



FOUNDATIONS FOR BUILDING

A VIBRANT OMAHA METRO

ARTS COMMUNITY

AMPLIFYARTS The **Improve** Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Led by Amplify Arts, ArtStock is a coalition of artists and organizations in the Omaha metro arts and culture community that are working within a Collective Impact framework to build a stronger sector.¹ Beginning in 2020, ArtStock embarked on a planning process to engage community in crafting a vision for the future and identifying and implementing strategies to realize that vision. This report documents the first half of that planning process – vision, strengths for reaching that vision and obstacles that may get in the way, and promising strategies generated through a literature scan. The intended use of this report is to provide ArtStock with the information needed to complete the process of crafting and implementing strategies to reach the community’s vision.

¹[FSG Social Impact Advisors](#) define the Collective Impact Framework as five conditions needed for organizations to use a structured method to achieve social change: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support from a coordinating team.

VISION & VALUES

In February and September 2020, about 65 members of the Omaha area arts and culture community **crafted a vision for a more vibrant community.** This vision calls for action to:

- Emphasize equity and accessibility,
- Center and support artists and communities,
- Engage in collaborations and partnerships, and
- Raise Omaha’s art and culture scene to national visibility.

STRENGTHS & OBSTACLES

In October 2020, over 200 community members provided survey input about **strengths that the community could leverage:**

- Strong connections within community subgroups, and
- A general appreciation for the arts among the greater Omaha population.

and obstacles that could get in the way of reaching this vision:

- Silos within the community, and
- Inequities in power and resources

STRATEGIES

Based on a literature scan of promising practices of arts communities and organization across the United States, **ArtStock might consider the following strategies when crafting its own path forward:**

- Build partnerships and collaborations,
- Prioritize audience and community engagement,
- Maintain a backbone organization throughout the work, and
- Generate strong sources of funding for the community.

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT AMPLIFY ARTS

[Amplify Arts](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose mission is to promote unity, innovation, and progress in the arts to build strong and vibrant communities. Amplify Arts supports artists with the tangible resources they need to thrive. Amplify Arts also works to connect the arts community to identify common goals and work for positive change. In early 2018, Amplify Arts began investigating the idea of collective impact in the arts. Amplify recognized that direct support of individual artists is important, but there are systemic barriers in place keeping artists from success. Amplify took on a micro/macro approach to its programming, seeing a need for achieving its mission in new ways, and working for systemic change in the arts.

ABOUT ARTSTOCK

ArtStock is a coalition of diverse representatives of the Omaha metro arts community that are working within a Collective Impact framework to build a stronger sector. ArtStock began as an initiative of the Peter Kiewit Foundation to build the capacity of nonprofit arts organizations, initially through funding and technical training, and later, with a focus on sector unity and progress. In early 2020 Amplify Arts became project lead and backbone support to ArtStock to facilitate sector-wide conversations. Shortly after, recognizing that not all voices of the arts community were represented in the room, Amplify Arts created the Culture Work Fellowship, bringing individual artists and culture workers into the ArtStock cohort as equal participants in strategy-building and implementation processes.

This change, with support from the original cohort, was essential to ensuring the ArtStock initiative moved forward as a transparent, inclusive, and transformative process. Amplify Arts is excited and humbled to lead this ambitious and necessary work, believing wholeheartedly that a strong cultural sector is vital to the Omaha metro's future.

ABOUT THE PLANNING PROCESS & THIS REPORT

In 2020, ArtStock began the democratic process of building a stronger arts sector by identifying a shared vision, gathering data about obstacles to realizing that vision and strengths to support the work, and exploring promising practices through a literature scan. The purpose of this report is to document results of these completed portions of this planning process as of November 2020. ArtStock will use this report to inform its next steps of crafting strategies that address identified issues and coordinating working groups to implement those strategies.

