

Report on Findings from Listening Tour, Jan. 30 through Feb. 11, 2009

The Colorado Council on the Arts' Listening Tour traveled to the following 12 Communities between January 30 and February 11: Frisco, Burlington, Pueblo, Fort Collins, Denver, Colorado Springs, Craig, Steamboat Springs, Glenwood Springs, Montrose, Durango, and Alamosa. CCA staff and consultants met with over 300 artists and arts enterprises (primarily nonprofit) and sought input on CCA's budget priorities, given there will likely be a cut in our state funding for next fiscal year. In addition, participants were asked to share challenges they face in dealing with the current economic uncertainties, as well as their strategies for addressing these challenges.



In addition to hearing from artists and organizations, CCA staff met individually or in groups with the following elected officials and municipal leaders to solicit their input.

- Fort Collins – Mayor
- Pueblo – Interim City Manager, Directors of the Latino Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Business District
- Denver – State Representative McCann and staff members of Congressional members DeGette and Coffman
- Colorado Springs – Directors from the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development, City Council, CVB, Cultural Services Office
- Glenwood Springs – State Senator Schwartz, Aspen City Council member, County Commissioner
- Montrose – Chamber of Commerce member
- Durango – City Manager, City Council member, County Commissioner

Lastly, we took advantage of an already-scheduled Colorado Preservation, Inc. workshop presentation by consultants Maryo Ewell and Ronna Lee Sharpe at the Colorado Preservation Inc. annual conference, and solicited input from about 60 workshop attendees.

In total, we collected input from approximately 400 participants in the Listening Tour.

Budget Priorities

Participants in the group meetings were asked to vote for their top three budget priorities from among several categories.

Category	1 st Priority	2 nd Priority	3 rd Priority	Raw Score	Weighted *	Top 3 Categories
Arts education	48	65	28	141	51.1	2nd
Retain existing enterprises & jobs	106	39	32	177	78.5	1st
Support new enterprises & jobs	8	16	25	49	12.1	
Support activities that build bridges	14	21	17	52	16.4	
Town revitalization	8	27	22	57	15.1	
Cultural heritage	19	10	14	43	15.8	
At-risk youth	11	15	27	53	13.8	
Promote creative assets	11	21	38	70	16.7	3rd
Skill development	2	15	23	40	8	

* Weighting: 60% for 1st priority, 30% for 2nd priority, 10% for 3rd priority

In addition to voting on budget priorities, participants were asked to share the challenges they are facing during these times of economic uncertainty, and the strategies they are using to cope with those challenges. Below is a summary of the input we received.

Challenges in this time of economic uncertainty

Earned and Contributed Income:

- Every source of income is down (grants, local government, ticket sales, memberships, special events) and there is little or no backup if one source falls through.
- Season ticket sales are down 5-15% and individual ticket and class enrollments vary - some are up and some are down as much as 30%. The increase in last minute decisions by consumers makes planning difficult, and ticketing systems are not set up for last minute discounting or multiple pricing strategies.
- Groups in the resort areas and tourist destinations are very concerned because advance summer lodging bookings are down. They have to make production decisions now, yet don't know what ticket sales will be like this summer. Second home-owners may be staying home this summer and international travel will likely be down. Some resort-area presenters are geared for the pricy larger venues and larger productions, so more is at risk in the downturn.
- Perception from corporate sponsors that art is a frill and a charity, rather than a fellow business with a product. That has led to lack of knowledge by businesses regarding potential for mutually beneficial partnerships and contribution of arts businesses to town's economic well-being. Collaborations with unlikely business partners can be slow and expensive, and the businesses that are themselves challenged are sometimes slow to recognize benefits from new or unlikely partnerships. Some arts nonprofits haven't been diligent in tracking in-kind donations to show extent to which community has supported them in the past.
- New home purchases are down, impacting art and home design expenditures.
- Individual donations are flat to slightly down; many members are renewing at lower levels. A real challenge is that some pledges are being reneged after expenditures against those pledges have been committed.
- Small business sponsorships, including ad purchases in programs, are not being renewed or are being downsized, as much as 30-40% off.
- Gallery Art sales are off as much as 30% and purchases are smaller due to airline luggage restrictions.
- City tax revenues range from flat to 20% or more down, and in many areas city funding for non-profit arts groups has been reduced. (Delta, Snowmass, Steamboat Springs)
- Foundation grants are down 50% or more, as many are shifting to health, human services. Some foundations have eliminated arts funding, others have not announced whether or not they still fund arts. A past grant is not predictive of future grant and some do not reply to inquiries, making it difficult to plan. Arts groups haven't always focused on their contributions to community and family health and welfare, and foundations don't necessarily acknowledge those contributions.

