



OKLAHOMA Arts

Strategic Plan 2026 – 2030



FORWARD



*Pathway to Hope Public Art Trail: Doorways to Hope
Artists: Marlon F. Hall and Gordon Huether
I-244 and N. Elgin Ave., Tulsa*

Statutory Compliance

This process was undertaken in accordance with Title 62 Oklahoma Statute § 45.3 which requires each state agency to draft a strategic plan covering five fiscal years and to provide updated plans periodically.

As required, copies of this plan have been submitted to: 1) The Governor; 2) The President Pro Tempore of the State Senate; 3) The Speaker of the House of Representatives; 4) The Legislative Oversight Committee on State Budget Performance; 5) The Chair and Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Accountability in Government; 6) The Director of the Office of Management and Enterprise Services; and, 7) The State Auditor and Inspector.

Additional copies are available upon request.

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“We are stronger together.”

*Cornerstone Conversations Participant
Bristow, OK*

Letter from the Director

On behalf of our Governor-appointed Council members and dedicated staff, thank you to the many Oklahomans from across the state who shared their voices through Cornerstone Conversations, surveys, and community gatherings. Your input has been foundational in shaping the 2026–2030 Oklahoma Arts Council Strategic Plan.

Since 1965, the Oklahoma Arts Council has worked to ensure all Oklahomans—regardless of geography or background—have access to the transformative power of the arts. That mission continues today as we expand our efforts to strengthen local economies, support education, promote wellness, and enrich community life through creativity.



This new plan reflects a shared vision: one where the arts are not just an enhancement, but essential to thriving communities. You asked for greater access, stronger collaboration, more support for artists, and deeper connections across sectors—and we are listening.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to advancing a vibrant arts ecosystem across the state for all Oklahomans. We invite you to partner with us in making creativity more accessible, visible, and valued in every corner of our state.

With gratitude,

Amber Sharples
Executive Director

Tower Theatre, Oklahoma City
photo by Doug Schwarz



Introduction

The Oklahoma Arts Council is dedicated to serving the state and its people, and as Oklahoma has evolved in the years since launching our previous strategic plan, the mission, focus, and response of our agency must adapt accordingly. Building upon our past successes, the 2026-2030 Oklahoma Arts Council Strategic Plan establishes a framework for our agency to further enhance its efforts in showcasing the various voices and creative communities of Oklahoma. This plan aims to cultivate the artistic talents of our people across art forms and provide public support for greater arts access and arts education.

Since 2021, with the support of our community of organizations, artists, ambassadors, educators, and elected officials, we have made significant strides in advancing our state's economy, education, cultural heritage, and quality of life by strategically utilizing funding from the Oklahoma State Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts. Notably, for every dollar invested by the Oklahoma Arts Council across the state, an additional \$6 in tax revenue was generated for state and local governments.

Despite challenges that inevitably occurred during this period, including the COVID-19 pandemic, our agency emerged more resilient than ever, with an unwavering commitment to prioritize the best interests of Oklahomans by using our resources effectively and efficiently. We recognize the need to invest in a new strategy to guide us. Having spent the past 18 months listening and learning to develop that strategy, we are excited to share our new plan in this document. We invite you to join in as we continue our work to enrich the lives of all Oklahomans.

In accordance with our mission, guiding principles, and core values, this framework will serve as the Oklahoma Arts Council's strategic roadmap for the upcoming five years. Our objectives include:

- Preserving and safeguarding our **cultural heritage**
- Expanding **access to arts and arts education** for all citizens
- Providing substantial **public support**
- Promoting the arts and their correlation to a **robust state economy**

In collaboration with numerous stakeholders, we have crafted a comprehensive plan that leverages proven strategies, incorporates genuine aspirations, and introduces innovative concepts. This plan serves as a guiding framework for fostering inspiration, accountability, and enhanced creative collaboration within the state of Oklahoma. We are delighted to share it here.



Oklahoma Arts Council's Strategic Context

Agency Strengths

Statewide Leadership and Convening Power
Dedicated and Skilled Staff
Successful Funding Leverage

Commitment to Access
Program Innovation and Breadth
Public Recognition and Cross-Sector Reach

Agency Challenges

Capacity Strain and Burnout
Communication Gaps
Data and Evaluation Gaps

Grantmaking Barriers
Access and Opportunity Challenges

Opportunities for Growth and Promise

Education and Youth Engagement
Rural Outreach and Community Building
Cross-Sector Growth
Direct Artist Support

Technology and Virtual Access
Internal Development
Storytelling and Research

Threats, Struggles, and Obstacles

Economic and Funding Instability
Political and Policy Shifts
Audience and Infrastructure Gaps

Organizational Burnout
Rural Challenges
Reputation and Relevance Risks

Wild Cards

Technology Leaps
Generational Shifts
Economic Currents

Education Landscape
Environmental and Cultural Change

Strategic Plan 2026 – 2030

Mission

The Oklahoma Arts Council leads, cultivates, and amplifies the transformative power of the arts for all Oklahomans and their communities.

