

HOW TO PARTNER WITH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

PART 3

MOVING AS EQUALS

Working with Chambers of Commerce to expand long-term opportunities for artists and businesses alike.



Special thanks to Oliver Nell for significant contributions to this publication.



WELCOME TO PART 3 OF HOW TO PARTNER WITH YOUR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: MOVING AS EQUALS.

Just as local arts agencies act as voices and conveners for their arts and culture communities, so do local chambers of commerce for their business communities.

How can these two agencies think beyond their own lanes and engage arts and culture as a viable economic driver for equitable development?

As the final installment in a three-part series, this toolkit will take the foundational knowledge gained and basic activations from [Parts 1](#) and [2](#), and look to rural communities to consider how local arts agencies (LAAs) can engage in innovative partnerships that focus on business and economic development centered on quality of place. The toolkit will explore stories for thinking beyond language and using mutually understood concepts to act as a translator between two often disparate sectors. This toolkit will highlight how arts and chamber entities have worked together to build community wealth, deepen alliances, and expand opportunity for artists and businesses alike.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to be used in tandem with our online webinar series entitled, **How to Partner With Your Chamber of Commerce, Part 3**. The series is available on ArtsU and includes three pre-recorded sessions. The Part 3 sessions include:



Policy, Politics, and Resource Distribution

What can you do when you've built trust with key players throughout the community? When elected leaders come and go, how do you create consistency with your partners? How do you navigate local politics alongside your chamber and strive to adopt forward-thinking economic and civic ideals in your community? How can you best integrate arts and culture into conversations in which they've traditionally been left out? This session will present a moderated conversation to get to the bottom of some of these key questions in order to build strong alliances meant to last.



Reimagining Your Assets to Create Alignment With Your Chamber

After working to build trust and relationships with your chamber(s) of commerce, how can LAAs see themselves beyond running in their lane; beyond managing a facility; or providing grants? How can you creatively leverage these private sector partners whether through recognition, collaboration, sharing networks, or developing community-driven development goals? This session will explore examples of how local arts agencies can recognize their own organizational and community assets to multiply community impact.



Moving as Equals: Accomplishing Long-Term Development Goals

This session explores complex partnerships and projects that center equity and push both the chamber and arts entities to move outside their normal comfort zones. It focuses on how local communities have challenged traditional arts-business relationships, orienting them instead around a shared "Quality of Place" ideal, and implementing programs to allow for deeper integration and collaboration between the sectors and their respective communities.



About Part 1: Local Arts Agencies & Chambers of Commerce—The Basics

[Part 1](#) of this series established a foundational knowledge of local chambers of commerce, the networks in which they operate and that serve them, how to navigate a traditional business environment, and basic activations a local arts agency can undertake to establish a partnership. Participants heard from chamber and arts leaders, gained perspective on chamber priorities and challenges, and learned to identify the various chamber and economic development entities in their communities. Participants in the series are encouraged to use the toolkit as complimentary learning and participate in a live discussion with presenters once completing the three-part, on-demand webinar series.

About Part 2: Connecting Community Impact With Arts and Chamber Partnerships

In [Part 2](#) of this series, participants took the foundational knowledge gained and basic activations from Part 1, and expanded beyond their role as arts leaders into the role of community and economic development partner. Participants learned about how to identify their own work and assets within their full community and creative ecosystem and begin to leverage new connections and relationships inside the chamber to address social impact, equity, and community issues. Participants gained fluency in the Arts & Economic Prosperity studies, and learned how to use other creative economy research to make their case to their chamber and economic development counterparts. Participants are encouraged to use the toolkit as complimentary learning and participate in a live peer discussion once completing the three-part, on-demand webinar series.

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE THIS TOOLKIT

- Using this toolkit
- Concepts, not language, and being a translator
- Focus on quality of place
- Case study: Arts Incubator Program, Oxford, Mississippi
- Research to support your partnership
- Putting it all together

USING THIS TOOLKIT

ARE YOU A LOCAL ARTS AGENCY LEADER WORKING ON LONG-TERM, SUSTAINABLE ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUR CHAMBER(S) OF COMMERCE?

Americans for the Arts defines local arts agencies as either private community organizations or local government agencies that integrate the arts into the daily fabric of their communities and work to advance the arts locally. However, the information included in this toolkit can be used by any arts group seeking to deepen their relationship with chambers of commerce.

This toolkit explores local arts and chamber of commerce partnerships in three small and rural communities (less than 50,000 in population) through interviews and case studies. Use the stories found in this toolkit to consider what types of in-depth and long-term partnerships you might develop in your community. A departure from the format of Parts 1 and 2, this toolkit focuses heavily on stories as a means of learning. Although every community is unique, many share similar struggles and opportunities, and much of the success found in others can be replicated or adapted.

The content in this toolkit assumes that as a local arts agency leader you have taken steps to establish relationships with your chamber(s) of commerce. It assumes that as a center point for arts and culture support and advocacy within your community, you seek to participate in and influence broader economic development conversations and decision-making that affects the artists, creative workers, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural institutions in your community. This toolkit takes a holistic view of the local economy. It maintains the perspective that its healthiest state is one in which arts and culture is seen as a substantial and vital member.

Use this toolkit as an aid to think beyond your role as an arts leader and to become an equal and respected community and economic development partner whose primary constituency is arts and culture. As you come to understand your role in this broader sense, think about the well-being of your community as a whole. Where can the arts meet the needs of traditional business and vice versa? What partnerships need to be formed based on the needs and goals that you see? Use the worksheet at the end of the toolkit as a place to brainstorm how to focus your partnerships and collaborations around quality of place and sustainable relationships.