Programming:

- Budgets are being cut 10% - 15%; this means cutting back on number of performances and number of artists and focusing on “core programming” for which they can sell tickets and increase their earned income. Those that are trying to continue programs at their current quality level are concerned that funders want more free programs for families and youth, yet without access to grants, free programs and scholarships will have to be eliminated.
- Acknowledgement there is a need to shift or expand some program offerings and upgrade some business systems, but fear that we don't have any extra time and know that we don't have extra money.

Staffing:

- Salaries have been cut as much as 10%, some layoffs have already occurred, and cut backs are planned on summer hiring, yet so many organizations already operate on a bare bones level, with few staff members and a lot of volunteers. There is a fear that further staff cuts will put them out of business.
- Staff and board are multi-tasking and stressed, worried about burnout as they look for new solutions to make up financial shortfall. Changing systems and habits takes training and time, and as staff responsibilities are shifted to address immediate financial issues, there is concern that some programs won't get done.

Marketing:

- The entertainment market is more crowded as consumers make difficult choices on limited budgets, some arts events are pricey to produce and consumer doesn't realize that ticket price still does not cover full cost. Perhaps too much has been given away for free in the past. Also, consumers seem more fickle, seeking new experiences over “tried and true”.
- Newspaper ad prices are going up and space is going down, and consumers get their information from more diverse sources, including email and social networking sites. The new technologies seem difficult, expensive and time-consuming to learn, and many feel like this must be added on top of existing marketing strategies, since some consumers, particularly high-level donors, don't use or respond to email.
- Tourism officials aren't promoting arts and heritage events and venues as much as they might or in an integrated way. City officials aren't understanding importance of town's uniqueness and aesthetics as part of tourism and downtown development.
- Arts councils or other coordinating and marketing entities are disappearing in some towns.

Arts Education:

- Uncertainty about future of school arts programs. Access has already been difficult due to standardized testing, and with new budget cuts to education will it be harder to get into the schools? Arts groups are cutting number of artists in classroom and there is a fear that schools will cut art teachers and transportation funding for field trips. Requests for scholarships for out-of-school youth programs are up, yet grant funding to pay for scholarships is way down.

Space:

- Fees for performance and rehearsal venues and artist lodging are going up as landlords seek to increase their revenues. Shift to corporate-owned venues instead of local landlords has led to less flexibility and fewer space donations. Arts venues have a lack of knowledge about how to use their venues more productively, for example wedding rentals.

Strategies utilized to deal with challenges:

"A crisis is a terrible thing to waste" (Senator Gayle Schwartz)

Arts Education:

- develop relationships with the homeschooled families, with special discounts and advertisements in church bulletins;
- reach out to the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, both of which are facing their own fundraising challenges;
- understand how arts education addresses different learning styles (Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences) ;
- collaborate with recreation district and sports, such as a summer camp where kids take art in the morning and sports in the afternoon;
- use creative bartering with the city, such as requesting memberships in the recreation center instead of cash from the city;
- use coalitions of art teachers to help convince the school district administrators of the importance of all of the art forms.

Marketing:

- Collaborate with businesses on package offers such as price discount for entertainment/hotel/restaurant/retail;
- cross promote each other's businesses;
- increase the hours your store or gallery is open;
- talk to local public radio station about new programming opportunities that increase your visibility;
- offer last minute discount tickets or advance purchase discounts;
- charge lower prices for less desirable seats (first two rows) ;
- use a Telemarketing service;
- focus marketing efforts by identifying different demographic groups and designing a separate marketing effort for each;
- get to know your town's tourism officials (Convention and Visitors Bureau) and link your activities with tourism;
- get to know your local reporters and art critics and let them know what's happening;
- use online calendars more proactively (e.g. Colorado.com) ;
- take a risk and TRUST in non-traditional, paperless marketing;
- buy ads in bulk from your local paper, and guarantee X number of ads in exchange for a Y% discount;
- don't forget low tech tools like placing a concierge binder on cultural events at all of the local hotels;

- find a way to customize your product by type of consumer and offer free samples to businesses that serve that consumer and will co-promote your product;
- use pay-what-you-can ticket option.

Technology:

- Capitalize on social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube and Face Video;
- use your website to sell tickets, accept donations, post late-breaking news and events, solicit suggestions (blog) and to link with other web sites that also serve your audience members (e.g. VRBO);
- find bloggers to tout your event or venue;
- solicit online “pay what you can” donations on your web site (e.g. PayPal);
- put time into developing a good data base so you can “know your people” and target your marketing and fundraising;
- find for-profit businesses who are good with using You-Tube and other tools to give us training in exchange for tickets;
- Constant Contact is a great email tool.