Vision

The Oklahoma Arts Council envisions a future where:

- All communities are celebrated and enriched through creative expression
- Artists, arts organizations, and arts education thrive through robust public support
- The arts are recognized as essential to education and economic vitality

Goal 1: Cultivate and Support the Arts in Oklahoma

Oklahoma Arts Council encourages the arts in Oklahoma, working through a variety of programs to champion local and statewide initiatives.

Goal 2: Advance Arts Education

Oklahoma Arts Council supports and advocates for abundant arts education at all stages of life.

Goal 3: Strengthen Agency Services and Capacity

Oklahoma Arts Council operates effectively, transparently, and efficiently, always seeking to improve through collaboration and learning.

Guiding Principles

- All Oklahomans and communities deserve and benefit from access to the arts.
- Every child should have access to a well-rounded education that includes the arts.
- Artists link us to traditions, capture contemporary life, and inspire future creativity.
- The arts support the development of an innovative workforce and a vibrant economy.
- The arts are a catalyst for promoting understanding of our cultural heritage.
- Lifelong engagement in the arts enriches quality of life and improves health and well-being.
- We navigate complexities, change, and uncertainty with resiliency to stay mission focused.

Values

- Accountability
- Creativity
- Excellence
- Partnership





Definition of Terms

Goal: What the agency will accomplish to support its mission and vision

Focus Areas: Where the agency will invest its resources

Strategies: Priority steps along the way

Outcomes: What success looks like



Goal 1: Cultivate and Support the Arts in Oklahoma

Since its establishment in 1965, the Oklahoma Arts Council has served as the state's official arts agency and state partner of the National Endowment for the Arts. The agency holds a unique responsibility to ensure that all Oklahomans have access to the arts. Cultivating and supporting the arts remains at the heart of this mission.

Six focus areas will guide the agency in this work:

1. Invest in Oklahoma's Arts and Cultural Heritage Assets
2. Elevate Artistry and Catalyze Creative Community Development
3. Promote and Equip Oklahoma Artists and Programs
4. Engage in Cross-Sector Partnerships to Facilitate Creative Initiatives
5. Encourage Arts-Supportive Policy and Promote the Public Value of the Arts
6. Ensure Arts Access

Invest in Oklahoma's Arts and Cultural Heritage Assets

- Provide financial support and technical assistance to strengthen Oklahoma's arts and creative infrastructure.
- Leverage investments in operating support for arts-focused organizations to increase opportunities for Oklahomans.
- Partner with Friends of the Oklahoma Arts Council to grow an endowment for the acquisition and care of state-owned art collections.
- Reactivate and sustain rotating Oklahoma State Capitol art galleries featuring artists and artworks from across the state.
- Archive, preserve, and celebrate Oklahoma's folk and traditional art.
- Expand and enhance community-based programs celebrating the unique cultural heritage assets of Oklahoma and the nation, such as the Route 66 Centennial, America250, the 2028 Olympics, and the Cultural District Initiative.

Elevate Artistry and Catalyze Creative Community Development

- Expand arts and creative opportunities in rural, underresourced, and vulnerable populations and communities.
- Increase support for emerging and small- to mid-sized arts organizations.
- Build public-private partnerships to expand community-driven initiatives.
- Strengthen statewide arts and cultural heritage networks.
- Develop and facilitate professional development programs such as the Oklahoma Arts Conference and Leadership Arts.

Promote and Equip Oklahoma Artists and Programs

- Invest in artists' professional development.
- Provide grants that enliven communities through accessible and engaging arts opportunities featuring high-quality Oklahoma artists.

Engage in Cross-Sector Partnerships to Facilitate Creative Initiatives

- Strengthen partnerships with tribal nations and Indigenous communities.
- Sustain the Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative.
- Expand partnerships that support Creative Aging, Arts and Health, and Arts in Incarceration programs.

Encourage Arts-Supportive Policy and Promote the Public Value of the Arts

- Engage community leaders and decision-makers as allies in advancing the arts.
- Strengthen the role of the arts within state policy and planning.
- Conduct and share arts-related research to demonstrate impact.
- Pursue increased resources through federal, regional, and state partnerships.

Ensure Arts Access

- Support arts experiences that benefit individuals and communities in all 77 counties.
- Monitor demographic shifts in participation and adapt programs accordingly.
- Ensure fairness and transparency in grant review processes.
- Expand programming to communities not previously reached.
- Foster new arts leadership in strategic areas across the state.
- Provide greater opportunities for artists from tribal nations and other communities to share their stories through the art commissioning process.

