and other key arts constituents generate significant support for COA's new direction. While navigating the transition required determination and resolve, much of the transition has afforded excellent opportunities for positive change and growth and has positioned COA as a key element in the state's transformative economic strategy.

Demonstrating Success – is a critically important goal as COA continues to advance the ways in which the state and its constituents are able to better measure the outcomes of grant programs and professional development services. Determining performance measures that can be realistically tracked and evaluated is crucial, as are evaluation tools and education for our constituents.

Undoubtedly, the outcomes which are most important for the state and the field to measure and evaluate are some of the most difficult to quantify and qualify. In addition, COA faces the constant demand for accountability and the need to track and demonstrate success externally. COA staff are committed to continuing the groundwork already begun to further establish this important work.

Consistent Grantmaking – has been nearly impossible to provide the state's constituents. Following the merger and subsequent new direction to placemaking and focus on project grants, many of our grantees faced uncertainty due to the significant changes that had affected their trusted funding source. Advance budgetary planning, already impacted by Connecticut's late response to the 2008 economic downturn, has been a real challenge for much of the state's cultural infrastructure.

From the point of view of our traditional grantees, COA's program changes have been sudden. COA continues to adjust and redesign funding programs that can support both innovative projects and provide modest operating support to the field.

Strategic Framework

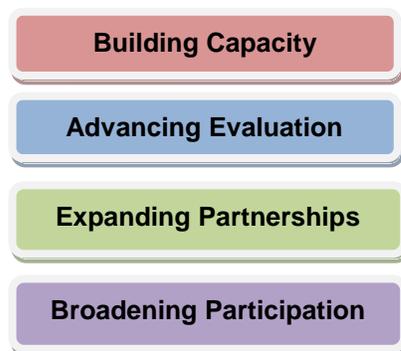
While much of the former CCT strategic planning framework is no longer appropriate for the new merged agency, numerous elements still align with current needs, especially those relating to operations, our authorizing environment.

COA has begun to prepare long term goals as a part of this transitional plan. Phases of current planning are further detailed in the Process Timeline section below. This phased planning process serves the needs of the state’s constituents, the broad cultural field, important national and global trends expressing changes in values and viewpoints, COA’s former strategic plan, and expectations of state government and COA’s merger into DECD.

While the state’s constituents are primarily concerned about the immediate outputs of specific programs (i.e., funding, programs and services), state government is focused on the long-term impact of the COA’s activities (economic development and quality of life). COA’s strategic plan must serve as a bridge for these perspectives and use a vocabulary that can ultimately articulate our aggregate outcomes as contributing toward the ultimate goals of statewide economic and community vitality. A sketch of COA’s transitional planning strategies include:

- **Building Capacity** – COA must support the advancement of constituents’ ability to provide intentional, relevant and transformational programming.
- **Advancing Evaluation** – COA must support the advancement of constituents’ and its own abilities to measure and articulate successes in new and innovative ways.
- **Expanding Partnerships** – COA must support the advancement of constituents’ ability to promote cross-sector collaboration and engage new and innovative partnerships.
- **Broadening Participation** – COA must support the advancement of constituents’ ability to deepen their connections throughout the state’s communities and beyond.

COA Plan Strategies



Community Vitality



Figure 2: Sketch of COA Strategic Framework

In our previous plan, CCT used Mark H. Moore’s “strategic triangle” that stressed public agency’s need for three strategies. COA will continue to reference this work through its transitional period.

- Continue to provide programs and services that enable and support **constituent** activities.
- Refine operations to maximize efficiency without compromising its **operational effectiveness**.
- Communicate with the **executive and legislative branches of government** (the “authorizing environment”) to better articulate progress and success stories and how COA enables and supports constituents’ efforts.