Programming:

- reduce the number of events;
- build simpler sets to reduce production costs; offer more popular programs;
- use free events in unusual settings to spur interest (e.g. rehearse in the park);
- consider alternative show times that will attract new audiences (e.g. immediately after work);
- reach out to young and emerging artists;
- look for the untapped potential of existing programs (a sculpture class could be commissioned by homeowners to do sculptures for lawns or an art class could help decorate store window displays);
- emphasize youth- and family-friendly programs;
- in resort communities, look to the locals as potential new audiences;
- create art that responds to current issues;
- add adult education/hands-on participation opportunities;
- create a series of low-tech, but constant, small activities that bring in small-but-steady income;
- do fresh market research on the needs and desires of your traditional audiences to make sure you are meeting these needs.

Space needs:

- Seek out price deals for short term housing for artists;
- look for alternative venues such as hotel, restaurant or mall spaces that are going unused;
- share your space and venues with other nonprofits, including non-arts groups;
- market the availability of your space through non-traditional channels such as bridal shows.

Budget advice:

- Reduce food costs for artists, interns;
- share operating costs with other non-profits (e.g. payroll, data entry);
- think entrepreneurially and increase earned revenues;
- know the real costs and revenue of each program you present and make budgeting and programming decisions on a real cost/revenue basis;
- include in-kind income/costs in our budgets to fully reflect the true costs of doing business and the importance of in-kind contributions;
- negotiate with your local vendors; you need one another;
- use your volunteers to help minimize your vendor costs, such as offering your volunteers to help with catering setup instead of the caterer's staff;
- privatize things like your gift shop and contract it out to a for-profit business, giving you a share of the profits;
- tighten administrative systems.

Staffing:

- Ask your donor pool to give of their time and expertise if they can't give money;
- hire HS and college students as interns <http://www.artsadministration.org/grad> ;
- reallocate staff responsibilities to meet marketing, technology and relationship-building needs in this "new world";
- empower the staff to be proactive in meeting goals;
- use contractors in lieu of staff.

Fundraising and Grant Writing:

- Describe your programs in terms of the things that ARE being funded (health, social services, youth at-risk);
- incorporate vocabulary and statistics on student achievement, workforce readiness, economic development, and jobs to make a stronger case;
- seek spokespeople who are not the "usual suspects" to present your case (sports people, business people) and offer to do the same for them;
- cultivate grassroots and small donors including "give what you can";
- be proactive in diversifying your income sources;
- make personal individualized appeals to all of your past members and ask them to renew at any level;
- pair artists with donors and ask artist to build relationship with donor including personal thank you notes and pre/post show chats;
- reduce your dependence on grants and donations and increase earned income;
- be direct and honest with donors, now is the time for transparency and working hard on stronger relationships with them;
- support each other's fundraising campaigns;
- try new approaches such as a "not at all ball" or "un-gala gala" where people pay NOT to have to go;
- ask for non-monetary support such as purchasing a Flip Camera or providing technology training;

- ask funders to give you challenge grants, even if they are small, to stimulate giving from new donors;
- rethink membership perks;
- thank donors more publicly.

Collaborations:

- design win-win-win-win partnerships between us/local businesses/other nonprofits/audiences;
- seek sports events as partners and advocates;
- think regionally, especially in rural areas;
- creative partnerships with social service organizations such as the Urban League to acknowledge “we are in this together”;
- locate and join networks of presenters to bring touring artists at lower costs to all;
- trade e-blasts, blurbs with other nonprofits and businesses on one another's ads and web sites;
- get a non-arts nonprofit to underwrite a performance of one of your events in exchange for doing the marketing and keeping the proceeds;
- be proactive and don't wait for someone to approach you;
- consider in-kind trades with other businesses and nonprofits;
- build personal relationships with fellow business owners in your town;
- create adopt-an-artist program with local businesses.

Advocacy and Promoting our Creative Assets:

- get economic impact and jobs data to the Colorado Municipal League, Colorado Restaurant Association, Colorado Ski Country, Association of Architects;
- seek sports teams as partners and advocates;
- become more aggressive advocates to stabilize local, state and federal arts funding and turn existing attendees and donors into active advocates;
- an economic downturn could be the ideal time to market rural Colorado as a place to relocate;
- identify and market local individual artists and producers of one-of-a-kind objects;
- advocate for communities to emphasize their uniqueness through signage, beautiful gates, unique landscaping, and public art, and encourage local officials and project planners to hire artists to do these things;
- work with CTO to influence local tourism people; inventory our creative assets.

Regional Patterns

There were a few regional differences. Clustering the meetings that attracted more people from resort areas, non-resort rural areas, and urban areas, we find the following tendencies.