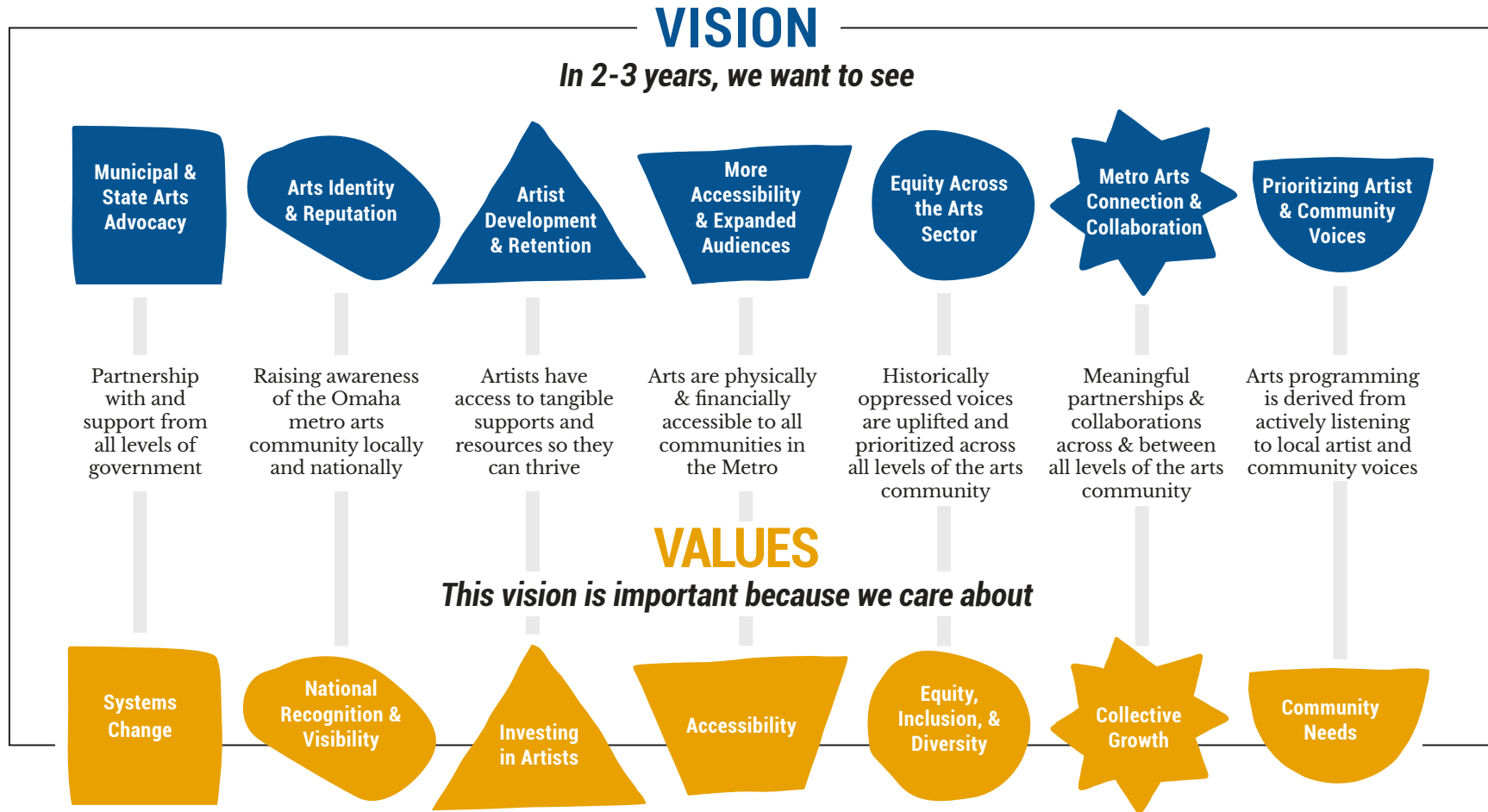
This report is organized by the following sections: vision and values, strengths and obstacles, strategies for consideration based on a literature scan, and a summary. Appendices including expanded methodology and data tables are available in a separate document.

ABOUT THE IMPROVE GROUP

In February 2020, Amplify Arts partnered with consultancy firm The Improve Group to help facilitate the planning process. [The Improve Group](#) is a planning, research, and evaluation firm located in St. Paul, Minnesota. Its mission is to help mission-driven organizations make the most of information, navigate complexity, and ensure their investments of time and money lead to meaningful, sustained impact.

VISION & VALUES

In February and September 2020, about 65 members of the Omaha area arts and culture community and ArtStock attended four visioning workshops led by Amplify Arts and The Improve Group.² Collectively, these community members crafted the below vision of what they would like to see in place for the Omaha area's arts and culture community in two to three years.³



² The first workshop was in February 2020, but the work was delayed due to the global Coronavirus pandemic and resumed in September.