Outcomes

Oklahoma Arts Council will be:

- Recognized as a statewide leader in the arts.
- A trusted source for connecting Oklahoma's creative community.
- A partner in developing Oklahoma's creative infrastructure.
- Viewed as a valuable hub for networking and professional development.

The arts sector in Oklahoma will be:

- An integral part of community identity and economic development.
- A respected steward of Oklahoma's unique cultural heritage traditions.



Tulsa MET, Hip-Hop Opera

Goal 2: Advance Arts Education

Providing Oklahomans of all ages and abilities with access to high-quality arts education and lifelong learning opportunities nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and greater appreciation of the arts. Engagement in the arts strengthens essential workforce skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, adaptability, and innovation — preparing learners for career success in a rapidly changing economy. In schools and communities, arts participation enhances student engagement, supports overall health and wellbeing, and builds stronger, more connected communities. Advancing arts education and lifelong learning strengthens individuals, families, and Oklahoma’s future.

Four focus areas will guide this work:

1. Invest in Quality Arts Education and Lifelong Learning in the Arts
2. Build and Empower Partnerships to Ensure Access Statewide
3. Provide Professional Development and Networking for Arts Educators and Teaching Artists
4. Ensure Access to Arts Education

Invest in Quality Arts Education and Lifelong Learning in the Arts

- Expand access to high-quality arts education and opportunities for lifelong learning in the arts.
- Evaluate existing programs and develop new models to increase impact and relevance.
- Build a library of public art education resources that support teaching artists.
- Develop educational programming and curriculum for the Capitol and state-owned art collections.

Build and Empower Partnerships to Ensure Access Statewide

- Collaborate with education leaders, government partners, and arts and education professionals to strengthen arts education policy.
- Maintain partnerships to address gaps in access and programming.
- Support cross-sector initiatives such as Creative Aging, Arts and the Military, Arts and Juvenile Justice, Arts in Incarceration, and Arts and Health.

Provide Professional Development and Networking for Arts Educators

- Increase the scope of professional development opportunities statewide.
- Offer trainings and convenings for the Oklahoma Teaching Artist Roster.
- Create incentives for recruitment and retention of teaching artists.
- Highlight professional development opportunities through creative promotion.

Ensure Access to Arts Education

- Evaluate grant programs through the lens of access.
- Build partnerships that raise awareness of funding opportunities for rural, underresourced, and vulnerable populations and communities.
- Use weighted scoring to promote fair distribution of grant funds.

Outcomes

- The arts will be a core component of every child's education.
- Arts learning opportunities will be widely available to Oklahomans of all ages.
- Arts education will be recognized as essential to workforce development.
- The next generation of Oklahomans will value the arts through meaningful educational experiences.

**“When people engage in art,
they are engaging in their health.”**

*Cornerstone Conversations Participant
Leadership Arts Program*



*OKC Rep, Vietgone
Photo by R. Tolar*

Goal 3: Strengthen Oklahoma Arts Council's Services and Capacity

Oklahoma Arts Council staff members are dedicated public servants committed to leveraging the arts for statewide growth. Investing in the Council's capacity strengthens its ability to serve the arts sector and ensures responsible stewardship of public resources. A culture of continuous improvement and innovation enables the agency to provide effective and resilient service.

Five focus areas will guide this work:

1. Enhance Efficiency, Transparency, and Constituent Focus
2. Expand National, Regional, Statewide, and State Agency Partnerships
3. Elevate Staff Capacity through Professional Development and Collaboration
4. Ensure Agency Preparedness and Resiliency
5. Ensure Access Within Agency Practices

Enhance Efficiency, Transparency, and Constituent Focus

- Streamline processes, including continued improvements to the grants system.
- Use data to measure impact and inform decision-making.
- Implement a comprehensive communications and marketing plan.
- Redesign the website with a focus on constituent needs and access.
- Participate in research demonstrating the arts' role in education, quality of life, and economic development.
- Streamline the Art in Public Places artist submission and selection process.

Expand Partnerships

- Review current national, regional, and statewide partnerships.
- Build new partnerships to strengthen engagement and fill gaps.

Elevate Staff Capacity through Professional Development and Collaboration

- Recruit and retain a skilled, motivated workforce.
- Expand professional development and collaborative training opportunities for staff.

Ensure Agency Preparedness and Resiliency

- Maximize return on public investment.
- Foster an organizational culture that promotes health, wellness, and resiliency.
- Maintain and update continuity and emergency preparedness plans.
- Revise safety and security policies annually.

Ensure Access Within Agency Practices

- Make access a core principle across all programs and services.
- Train and equip staff to build relationships with rural, underresourced, and vulnerable populations and communities.
- Improve metrics for evaluating access to grants, programs, and services.
- Ensure the website and grants management system are accessible to all users.