This toolkit assumes completion of Part 1 and Part 2 of the three-part series. Once completing Parts 1 and 2, we invite you to build upon your skills in Part 3. All three parts include their own set of three on-demand sessions, a toolkit, and periodic live conversation for peer learning.

[Learn more about local arts agencies](#) and the ways they are vital to their communities.

CONCEPTS, NOT LANGUAGE, AND BEING A TRANSLATOR

A CONVERSATION ABOUT NAVIGATING POLITICS AND PLACE FROM MONROE, LOUISIANA

Many barriers that exist between the arts and business sectors are often a matter of terminology and conventional, sector-specific modes of communicating. It is usually not a barrier that comes from lack of knowledge or conceptual understanding. This conversation presents thoughts and strategies for addressing the disconnect and for establishing mutual understanding between these seemingly disparate communities.

One powerful role arts leaders can play is acting as a translator between the two sectors. This toolkit contains best practices useful as you serve in this role. If you are diligent, the two once-separate sectors can speak the same language.



Kelsea McCrary is the chief economic and cultural development officer for the City of Monroe, Louisiana. Below are her answers to our questions regarding the role of arts and culture in local economies, strategies on integrating arts and culture into larger civic conversations, and the approaches Monroe takes to achieve mutual respect from its local leaders. We've created a list of tips from McCrary at the end of this toolkit as a print out or for easy access.

How can local arts agencies work with chambers, planners, and economic developers to help them see that the arts are an untapped entrepreneurial landscape?

Perhaps one example could be that structurally a “requirement” is necessary until boards and organizations view the importance of an artist or creative equal with that of a legal/financial representative. If chambers, planning orgs, and economic developers aren't willing to carve out space in their respective areas for creatives and artists to participate, engage, and lead, we can't fix the “softer” side of this problem, meaning the language that is used, the numbers that are generated, and the things these organizations place importance on. This could be something local arts agencies work with their respective landscape of peer organizations with, to draft a policy or create an initiative to pilot this in their communities.

When we look at the work itself, one way to change perception of this untapped entrepreneurial landscape is for arts agencies to find those transferrable businesses that speak the language of chambers, planners, and developers. The more that we can integrate artistic businesses, the more we can shift understanding and engagement

The way we create sustainable change here is for artists to lead chambers, planning organizations, and become economic developers in their own right. One strength that I do not hide is my deep commitment to elevating the creative sector to equitable status with those others that we see as economic drivers...we need to break open the term “quality of life” and define it more transparently, which begins and ends with arts and culture.

You've mentioned before that "the language is unknown but the concepts are not." Can you talk more specifically about what this language and concepts are?

I think this was in reference to community building work, and in that frame I meant that people in general know what to do. They naturally gather, they naturally build, they naturally want to improve. Given this, they don't often know the vocabulary that has been collectively agreed upon to describe these activities and initiatives. The language itself should be driven by the people doing the work, so the grasp of the terms needs to be loose enough that words can change—i.e., placemaking to placekeeping or placehonoring.

In regards to language that references the entrepreneurship element and the creative sector, it does seem like we are on the cusp of defining the terms that will accompany this new integrative work. The concepts, again, are known. How we engage a new sector, how we do the relationship-building that will drive this, how we stay intentional and focused and committed, etc.

What are some of the most common conversations in which your role as translator between the arts and business ecosystems becomes necessary?

It's sad to say, but common stereotypes and old tropes exist in force. Artists are flaky, artists are late, creatives don't have real jobs, creatives stay up all night and sleep all day. Often I am combatting that sort of mindset, not just with words but with presence and proof. Lately, I am finding that there is interest in the storytelling component that arts and culture lends to the larger community. Not just in verbal storytelling, but the types of tradition bearers, the types of creative businesses, what the artists are creating. This tells the story of a community.

What are some specific instances of these conversations in the Monroe community?

The renaissance in leadership that the larger regional community has undergone is spurring a lot of conversation about unity. In light of this, the cultural community has led the way in setting the tone for merging a lot of sectors of our society together. The Chamber has created the Ouachita OneTable podcast, where they feature community champions and many are artists or creatives. The Black Creatives Circle has rented space downtown for a gallery, event space, working studios, and to embody the presence needed to diversify and expand the community's definition of who belongs downtown. The Downtown Gallery Crawl is an example ripe for entrepreneurship transformation—for over a decade, this event has highlighted local and regional artists at no admission charge to the community.

You've made the point before that productive community partnerships aren't about the particular roles that people fill, they are about the people themselves. Are there approaches that Monroe has taken to foster an environment which produces dynamic relationships and attracts dynamic people to city leadership roles (e.g., yourself and Mayor Ellis)?

Knowing if someone aligns with values, team mentality, and overall goals cannot be overstated in their ability to be successful in whatever role they are placed in. We trust in their ability to obtain the skill set and leverage their talents to rise to the occasion. Monroe, knowing the short runway that we have to plan for the future and govern in the present in a way that honors our people, has chosen to put their money where their mouth is, in their hiring practices around culture and diversity. It is an amazing sight to see, because not only does it prove that this concept works but it also proves that if it can happen here, it can truly occur anywhere.