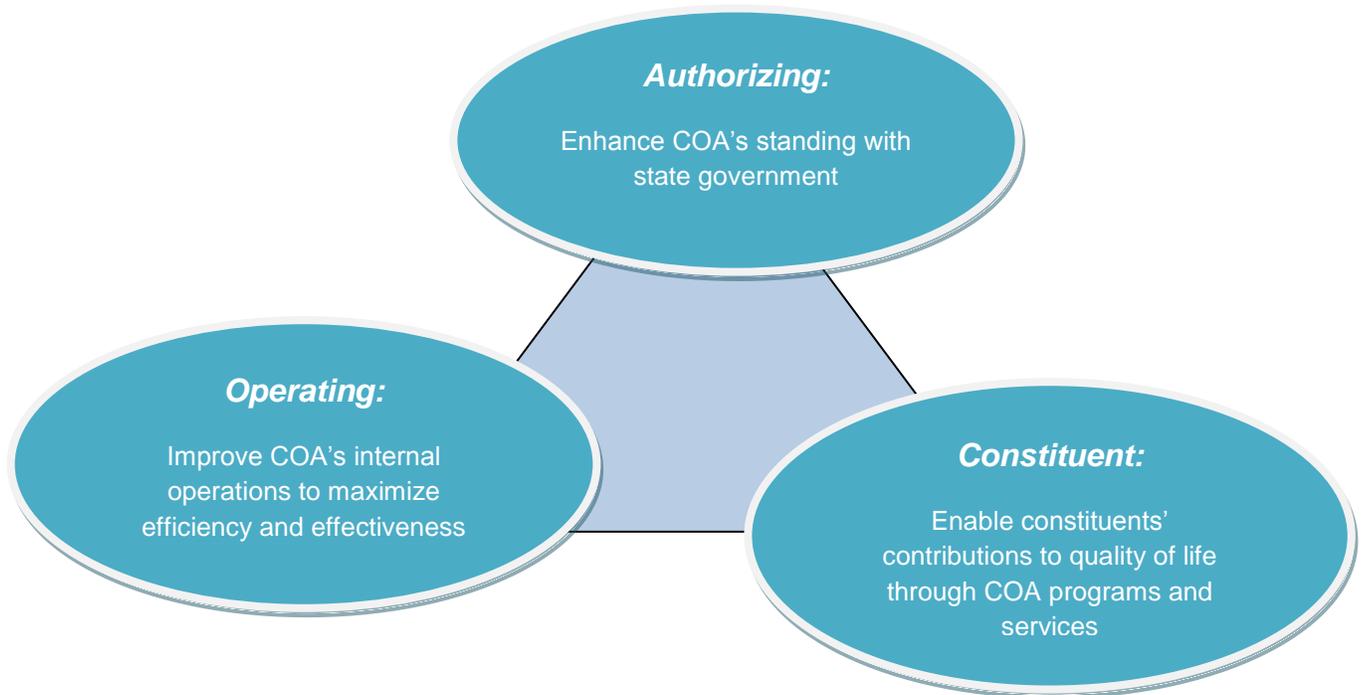


Figure 3: COA's Strategic Triangle

In addition to the planning activities outlined above, COA also engaged in state government’s LEAN process, also known as “**Continuous Improvement**.” The LEAN philosophy is an expansive and fundamental transformation of Connecticut’s state government and DECD is a pioneer state agency in this work. DECD and Connecticut state government has embraced the LEAN process and all of DECD’s programs and services will be examined through LEAN events. In March 2012 COA conducted its first LEAN Event, a week-long intensive workshop focused on improving one phase (internal operations) of the ACP grant program.

Connecticut LEAN Vision Statement: Utilize the talent and skills of our staff to eliminate waste as it impacts internal or external customer service, economic development, efficiency, cost, growth or the operation of any State functions to create a more effective, efficient and prosperous Connecticut.

Key LEAN Concepts

- Telling our story more successfully using the LEAN framework.
- Know who your customers are and how you interact with them.
- Identify value through customer's eyes
- Define the value stream – Process
- Create Flow where possible
- Establish pull where flow is not possible
- Continually pursue perfection
- Opportunities for Improvement
- Standardized Work – combining (1) people, (2) assets, (3) production time based on demand
- Expectation, Accountability, Results