³ See Appendices for detailed methodology.

STRENGTHS OBSTACLES &

In October 2020 The Improve Group surveyed community members to learn about what strengths could help the community reach its vision and what obstacles might block the community from reaching its vision.⁴

Just over 200 people completed the survey – about half identified as artists and patrons, and just over a quarter identified as educators, administrators, and creative professionals. People of Color and Indigenous community members were underrepresented in the survey and continuing efforts should be made to elicit input from these groups. Most survey respondents were from the Midtown and downtown areas of Omaha.

The following summary is a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative community input and is intended to inform strategies for working toward the community’s vision.

STRENGTHS to leverage:

- Connections** ▶ There are generally high-quality relationships within segregated groups in the arts and culture community.
- Appreciation for the Arts** ▶ The general Omaha population values local arts and culture. This strength could be further leveraged by providing more financial support and increasing public perception of the arts as a necessity rather than a luxury.

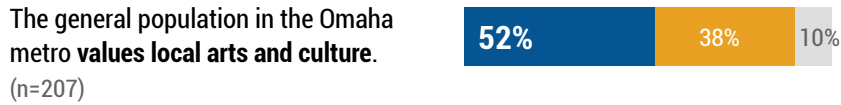
OBSTACLES to address:

- Silos** ▶ There is separation and competition between segregated groups of the arts and culture community.
- ▶ Groups are often segregated by organization size, arts specialty, neighborhood, and identity (e.g., race or ethnicity, LGBTQ identification, etc.).
- Power Imbalance** ▶ Decision-making power, authority, and influence in the arts and culture community are inequitably distributed, with people in marginalized groups, smaller organizations, and those with fewer financial resources often excluded.
- Resource Imbalance** ▶ There is inequity in resource flows to and within the arts and culture community.

⁴ The Improve Group designed the survey based on the six conditions of systems change as described in *The Water of Systems Change* (2018) by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge (FSC). Please see the appendices for more information, expanded methodology, and data tables.

Over 200 community members answered the following survey questions:⁵

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ I don't know



The quality of the relationships is good, but they aren't very broad between different races, physical areas, and art disciplines.

SURVEY RESPONDENT

I agree that the general population in Omaha supports the idea of a thriving local arts and culture scene, but I don't think they fully understand the need for financial support and government funding.

SURVEY RESPONDENT

I feel like the different arts communities are siloed - music, dance, visual arts, theatre. And the sub-communities are siloed - Black artists, LGBTQ artists, Indigenous artists. Jumping from one group to another is challenging.

SURVEY RESPONDENT

Power, authority, and influence mostly lie with leaders in larger organizations, the majority of whom do not represent a diverse population. Also, the opinions of staff, artists, or members of the greater community are rarely accounted for.

SURVEY RESPONDENT



⁵ In the survey questions, the term "community" refers to the arts and culture community in the Omaha metro area.

STRATEGIES for consideration

In addition to the community-driven visioning process and the strengths and obstacles survey, The Improve Group conducted a literature scan to explore strategies that other arts organizations and communities across the United States are using to address similar obstacles and reach similar goals. ArtStock might consider the below strategies from the literature scan as they move into crafting strategies to realize the Omaha community's own vision.

► Form collaborations and partnerships⁶

Collaborations and partnerships across organizations emerged as a critical element of success. Specifically, ArtStock should consider intentionally strengthening collaborations and partnerships among:

- Organizations of different sizes to benefit from resources and visibility of larger organizations, and benefit from smaller organizations' connections to communities;
- Communities and racial and ethnic groups to access new audiences, share practices, and present works on a larger scale;
- Art disciplines to expand programming and resources and bring programming to new audiences and neighborhoods; and
- Sectors beyond the arts to increase community engagement, increase arts visibility and audience size, and build educational pipelines.

Strategies for success in collaborating:⁷

- Set long-term goals and objectives
- Build trust and consensus
- Define leadership and structures for involvement
- Maintain ongoing communication

► Develop innovative ways to build audiences and connect with community⁸

Multiple strategies for increasing engagement with audiences and broader communities have benefitted other arts organizations and may offer ArtStock ideas for actualizing its vision:

- Build relationships through hosting conversations with artists and engaging community liaisons;
- Redesign financial exchange systems by offering rush tickets, and selling sponsored tickets or premium services;
- Bring audiences in through engaging audiences in developing new works, and performing works that encourage audience participation;
- Bring art out by performing in nontraditional venues, and delivering content through new media or social media channels; and
- Focus on people by programming content for specific audience groups (by age, ethnicity, geography, etc.) and engaging directly with those groups.