How does the work continue in small communities where relationships are key, when the roles and the people in them shift? What about when there are changes in elected positions?

This is where policy and structure becomes important. To ensure that some of the good work continues, it has to be drafted and codified. This is the administrative world that we live in, and so we partake in the system while using it as a method of sustainability. That everyone has a role to play becomes the most important factor in the room—the danger in this is that loss of a role is felt deeply. To combat this, we reach behind and ensure that the deck is stacked behind us so that the next generation is aware, engaged, and intent. Considering the importance of relationship-building in small towns, if one person changes their mind or starts to waver, there has to be enough strength in those still standing to overcome and weather that.

Can you talk about the Monroe Chamber, and specifically the Diversity Committee—how has that become a space for diversity of thought? What are the outcomes of that thought diversity?

The Chamber itself has become a model for diversification—the committee is the symptom to the underlying condition. Under new leadership, the Chamber reworked the board in the image of the people, not just the businesses they represented. The new president added folks to the board because of who they are AND where they work or what business they own, not the other way around. Due to this, so many new committees were formed. Education, diversity, technology, and more. The committees have the benefit of having people serve on them that aren't actually Chamber board members, further diversifying the levels of thought, backgrounds, and experiences that are flowing into the Chamber world. The Chamber has taken the stance of coming alongside the business community, versus trying to force it in a certain direction. This has resulted in renewed relationships, increased trust, better communication with the city, the university, and the community college, and has created a sense of coolness that the Chamber has not had in a very long time.

IF YOU COULD TELL LOCAL ARTS AGENCY LEADERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ONE THING TO AVOID WHEN IT COMES TO WORKING WITH CHAMBERS, BUSINESSES, AND/OR ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS, WHAT WOULD THAT BE?

DO NOT APOLOGIZE FOR BEING ARTS ORIENTED. DON'T LET IT SEEP INTO YOUR LANGUAGE, YOUR POSTURE, YOUR MATERIALS, YOUR MEETINGS. BE ROCK SOLID ON HOW THE ARTS DRIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH. NO GUESSWORK. TRANSPARENT DATA, AND I DON'T WANT TO INSINUATE THAT DATA HAS TO BE NUMBERS...ANYTHING THAT PRESENTS PROOF. INVITE THEM IN AS MUCH AS YOU WANT TO BE INVITED IN.

KELSEA MCRARY
CHIEF ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, CITY OF MONROE, LOUISIANA

FOCUS ON QUALITY OF PLACE

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE CULTURAL ALLIANCE OF YORK COUNTY AND THE YORK COUNTY ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

In York County, Pennsylvania, the Cultural and Economic Alliances have partnered together through a shared “quality of place” mindset. This framing has allowed them to focus on the existing assets in their community (business, cultural, etc.), rather than focusing solely on bringing in outside economic drivers. Below is an interview with Kelley Gibson, president & CEO of the Cultural Alliance of York County (CAYC), and Silas Chamberlin, Ph.D, president and CEO of the York County Economic Alliance (YCEA).



Can you describe the relationships/interactions between the CAYC, the YCEA, and Downtown Inc (DTI)?

Kelley Gibson (KG): In a word: collaborative. For the past three years we’ve worked closely with DTI on creating a grant program for events/festivals/experiences that make York City a more vibrant, welcoming community. We call it “Welcoming Communities.” It’s been so successful, we’ve now expanded it to the County thanks to a National Endowment for the Arts subgrant we received, and are hoping to create a Welcoming Communities Hanover grant for the southern part of the county. We have worked closely with Silas and his team at YCEA on weaving creative placemaking and artists into redevelopment projects, including the Codorus Corridor waterway improvement and the renovation of our historic Yorktowne Hotel, which will feature 14 site-specific installations throughout the hotel by local artists that started in 2016 as the plans for the hotel were being drafted.

Silas Chamberlin (SC): Our relationship with CAYC is probably one of our favorites because Kelley and the team have an expansive and evolving perspective on the arts and the role of their organization. That allows them to see the arts as part of almost anything—from greenway development projects to hotel redevelopment to economic planning to Trail Towns. Some of our work together is very strategic and unfolds over the long run. For example, we’ve been working to infuse the \$75 million Codorus Greenway project with public art components for the last five years or so. But other partnerships happen in the span of days, when opportunities arise. For example, YCEA’s partnership with CAYC to advocate for, secure, and disburse millions in our County’s CARES and ARPA funds to cultural institutions occurred over the span of just a few weeks.

How do the individual goals of these entities align into shared priorities among the group and therefore the community?

KG: I think the best illustration of this is how we all worked together on a [shared economic action plan for the County of York](#), interweaving all of our goals for industry, workforce development, entrepreneurship, equity/economic mobility, quality of place, infrastructure, and the rural economy all in one comprehensive plan. This way, we have our focus but it isn't siloed. The asset study and map was a direct action item from this plan.

SC: Our YCEA and Downtown Inc leadership see arts and culture as a natural part of our work to foster a resilient economy in York County, but we know future leadership, boards of directors, and funders may not always see it that way. To make these relationships more formal, we've built arts, culture, and quality of place strategies and goals into the York County Economic Action Plan, which is our County's official 10-year economic development strategy and a chapter of our County's comprehensive plan. We developed the plan with the input of 1,000+ stakeholders, and Kelley served as co-chair of our Quality of Place working group. Getting these goals in an official plan helps ensure the synergy we see between downtown revitalization, countywide economic development, and the arts is not a short-term effort and transcends current leadership and administrations.