Outcomes

- Oklahoma Arts Council will be recognized as a responsive and full-service public agency.
- The Council's grantmaking will be accessible, transparent, and fair.
- Effective internal and external communications will improve services.
- Staff will be equipped to navigate changing conditions with resiliency and effectiveness.
- Programs and services will reflect the people, communities, and traditions of Oklahoma.
- All Oklahomans will have greater access to the arts.

“There is a feeling of hope.”

*Cornerstone Conversations Participant
Chickasha, OK*

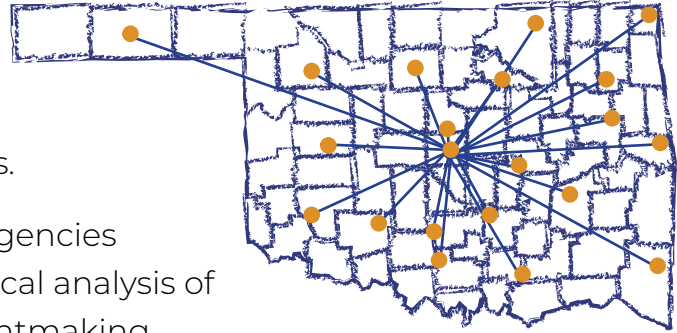


Planning and Implementation

In creating its 2026-2030 Strategic Plan, the Oklahoma Arts Council undertook a comprehensive process. The resulting plan provides the agency with renewed focus by establishing the primary strategic initiatives to be employed over five years to fulfill the agency's mission and to serve the needs of all stakeholders in the state's arts sector.

Planning Methods

- Oklahoma Arts Council Strategic Planning Committee and staff assessed the status of the agency's mission, values, and guiding principles.
- The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies conducted a geographical and statistical analysis of 15 years of Oklahoma Arts Council grantmaking.
- Cornerstone Conversations allowed Oklahoma Arts Council staff to listen, learn, and dream with Oklahomans representing all communities for what is possible for our state through the arts. These community engagement sessions involved more than 125 constituents from Alva, Bristow, Chickasha, Guthrie, Oklahoma City, and surrounding communities.
- Staff provided strategies and outcomes to shape the goals and focus areas of the plan, while an independent consultant offered guidance and revisions to the draft plan.
- The strategic plan was released for public comment, and a publicly accessible strategic planning webpage was created to maintain transparency and to invite ongoing input.



Upon approval by the Governor-appointed Oklahoma Arts Council, and the distribution of the plan to the State of Oklahoma officials, in compliance with state statute, the Oklahoma Arts Council announced the plan through agency communication channels.

Staff then aligned annual departmental roadmaps and individual work plans with the updated plan and developed recommendations for the next planning process.

Evaluation

To ensure accountability, this plan provides intended outcomes for each goal. Department roadmaps and individual staff work plans, which will incorporate operational steps, include key performance measures. As a performance-driven agency, staff will track and evaluate progress toward achieving strategic goals. Measures may be refined as the plan is implemented.

In addition, the Oklahoma Arts Council may use the following methods to evaluate progress:

- Compile strategic roadmaps and work plans to prioritize agency projects by department.
- Present progress reports, including an annual impact report, to the Governor-appointed Oklahoma Arts Council.
- Employ general and targeted surveys to obtain data on agency programs and to assess constituent needs.
- Conduct community engagement efforts and listening sessions across the state to collect qualitative and quantitative data.
- Make the plan accessible to agency staff and to the public.
- Solicit ongoing feedback to measure performance and ensure goal achievement.

The qualitative and quantitative data obtained through the evaluation methods outlined in this plan will be crucial for crafting the next strategic plan.

The Oklahoma Arts Council Strategic Plan 2026-2030 and all details describing goals, objectives, and strategies within this plan are subject to change depending on annual appropriations.





Acknowledgments

The Oklahoma Arts Council offers its sincerest thanks to all who have had a hand in bringing this plan to fruition. Without the support of partners and communities across the state, this new plan would not have been possible. We are especially grateful to the many Oklahomans—artists, educators, arts organizations, community leaders and members—whose perspectives and work inform the direction of this plan and the agency’s service to the state. Among our partners, the leadership of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies were instrumental in the strategic planning process. Finally, the dedication of Oklahoma Arts Council members, and specifically the Council Strategic Planning Committee, in supporting the development of this plan was essential. Significant gratitude is owed to the members of our Council for voluntarily dedicating their time to provide meaningful guidance and oversight of the agency on behalf of the people of Oklahoma. Support for the agency from elected officials is strong statewide—state and local, rural and urban. The Oklahoma Arts Council is grateful for the public support that makes arts opportunities possible. This plan is shaped by input from Oklahomans across the state and is intended to serve communities in every part of Oklahoma.

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John Kennedy, Vice-Chair

Jake Yunker, Secretary

Melinda Adwon

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Oklahoma Blues Hall of Fame, Rentiesville





OKLAHOMA
Arts