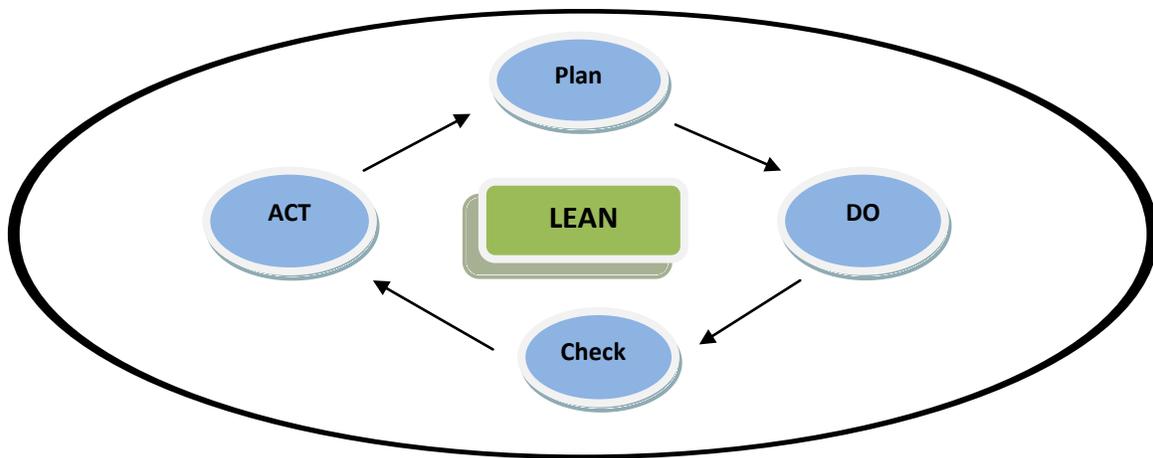


Figure 4: LEAN flow chart

Another State initiated strategic framework is **Results Based Accountability (RBA)**. In order to be accountable for its performance, consistent with the State's results based accountability approach, it is necessary for COA to determine realistic performance measures and regularly assess its progress on them.

The Connecticut Legislature has embraced RBA as a method of assessing the effectiveness of state programs and services. Since FY2009, selected COA programs have created "RBA Report Cards" that have been supplied to the Legislature and the Appropriations Committee. Aside from providing data on funding and numbers served, each Report Card attempts to answer the following questions:

- a) How Much Did We Do?,
- b) How Well Did We Do It?, and,
- c) Is Anyone Better Off?

Each question section conveys the "Story behind the baseline," which includes specific information regarding perceived "Trends," and "Proposed actions to turn the curve." COA has used a more comprehensive series of the "RBA Questions" in its planning and evaluation work.

Guiding Principles

The following principles have guided COA's thinking in the grant development process:

1

The arts create a more connected community.

2

The intrinsic value of the arts transforms places through civic engagement, community cohesiveness, vitality and attractiveness.

3

Arts education is essential to the creative learning process and is a contributing force behind a vigorous arts community.

4

The ability to articulate the impact of relevant arts activities on the vibrancy and health of Connecticut cities, towns, and villages is fundamental to building arts support.

5

A healthy variety of arts organizations, artists, programs, and projects of various sizes and disciplines are necessary to address the diverse interests of Connecticut citizens and visitors.

6

Anchor arts institutions and proven programs are an essential component of Connecticut's landscape.

7

Collaboration between and among arts organizations, artists and diverse community partners leads to:

- a higher level of artistic experience
- uses resources more effectively, and
- propels the arts sector forward.

8

An important measure of the Arts Catalyze Placemaking program's success is its ability to attract increased resources and participation across the arts community and beyond.

9

An effective grantmaking process must drive measurable community impact, maintain public trust, be easily understood and provide a level of predictable funding to sustain measurable change over an extended period of time.

10

A relevant grantmaking process guides applicants through continuous learning, evaluation and adjustment.

Strategic Goals

COA has developed three (3) strategic goals relevant to its new direction on creative placemaking. Through COA's transitional planning process, these goals will be further refined and informed by continuing conversations with constituents, government leaders and additional research.