Strategies for success in engagement:⁹

- Give audiences direct access to artists
- Use social media and technology
- Partner strategically
- Commit to engagement on an organizational level

⁶ See [How the Arts Can Prosper Through Strategic Collaborations](#) (1996) by Scheffer and Kotler, [Cultural Collaborations: Building Partnerships for Arts Participation](#) (2003) by Ostrower, and [Audience Revolution Case Studies: Steppenwolf Theatre Company](#) (2013) by AMS Planning and Research and the Theatre Communications Group.

⁷ See [How the Arts Can Prosper Through Strategic Collaborations](#) (1996) by Scheffer and Kotler.

⁸ See the [Audience Evolution Case Studies Executive Summary](#) (2013) by AMS Planning and Research and the Theatre Communications Group.

⁹ Ibid.

▶ **Establish a specific organization as a “backbone” for the community.**¹⁰

Highly collaborative arts and culture communities often have dedicated organizations with missions specific to supporting arts and artists, developing regional arts reputations, and/or building and supporting collaboration.

▶ **Devote energy to creating solid economic support for arts and culture.**¹¹

Large-scale processes for measuring the robustness, vitality, or vibrancy of arts and cultural communities often rely on economic indicators. The National Arts Index compiled by Americans for the Arts (2016) and the Arts Vibrancy Index compiled by Southern Methodist University (2019) both rate vibrancy of arts communities using economic indicators. Regardless of other community strategies engaged, funding is important.

SUMMARY

The Omaha area arts and culture community crafted a vision for a more vibrant community. This vision draws from a number of values to articulate a future that emphasizes equity and accessibility, centers and supports artists and communities, engages collaborations and partnerships, and raises Omaha’s art and culture scene to national visibility.

The community also articulated that they would need to address the obstacles of silos within the community and inequities in power and resources to reach their vision. At the same time, they recognized that they could tap into the strengths of strong connections within community subgroups and a general appreciation for the arts among the greater Omaha population as they worked to address these challenges.

A literature scan of other arts organizations and communities across the United States suggests that partnerships, audience and community engagement, a backbone organization to support the work, and solid funding have been successful strategies for communities with visions and obstacles similar to Omaha’s.

The next step in this work is for ArtStock to use the information in this report to create strategies and action plans to work toward the community’s vision.

¹⁰ See [Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity](#) (2013) by Kania and Kramer, [Collective Impact in the Arts](#) (2013) by Moses, and [Top 40 Most Arts-Vibrant Communities in America](#) (2019) by Southern Methodist University.

¹¹ See the [National Arts Index](#) (2016) by Americans for the Arts and the [Arts Vibrancy Index](#) (2019) by Southern Methodist University.

2020/2021 ArtStock Members

Organizations

| | |
|--|---|
| African Culture Connection | Nebraska Writers Collective |
| American Midwest Ballet | Omaha Academy of Ballet |
| Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts | Omaha Area Youth Orchestras |
| BFF Omaha | Omaha Community Playhouse |
| Bluebarn Theatre | Omaha Conservatory of Music |
| The Durham Museum | Omaha Girls Rock |
| El Museo Latino | Omaha Performing Arts |
| Film Streams | Omaha Symphony |
| Great Plains Black History Museum | Opera Omaha |
| The Arts Center at Iowa Western Community College | OutrSpaces |
| Joslyn Art Museum | Pottawattamie Arts, Culture, and Entertainment |
| Joslyn Castle | Rabble Mill |
| KANEKO | The Rose Theater |
| Maha Festival | The Union for Contemporary Art |
| Nebraska Shakespeare | WhyArts |

Culture Work Fellows

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Ang Bennett | Maher Jafari |
| Esau Betancourt | Nathaniel Ruleaux |
| Ryan Boyland | Fran Sillau |
| Pamela Conyers-Hinson | Brandi Smith |
| Sara Jacobson | Ameen Wahba |

Funders

PETER KIEWIT
FOUNDATION



Omaha Community
Foundation

The Mammel Foundation

The Adah and Leon Millard Foundation

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