What was the process of forming these partnerships like over the years?

KG: Like any good partnerships, they take time and the right mix of leadership. Though I've only been the president of CAYC for four years, I've been involved in community work for 25 years in York and so have many of us that sit in the leadership roles now. These partnerships were built through many collaborations over the years that plant seeds to yield bigger collaborations in the future. We also leverage our different assets to reach shared community goals—the Welcoming Communities grant is a great example. CAYC brings grant-making expertise and administration. DTI brings the knowledge of the city groups doing the work and the marketing to get the message out.

SC: Fortunately, in York County the arts have always enjoyed the respect of civic and business leadership, and—since art galleries and creatives helped spur our downtown revitalization—I think we've always seen the economic value of the arts. However, I think we always came up short in fully leveraging that recognition and finding ways to partner. The key to our current partnerships comes down to leadership. It's hard to tell another community that the secret to success is "hire, elect, and appoint people who care about the arts," but that's a really important component.

Much of the work you do falls under a "quality of place" focus. What, if any, are the parameters around the definition of "quality of place?"

KG: We define quality of place as the built environment of arts, culture, history, entertainment, and outdoor assets that make our community attractive, and that increase the quality of life for residents and visitors.

How has the focus on “quality of place” allowed (or not allowed) for more expansive partnership work? Has it created more trust between the Cultural and Economic Alliances?

KG: Absolutely. It really is critical to messaging why these sectors matter to our businesses and residents, and has given us a shared marketing language. I think the trust was built over time prior to leaning into quality of place, so that made adoption for our groups much easier. The pandemic just really crystallized our impact when all our creative sector was shut down and the ripple effect of local businesses/economies that were hurt was so obvious. I don't think people realized the impact we have in a really tangible way until it was gone overnight, and we weren't sure if it would come back.

What is the Arts Navigator program, and specifically, what are any mutually shared gaps or challenges felt by the Economic Alliance, Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Cultural Alliance that this program and partnership addresses?

KG: The navigator role was developed directly from our own Equity Action Plan for CAYC and our two-year work to ensure our resources were providing access and empowerment to our creatives across the county. The navigator role provides facilitation and guidance by a local arts leader representing cultures and communities around York, and they leverage the YCEA, SCORE, and the SBDC as tools in the toolbox to help the creative [entrepreneur] workshop their business goals for as long as they need to. When they have gotten to a place where they can utilize funding, the navigator moves them forward to a full application status—which puts them in the queue for a grant. They don't get told no, and there's no panel that decides. The navigator and the grantee decide when it's time, and the support of YCEA/SCORE/SBDC gets them there. For the CAYC, this addresses connection and access. For our business partners, it's building bridges to entrepreneurs—once they are connected by the navigator, the creative now can continue to come back to access traditional business services because the pathway is there.

SC: In our Economic Action Plan, YCEA has an overarching goal of addressing disparities in our economy related to our number of women-owned businesses, minority-owned businesses, and overall business starts. During our administration of nearly \$30 million in CARES and ARPA grants to small businesses, we interacted with many entrepreneurs in the creative sector or adjacent fields. We learned a lot about the barriers to launching a creative business and the need for entrepreneurial support along the way. CAYC's Arts Navigator Program is a perfect response to that need in our community, and it serves as a pipeline to help creative entrepreneurs navigate the resources that are available to them.

What have been some of the outcomes of the Arts Navigator program, both for the Cultural Alliance and the Economic Alliance?

KG: For us, it's been amazing. Most of the grantees this first year are creatives we did not know existed. And the feedback on the navigators has been exactly what we hoped: their belief in their work as artists and their guiding hand to resources has been game-changing for these artists and their practice. It's also helped us build relationships with members of YCEA/SCORE/SBDC we didn't traditionally work with before. We're now seeing referrals of creatives to our program coming from our business partners.

SC: In the short term it seems that many creatives who otherwise would have been trying to “go it alone” now have partners—with the navigators, with CAYC, and YCEA—to help them along. But I think a more important outcome with long-term implications is the idea of CAYC as a pipeline to YCEA for creatives who want to launch and grow a business. CAYC knows the individuals and their needs, and YCEA (increasingly) has the tools to help.

How has the recent Quality of Life Asset Ecosystem Mapping strengthened and deepened the partnership with the Economic Alliance?

KG: It’s overtly connected to our work in a much deeper and tangible way. It’s a great manifestation of why arts, outdoors, and business need each other and their value to the community overall.

SC: For YCEA, I think it also helps make our case for why we believe the creative economy is so worthy of time, attention, and investment and adds more data, evidence, and structure to our work with CAYC in this space.

What were your mutually shared goals with this work?

KG: We wanted to finally get a comprehensive landscape of the cultural and outdoor assets in our own community (which had never been done before) and examine ways public funding can support these assets here by studying how it’s done in other places across the country.

SC: In the short term, we wanted to identify and map the assets already in place, assess their impact by looking at employment figures and case studies, and then explore best practices for dramatically increasing public investment in the assets to expand their impact. The study will provide the basis for an ongoing advocacy campaign undertaken jointly by CAYC and YCEA to hopefully create a new revenue stream for quality of place amenities and organizations across the county.

What have been the impacts, both intended and unintended?

KG: I can tell you even though I’ve been in York for almost 30 years, I learned about cultural and outdoor assets I didn’t even know existed. I think our public will have that same experience.