1. COMMUNITY RELEVANCE & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The arts are essential to the development of meaningful places in which to live, work, learn and play. As the intrinsic value of the arts can transform places through civic engagement, community cohesiveness, vitality and attractiveness, arts programs and activities must be thoughtfully and perceptively developed through the engagement of community members as active planners, participants, partners and contributors. COA supports its constituents to take a leadership role in applying the arts in innovative ways to deepen relationships and understanding, advance communications and pride, and enhance education, governance, health, the economy and all areas of individual and community endeavor.

2. ARTS ACCESS & THE ARTISTIC ENVIRONMENT

The arts are essential to creating more connected communities and improving social health, and must, therefore, be accessible to all. To best address the local, regional, statewide and national interests of Connecticut's communities, citizens and visitors, a healthy diversity of arts organizations and groups, programs and projects, artists and creative workers, spanning a broad spectrum of disciplines, abilities and sizes in a multiplicity of locations, is absolutely essential. COA supports its constituents to take a leadership role in creating and advancing cultural equity through their plans, affiliations and operations.

3. LIFE LONG LEARNING

The arts are essential to learning and contribute to vigorous and healthy schools and meaningful communities in which to live, work, learn and play. As the creative process is central to human development, arts programs and activities must be designed to take advantage of opportunities for learning and the advancement of values and understanding, working with Connecticut citizens of all ages, backgrounds and abilities in both formal and informal learning environments. COA supports its constituents to take a leadership role in integrating the arts to advance education across all disciplines and curricular content and to invigorate life long learning for all participants.

Strategic Objectives

Through this transitional planning process, COA's strategic objectives will be further refined and informed by continuing conversations with constituents, government leaders and additional research. The strategic objectives listed here are intended to focus COA's attention and resources over the next three years 2013 - 2016. Several of the objectives are aligned across the major goal areas and will be

coordinated where aligned and mutual objectives intersect. (objectives on page 12 are color coded and relate to Figure 2. Sketch of COA's Strategic Framework on Page 7)

1. COMMUNITY RELEVANCE & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- A. Build the capacity of organizations and individuals to value, comprehend, develop and employ best practices to advance community relevance and civic engagement.
- B. Develop evaluative tools and measures that constituents and the state can use to articulate and publicize the intrinsic impacts of arts activities on the vibrancy and health of Connecticut citizens and its communities.
- C. Support collaboration between and among arts organizations, artists, educators and new and diverse community partners.
- D. Demonstrate accountability and exemplary management as a public agency.

2. ARTS ACCESS & THE ARTISTIC ENVIRONMENT

- A. Strengthen the ability of arts organizations and groups as essential catalysts of civic, cultural and economic vitality in Connecticut.
- B. Foster engagement and participation in the arts and access among all Connecticut citizens to ensure that the arts reach all community sectors regardless of circumstances or abilities.
- C. Facilitate the work of artists as entrepreneurs, community-builders and contributors to Connecticut's creative industries.
- D. Embed high quality art and arts experiences in relevant ways into the daily lives of Connecticut citizens and visitors.

3. LIFE LONG LEARNING

- A. Advance the arts as an essential element of schooling and life long learning.
- B. Build the capacity of organizations and individuals to value, comprehend, develop and employ best practices to integrate the arts into formal and informal learning in Connecticut's schools and other private and public learning environments.
- C. Develop the tools and measures that constituents and the state can use to articulate and publicize the educational impacts of arts activities on the vibrancy and health of Connecticut individuals and its communities.
- D. Support collaboration between and among arts organizations, artists, educators and new and diverse community partners.

Planning Process Timeline

COA's transitional strategic planning process is outlined in 3 planning phases below and has been conducted during and in response to the July 2011 merger.

PHASE ONE

July 2011 through December 2012

Outreach with constituents to introduce new creative placemaking direction and to develop pilot funding programs to implement the concept. Two successful, one-time initiatives were implemented concurrently during the planning process to initiate creative placemaking and to demonstrate the positive impact of arts activity on Connecticut communities.