Resort areas:

- Arts activities in resort areas are more dependent on the external environment than other areas (out-of-town travelers including international travelers, foundations,

corporations, for program underwriting). The costs of many programs – especially the summer/September festivals - are much higher than the local small community can support.

- Many programs are summer-only, and this year, especially, there is no way to forecast summer travel patterns of visitors and second home-owners. This makes budgeting and planning particularly difficult for these organizations.
- Often programs revolve around prominent national and internationally-renowned guest artists; costs, always high, are rising. The “signature” of these summer programs is the quality of these artists.
- Some of the larger organizations are emphasizing cultivating local “grassroots” audiences.
- They are trying to shift the ratio of contributed/earned income from the current 60/40 to 40/60.
- They are cutting programs and numbers of guest artists, and they are re-examining the importance of offering free performances.
- They are trying to get their economic message to other engines such as Colorado Municipal League, Colorado Tourism, Colorado Ski Country, etc; but it may be too late to impact this crucial summer.
- They are offering special deals and discounts to advance ticket-buyers.

Urban areas:

- Many of the organizations in the medium-sized cities and Denver have buildings and staff, so as a region they may have higher relative infrastructure costs than either of the two other areas.
- Arts education seems to be a particularly troubling issue here.
- Because of the wealth of arts organizations, new possibilities for mergers, collaborative art-making, and shared administrative costs may be more feasible.
- Because of the wealth of professionals in these communities, there is technical help available more easily than in the other areas.
- Organizations that were created to serve other organizations, such as local arts councils and arts service organizations, are often located in urban areas. They are finding fundraising particularly difficult since they do not have an artistic product to sell per-se.

Rural areas:

- Cultural heritage is a concern of particular importance here, as it gives communities their identity which is the lifeline of tourism for them.
- If organizations have staff or facilities, these are unusually dependent on external visitors and funding; and if they have to consider letting staff go or parting with facilities, the impact on the community’s economy (unemployment, impact on the health of Main Street) is disproportionately higher than the other communities. This could make them particularly at-risk.
- Organizations and individuals may be more “nimble” in meeting certain challenges for they tend to be more reliant on their local communities and because of the small size of

the communities, more used to partnerships and collaborations – which may be the hallmark of survival.

Municipal Leaders and Elected Officials

In individual meetings and small group interviews, the community leaders we spoke with recognized the economic value of their community's arts and cultural venues and activities. These leaders had much in common when asked about the state's priorities:

- They were uniformly impressed by the jobs data and felt that Colorado would benefit from touting our creative assets more.
- Fort Collins and Colorado Springs both commented that their strategic plans include the arts.
- All spoke to the importance of retaining jobs and businesses.
- Most felt it was very important to focus on their community's cultural heritage.
- Some saw the need for programs that address at-risk youth, especially during these times when social service organizations are struggling.
- There is a need to help artists work with the business community – things as simple as knowing how to develop a price list of offerings.
- Small incentive grants and loans can play a big role in helping arts-based businesses start up or expand.
- They could use help engaging corporate leaders in understanding the role of the arts in community and economic development.
- They would like to learn about what is working in other towns or cities.
- Some would like help to change the public perception from “the arts are nice” to “the arts are essential”.

Colorado Preservation, Inc.

The CPI workshop attendees were primarily interested in cultural heritage, since their focus is preservation of historical buildings and sites. We asked for advice on what CCA should do for the heritage of the state.

- Inform the history and preservation people about the cultures and their traditions so that they have the information they need to do work at the local level
- Provide technical assistance on the best way to showcase different traditions
- Continue to give Small Steps – it's a great leverage. Consider boosting Small Steps to \$1000
- Advertise the availability of a folklorist who can help us understand how to harvest the stories of our region, and then what to do about it once we've collected them
- We'd love to feature more traditional arts at our events – especially music. How do we locate traditional music groups?
- Can you give us pointers on making the link between heritage and economic development?
- How can we get heritage events on the CTO calendar? What's the best way to market them?

- Is there some way that we can reach the CPI membership with information about what CCA offers in the way of t.a., Small Steps, the Ties That Bind kit, etc? This isn't a group that would naturally think about going to the CCA website. Could it be linked with CPI somehow?
- CCA could disseminate information through the network of historic theaters in Colorado
- The CPI members could also benefit from information on setting up public art programs locally: CCA could assist communities in serving as a "liaison" between the downtown development authorities and artists – how to set up a public art program? How can it engage the heritage community?
- We could use assistance in marketing the heritage of the byways
- Could CCA put sample cultural itineraries – for instance, of a single byway – on the CCA website, and then alert us at CPI that it's there?

Notes compiled and posted February 23, 2009.