SC: The study allows us to take a holistic look at quality of place and the specific sites and organizations that compose the ecosystem, and we are already using data points and insights from the study to inform public presentations. I especially appreciate the insights regarding the connection between the creative economy and outdoor economy—as well as the differences. For example, I wonder if more closely aligning arts and culture organizations with the public spaces where their programming often occurs couldn’t lead to better stewardship of the outdoor spaces, while expanding them as a platform for the arts. I know we’ll continue to noodle these insights for some time to come.



CASE STUDY

COMMON GOALS: THE ARTS INCUBATOR PROGRAM OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI

BY OLIVER NELL

INTRODUCING OXFORD

Oxford, Mississippi, is a place where opportunities are made. It's a small town, with approximately 28,000 people, and is home to the University of Mississippi, commonly known as 'Ole Miss,' which contributes an additional 21,000 people to that total. By virtue of the university, there is a unique, unending youth and vitality that fills the air. Special even among college towns, is the creative energy in Oxford that exists parallel to the towering presence of the university. Most famously, William Faulkner is from Oxford, and the literary tradition he started continues to influence generations of Oxford writers. There are yearly festivals, world-renowned painters, and several James Beard award-winners in Oxford. The creative energy is real and palpable.

It's also an energy that is quantifiable. Lafayette County, of which Oxford is the county seat, was the only area in Mississippi to be represented in Americans for the Arts' 2015 [Arts & Economic Prosperity 5](#) (AEP5) study, and continues to be the only community representing the state in the [Arts & Economic Prosperity 6](#) study taking place in 2022-2023. AEP5 findings reported that industry expenditures primarily in Oxford, by arts and culture organizations and their audiences, totaled nearly \$11 million during Fiscal Year 2015.¹ Throughout the last decade, local leaders have begun to recognize the arts' immense economic value, in addition to the long-standing recognition of the intrinsic value, and have been intentional about integrating it into the broader civic agenda. Civic leaders have been proactive about leveraging this creative energy, forming productive partnerships, and ensuring that entrepreneurial opportunity becomes synonymous with Oxford's already well-regarded name.

¹ [Arts & Economic Prosperity 5, Lafayette County, MS, 2015](#); Americans for the Arts

GETTING THE CONVERSATION STARTED

Wayne Andrews, the executive director of the [Yoknapatawpha Arts Council \(YAC\)](#) in Oxford, has a commitment and skill for forming partnerships. He puts a strong emphasis on bringing individuals together from different, and often seemingly disparate, areas of the community to start conversations. He has found success in forming partnerships when people come together and articulate their goals, needs, assets, and individual capacities.

Though the creative ecosystem has existed in Oxford for a long time, business and economic development work skewed heavily towards traditional business growth (manufacturing, healthcare, etc). A division existed between the needs of artists, creative entrepreneurs, and the cultural community, and the workings of the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development partners. As in most communities, those working to advance the arts and those working in chamber and economic development spaces operated separately. The resources for artists and creatives to start or cultivate their own creative businesses weren't accessible or easy to navigate. Andrews understood the existing economic value of the arts in Oxford and knew that there was potential for greater growth. To address this gap, it was clear that there had to be deeper interaction and communication between the arts and business communities. In 2015, Andrews and YAC approached the [Oxford-Lafayette County Chamber of Commerce \(OLCCC\)](#) looking to find a solution which could offer local artists and creative entrepreneurs the resources and education they needed to start their own businesses. In his words, the partnership was “about building systems to enable creative people.”

The partners quickly found, by simply starting the conversation, that their goals and needs were strikingly similar and that their individual capacities and expertise were complementary. YAC could articulate the value of the arts in Oxford. They knew the needs of local artists and arts entities, and the unique challenges they faced. OLCCC, on the other hand, had their finger on the pulse of Oxford's business community. They had the resources available to support local entrepreneurs and business owners, arts or otherwise, and they knew the pathway toward achieving future growth, which would in turn grow the business sector and economy overall. Both YAC and OLCCC had the same goal: increasing the “quality of place” in Oxford by maximizing the cultural and economic assets that already existed.

PRIORITIZING ‘QUALITY OF PLACE’ CAN BE DESCRIBED AS A TROPICAL FISH ECONOMIC MODEL. RATHER THAN “TRYING TO CATCH A BIG WHALE” (FOR EXAMPLE, A MAJOR MANUFACTURING COMPANY), THIS METHOD ARGUES THAT COMMUNITIES SHOULD CULTIVATE ECONOMIC ECOSYSTEMS IN WHICH THEIR “TROPICAL FISH”—I.E. THE UNIQUE ASSETS THEY HAVE—CAN FLOURISH. THIS CREATES A LESS TOP-HEAVY, MORE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC BASE FOR MANY SMALLER COMMUNITIES. ALLEN KURR, THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE OXFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION, EXPLAINS, “A LOT OF ‘GROWTH’ MEANS MAKING A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE, IMPROVING QUALITY OF PLACE, NOT NECESSARILY ATTRACTING HUGE COMPANIES.