JULY	Creative Placemaking articulated as Arts Office focus
AUGUST	Internal meetings to determine transition tasks necessary, complete FY12 grant programming and begin to propose ideas for new FY13 grant programming
NOVEMBER	Creative Placemaking pilot discussions with select constituents
JANUARY	New Direction Statement released; City Canvas and First FY12 Creative Placemaking pilot projects launched
FEBRUARY	Conducted 5 statewide forums to gather information regarding the agency's New Directions
MARCH	Conducted 17 working sessions statewide to assess more detailed parameters to develop new grant programming
APRIL	Compiled and assessed collected information to inform design of new grant programming based on placemaking
MAY – JUNE	Ongoing program development; engaged evaluation support from WolfBrown
JUNE	COA invited the state's community foundations to discuss change in funding direction and propose funding synergies
AUGUST	Conducted 5 statewide forums to announce Arts Catalyze Placemaking (ACP) <i>PILOT</i> grant program, discuss details of the new system, present priority outcomes and new application format
SEPTEMBER	ACP <i>PILOT</i> grant program launched. Revise former funding programs as needed to maintain select services and programs and bring others to a close
NOVEMBER	ACP <i>PILOT</i> grant program panel reviews
DECEMBER	ACP <i>PILOT</i> grant program funding recommendations presented to COA Arts Council and final internal recommendations

PHASE TWO

July 2011 through September 2012

January 2013 through December 2013

Evaluate the results of placemaking pilot programs and deepen the discussion of the agency's new directions at the policy making level.

- FEBRUARY** [10 Policies to Increase the Impact of the Arts on Placemaking](#), a policy paper developed by Deputy Commissioner, Kip Bergstrom in support of COA's new programs and plans focused on creative placemaking.
- MARCH** Conducted a week-long LEAN (Continuous Improvement) workshop examining the internal processing phase of the ACP pilot program.
- APRIL** Agency-wide assessment of the LEAN process. COA presentation to DECD
- JULY – AUGUST** Deputy Commissioner Kip Bergstrom convened six focus groups to discuss the *10 Policies* with members of the agency's Advisory Committee, COA's Arts Council, COA staff and invited constituents central to each topic.
- SEPTEMBER** Final preparation of Phase I and II of COA's transitional strategic planning process

PHASE ONE

July 2011 through December 2012

PHASE TWO

July 2011 through September 2012

PHASE THREE

IN PROGRESS

October 2013 Forward

PHASE THREE

October 2013 Forward

Continue to analyze data from the FY13 ACP pilot programs. Develop a plan for policy implementation of the Action Agenda to the 10 Policies.

OCT – DEC	Develop Final Reporting Requirements
DECEMBER	Staff review of FY2015 ACP goals
JANUARY	Meet with partners to plan and coordinate COA’s FY15 programs and services.
FEBRUARY	Publish FY2015 ACP grant programs for application and submission by April-May. Compile constituent statistics from FY14 ACP Supporting Arts in Place to gauge economic impact and other measures that can support DECD mission
MARCH	Continue LEAN (Continuous Improvement) process as a part of COA’s transitional planning process Explore option to partner with Connecticut Humanities (CTH) regarding a third contract with WolfBrown to advance evaluation strategies across shared constituencies
APRIL	Engage final transitional planning work, revise goals and objectives as needed, add indicators of success and outcome measurements. Overlay planning with state RBA principles and reporting requirements
MAY	Conduct panel reviews for FY2015 ACP grant applications
JUNE	Make final FY15 ACP funding recommendations to COA Arts Council. Prepare FY2015 ACP grant contracts. Continue final planning work
JULY	Engage WolfBrown for next phase evaluation work in partnership with CTH. Contract focus on development of constituent evaluation tools, constituent learning, next phase priority outcomes and appropriate measurements, local/regional placemaking lens
SEPTEMBER	Final preparation of Phase III of COA’s transitional strategic plan
OCTOBER	Redesign of ACP grant programming with new WolfBrown evaluation work
DECEMBER	Final review of transitional planning document

Conclusion

Through the ongoing merger process, and its many implications, the Connecticut Office of the Arts remains motivated and passionate about this work. COA looks forward to advancing its, and its constituents’, ability to measure the intrinsic impact of the arts and to be better able to articulate the many program successes that take place across this extraordinary state. Notably, the lens of creative placemaking has served to energize new programs and initiatives that the arts staff has capitalized on to drive revitalized goals and to build new relationships.