THE ARTS INCUBATOR

Those first discussions between YAC and OLCCC focused on a central question: how do the arts contribute to the local economy? In addition to using the *Arts & Economic Prosperity 5* study, and when viewed as a part of the local business economy, arts-related industries accounted for 62 of the town's businesses.² With the numbers in hand, the economic value of the arts became indisputable. OLCCC and YAC realized that measures had to be taken not only to ensure the sustainability of the arts entities already there, but to capitalize on this market for new arts business growth. Working together, YAC and OLCCC created the [Arts Incubator Program](#). The Arts Incubator is a collection of programs that include networking, peer learning, and workshops to help artists and creative entrepreneurs grow their businesses. In this partnership, YAC oversees the majority of program coordination. They bring in speakers, oversee promotion, and house events. OLCCC provides business-focused speakers, aids with promotion, and offers resources (in the form of business training, contacts, networking opportunities, etc.) to the artists and entrepreneurs who participate in the programs. The majority of these participants are not members of the Chamber. The Arts Incubator hosts numerous events through their Big Bad Business Series. These include Q&A sessions with other local business professionals; round robins

where artists and entrepreneurs can talk with financial advisors, accountants, loan experts, marketing professionals, etc.; and others. All events are free and open to the public. The Arts Incubator maintains a Community Supported Arts (CSA) program in which a cohort of local artists, over the course of a few months, move together through the process of establishing and growing their small businesses and personal business skills. They offer another cohort-based professional coaching program, the Big Bad Business Lab, and provide separate, personalized professional training services apart from these many programs. In all these programs and services, growth is measured according to professional goals participants set themselves with the guidance of the experts brought in. The Arts Incubator also houses a Resource Center where entrepreneurs can make use of free Wi-Fi, printing services, computers (which are also available for check-out), and general office support. Lack of access to these types of simple, yet vital resources, can often create barriers for new start up creative businesses. [Taariq David](#), a successful restaurateur, culinary artist, and culinary arts consultant, and [Michael Satterfield](#), a local pottery artist and successful arts business owner, have both been able to leverage this support in the growth of their businesses and their own professional expertise.

² [Creative Industries: Business & Employment in the Arts, Lafayette County, MS, 2017](#); Americans for the Arts



OXFORD RESIDENT CATHERINE SMITH WORKED IN MARKETING AND SALES UNTIL RECENTLY, WHILE RUNNING HER SMALL ART BUSINESS, [SOUTHERN BIRD STUDIO](#), IN HER FREE TIME. SINCE GROWING HER BUSINESS THROUGH THE ARTS INCUBATOR'S COMMUNITY SUPPORTED ARTS (CSA) PROGRAM, CATHERINE HAS BEEN ABLE TO RUN HER STUDIO FULL-TIME—SHE NOW HAS HER PRODUCTS IN OVER 300 STORES ACROSS 42 STATES NATIONALLY. ALTHOUGH SHE HAD LONG WANTED TO MAKE THIS KIND OF PROGRESS AS A BUSINESS OWNER, IN HER WORDS, "IT WAS THE [YOKNAPATAWPHA] ARTS COUNCIL THAT REALLY GAVE ME THE CONFIDENCE."

"We provide," says Andrews, "the process, the points of entry, and the toolbox. We connect [arts entities] with the resources they need." The Arts Incubator is designed to provide equitable pathways for creative entrepreneurs to succeed. Before getting involved, [Antonio Tarrell](#), a small business owner and award-winning filmmaker, had been running his hair studio and beauty brand successfully for years. For Tarrell, while the business instruction was helpful, the Arts Incubator Program provided a unique "point of entry" into the Oxford business community. In his words, approaching the Arts Incubator was "not as intimidating as going to the chamber." Similarly, [Danny Klimetz](#), an Oxford entrepreneur and creative business owner, makes the point that, "maybe the Chamber [before the Arts Incubator partnership] had the services we needed available, but we didn't know...we don't know what we don't know." The Arts Incubator, in large part, acts as a conduit for access. Opening up these communication channels is critical to creating access to necessary resources and services.

[ANDI BEDSWORTH](#) IS AN OXFORD-BASED COSTUME DESIGNER, MIXED MEDIA ARTIST, AND ARTS EDUCATOR. SHE JOINED THE FIRST ARTS INCUBATOR COMMUNITY SUPPORTED ARTS (CSA) COHORT IN ORDER TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP AS THE OWNER OF A SMALL FIBER ARTS BUSINESS. "THE [ARTS INCUBATOR] EVENTS GOT ME THINKING LIKE A BUSINESS PERSON," SAYS BEDSWORTH. IN ADDITION TO THE CSA PROGRAM, SHE HAS PARTICIPATED IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COACHING THROUGH THE ARTS INCUBATOR, FOCUSED ON GROWING THE ART CAMPS SHE RUNS DURING THE SUMMER. IN THE SUMMER OF 2022, SINCE BEING A PART OF THESE COACHING SESSIONS, HER ART CAMPS SOLD OUT EVERY AVAILABLE SPOT.



PERCEIVED DIFFERENCES

Throughout the process of building the partnership and Arts Incubator program, YAC and OLCCC learned that they had mutual goals, but that a “language barrier” existed, which had prevented them from naturally aligning prior to these initial conversations. Overcoming this barrier required defining terms and sorting out exactly where the miscommunications and misperceptions lay. For example, what constitutes “the arts”? In the business sector, many first think of the “high” arts (opera, symphony, etc.), fine art museums, or other historically Western European traditions, and equate those institutions with nonprofits, while separating out the entertainment industry. Thinking more broadly about arts and creativity, we know that creative and artistic processes exist in culinary and hospitality work, fashion and clothing retail, and even wholesale manufacturing. The arts span the public, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors, blurring the line between arts and business which may have seemed so clear upon first glance. The fullness of this ecosystem constitutes the Creative Economy.

Klimetz comments on the shared needs between all businesses, arts or otherwise: “...we all need CPAs , legal help, and licensing.” Yet, Klimetz states there is a “perceived difference” which keeps the arts and business communities from interacting as much as they should. Artists and creative entrepreneurs often align themselves more with the arts community than they do with the business community, although they should be valued members of both. Klimetz even says that when he hears of programs, opportunities, etc., being offered to businesses, he doesn't think they apply to him. In conversation, other artists in Oxford expressed similar sentiments. Defining terms and articulating goals and needs is vital to breaking down these perceived differences and establishing open, productive lines of communication.

WE WANT TO BE ABLE TO SERVE EVERY INDIVIDUAL...WE ARE ALWAYS THINKING ABOUT UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS AND MAKING A SPACE FOR THEM.

MEGHAN GALLAGHER
OUTREACH AND EDUCATION COORDINATOR, YAC

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

Meghan Gallagher, the outreach and education coordinator for YAC, says of the Arts Incubator: “we want to be able to serve every individual.” This statement speaks to a couple aspects of the program. First, different individuals have different needs. Some know exactly what they want out of their creative practice but don't know the steps necessary to start their business. Some, like Tarrell, are an experienced business owner, and are looking more for an entry point into the greater Oxford business community. But what about those from underserved or minority communities, for which access to resources is further removed than it may be for others? Andrews comments, “these programs for us have ramped up engagement with minority communities.” And Gallagher adds, “we are always thinking about underserved populations and making a space for them.” The Arts Incubator works not just to level the playing field in terms of business acumen and knowledge—it also strives to ensure equitable access to resources, training, and local business communities.

The Arts Incubator serves as a hub for business resources and events. It also acts as a space where the local arts and business communities can congregate, converse, and ultimately integrate with one another to develop a stronger, more connected community in a small town. The YAC and OLCCC partnership creates access to expertise, co-mingles different circles of influence, and centers the notion that the arts belong in the business community, and that the arts mean business. Ultimately, this partnership achieves its original purpose of “building systems to enable creative people.”

Special thanks to the [Yoknapatawpha Arts Council \(YAC\)](#) and the [Oxford-Lafayette County Chamber of Commerce \(OLCCC\)](#) for their time, energy, and contributions to this case study.



RESEARCH TO SUPPORT YOUR PARTNERSHIP

Research is a powerful tool to support the case for a chamber/local arts agency partnership. There is a wide variety of research on the benefits of business partnerships with the arts and economic impact of the arts, creative industries, and local arts and culture production. Research is only meaningful if it can be used to tell a story, facilitate change, or aid in the creation of policy. The following research resources are a good place to start to make an effective case for the arts in the chamber and economic development community.

[Arts & Economic Prosperity 5](#)

This study features national data collected by Americans for the Arts, localized economic impact reports for participating communities, and an online calculator for those who want custom data. [Arts & Economic Prosperity 6](#) will be available in fall 2023.

[Arts and Culture Production Satellite Account](#)

Published by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, this report highlights the economic impact, contributions to GDP, output, employment, and compensation of the arts and culture sector in the United States.

[Arts & Creative Economy County Reports](#)

Published by Americans for the Arts, initially available via the National Association of Counties (NACo) County Explorer, and available in late 2022, these reports will be freely accessible, and will cover all 3,143 counties in the United States. They will quantify employment and commerce at the county level for aspects of the nation's creative economy based on the most current federal data available.

[Creative Economy State Profiles](#)

Based off of the Arts & Culture Satellite Production Account (ACPSA) by the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the National Endowment for the Arts, this interactive dashboard allows you to explore state-level ACPSA data through figures, including value added to state economies through arts and culture production, as well as employment and compensation figures for the creative workforce.

[Rural Prosperity Through the Arts & Creative Sector](#)

Published by the National Governors Association, this Rural Action Guide features many successful high-profile examples of rural communities and regions that have become more economically resilient and sustainable through creative sector initiatives. The guide gives governors and their advisors and staff the tools to both support and benefit from their state's creative sector

If you are interested in pursuing the development of research in your community, Americans for the Arts offers customized [Research and Survey Services](#).

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Forming these partnerships is a process. Below are some quick tips based on the interviews and case studies presented throughout this toolkit.

MAKE IT YOUR GOAL TO

- **Adopt a “quality of place” mindset in your community.** Focus on the maintenance and growth of existing assets (businesses, arts and culture amenities, natural resources, etc.).
- **Grow community awareness and initiative around arts and culture.** This ensures that the arts are not only a crucial part of individual and communal experience, but a viable economic driver as well.
- **Understand the needs and motivations of arts businesses.** Know where they differ from or resemble those of typical small businesses, and form programs to address them specifically.
- **Find your advocate(s).** Try and try again, and don't give up if the relationship doesn't take at first. If you don't succeed with the first contact, how can you build allies at different staff and board levels?

THINGS TO AVOID

- **Be wary of a narrow line of business development thinking.** Traditional business and economic development centers attracting outside industry to your community. Find the balance between this sort of business attraction and nurturing local business growth alongside your chamber of commerce partner(s).
- **Assuming that all entrepreneurs have the same information.** Avoid forming business programs and workshops with your chamber partner that treats all participants as if they have the same amount of baseline knowledge and business experience. Make space within your programs for different needs, goals, and capacities, and offer resources to address these differences.
- **Assuming that all entrepreneurs and business people are well-connected.** Partnerships with chambers of commerce can offer an opportunity to intermingle new circles of influence and relationships for business owners and entrepreneurs. Many creative entrepreneurs don't have connections in the local business environment, and you can strive continuously to make this ecosystem as accessible and inclusive as possible.
- **Don't let the past get in the way.** A lack of response or past barriers shouldn't get in the way of forging ahead with shared programming. The arts and culture community solves problems; how can they be best utilized to solve economic problems in your region?

WHAT TO STRIVE FOR

- **Strive for programmatic diversity.** When thinking of shared programs, services, and resources you might offer with your chamber partner(s), your constituents will have different needs and skill sets and will often have vastly different reasons for approaching your organization.
- **Create a sense of belonging.** Strive for the arts-business ecosystem within your community to be personally and culturally welcoming, not just economically inclusive. Traditional ideas of “economic viability” and “profitability” should not be prerequisites for being a respected member of the arts-business community.
- **Effect practice and policy.** Strive to do more than simply “inform” your local arts and business communities. Work to ensure that information is always accompanied by practical, actionable steps toward progress, rooted in relationship and reciprocity with our partners.

WHAT PRINCIPLES/METHODS DO YOU THINK CAN BE TAKEN FROM THE NOTION OF QUALITY OF PLACE AND REPLICATED IN OTHER COMMUNITIES?

I THINK A KEY PIECE IS, WE LEAVE THE EGOS OUT OF IT AND BRING WHAT WE CAN TO THE TABLE SO THAT THE COMMUNITY WINS. WE PLUG OUR CREATIVE COMMUNITY INTO REDEVELOPMENT, WHICH IS YCEA'S WORK, AND THEY BRING BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMS TO OUR CREATIVES TO MAKE THEM STRONGER. IT'S NOT ABOUT WHO'S PROGRAM IT IS, IT'S ABOUT THE COMMUNITY BENEFIT WE CAN YIELD BY WORKING TOGETHER.

KELLEY GIBSON

PRESIDENT & CEO, CULTURAL ALLIANCE OF YORK COUNTY

WORKSHEET

MOVING AS EQUALS

Please complete the following information as best you can about your business and economic ecosystem, and your chamber(s) of commerce.

This worksheet should complement and follow the worksheets in the Part 1 and Part 2 toolkits, which serves as a tool for mapping and identifying the industries and business networks in your community, shared community challenges, and equity and inclusion goals. With an understanding of the business networks that currently exist, this worksheet is designed to think more deeply about what makes up the quality of place in your community, and how to move as equals with your partners.

WHAT ARE THE ASSETS IN YOUR COMMUNITY THAT CONTRIBUTE TO QUALITY OF PLACE?

In addition to arts and culture, think about the creative businesses, outdoor assets, culinary, and/or other components that make your community unique. Who are the associated service organizations that you could talk with about each other's barriers and opportunities?

WHAT ARE THE EXISTING OR ANTICIPATED BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING EFFORTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Are there any upcoming planning efforts slated for your community? Does your cultural plan exist separately from the economic development plan? Use this space to think about connectivity between the two, and with whom you may need to connect in order to align priorities.

WHAT POLICY OPPORTUNITIES MIGHT THERE BE TO WORK ON WITH YOUR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS?

Pursuing mutually beneficial policy is a great way to build coalitions and support each other. Are there policies that support or could support your local creative economy that might also benefit your partners?

HOW DOES CAPITAL MOVE IN YOUR COMMUNITY, AND WHERE IS THERE ALIGNMENT TO BRING ARTS AND CULTURE INTO THE FOLD?

When thinking about the flow of capital, either from local government, community foundations, private business, investments, or county/state/federal government, are there avenues to work with your chamber and economic developers to incorporate the creative economy more equitably into that flow? Is there policy language that needs to be changed to open up channels for arts, culture, and creative businesses? Are there internal practices that can be changed to build inclusion? Use this space to explore any opportunities.

ELEVATING THE CREATIVE SECTOR PRINCIPLES OF ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE ARTS AND BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

KELSEA MCCRARY

CHIEF ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
CITY OF MONROE, LOUISIANA

- Carve out space in chambers of commerce, planning organizations, economic development organizations, etc. for artists to participate, engage, and lead.
- Change the perception of the arts economy by working with arts agencies to find those transferrable businesses that speak the language of chambers, planners, and developers.
- “Quality of Life” drives business recruitment, retention, and growth—but it begins and ends with arts and culture.
- Combat stereotypes around the creative industry (“artists are flaky,” “artists are late,” etc.) with presence and proof—incremental shifts are what allow us to push for avalanches of improvement.
- In community conversations around unity, position the cultural community to take the lead in merging the various societal sectors together.
- As you work to build partnerships and work with local community leaders, understand that value alignment, team mentality, and overall goals are crucial to success.
- In the form of policy, infrastructure, and proper education, ensure that the deck is stacked behind you so that the next generation of arts and business leaders are aware, engaged, and intent.
- Rework boards and leadership in the image of the people, not just the businesses they represent—build your board because of who they are and where they work, not the other way around.
- Cultural asset mapping is a great jumping off place for communities: it can show the way forward and pay tribute to what was behind. Asset maps should be leveraged by chambers, planners, and developers to understand the landscape and any gaps within it.
- Be rock solid on how the arts drive economic growth. Offer transparent data, stories, and individual narratives—anything that presents proof.