

# Establishing a Partnership of Arts and Culture Organizations to Create a More Resilient Sector

## Initiative Summary Statement:

Establish a partnership of regional Art and Culture Organizations composed of arts leaders to support and advocate for the local creative industry.

## Initiative Description:

**Objective:** The arts culturally and economically help to define and support the County's reputation, quality of life, and vibrancy. The arts and culture community includes a diverse set of employers, producers, visionaries, and consumers who collectively are a critical component of the tourism economy, which generates revenue for state and local governments. "The nonprofit arts and culture sector is a \$140.1 million industry in Lee County—one that supports 3,875 full-time equivalent jobs and generates \$18.8 million in local and state government revenue."<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the arts and culture sector provides joy to patrons and inspiration to students.

This Initiative proposes to formalize the crucial role that the arts and culture community plays in enriching Lee County and its municipalities by providing a platform to advise, advocate, and coordinate for the arts in the recovery process and on an ongoing basis. The partnership could be involved in implementing the following recovery Initiatives:

- Participating in the Resilience Hub Network (H & SS 02);
- Participating in the Regional Development of a Continuity of Operations Hub (ER 02);
- Advising the Region on the Continued Support of Public Art and Cultural Events (CR 05);
- Coordinating and Advocating for Capital Funding for Art and Cultural Institutions (CR 01); and
- Supporting the Reviving of Public Recreation in the Region (CR 03).

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<sup>1</sup> Americans for the Arts, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building recognition for the value of arts and creative networks nationwide, conducted a 2015 Arts and Economic Prosperity<sup>®</sup> 5 study that included a *Lee County Arts and Economic Prosperity Report* from which this data is derived.

**Need:** After more than 7 years of disruptions to the tourism industry, the arts and culture sector has stepped up in many ways to support the region in recovery efforts in everything from distributing food and staging debris to creating a sense of normalcy and additional opportunities attract and entertain visitors' post-disaster. However, the sector has not been immune to the challenges created by the on-going disruptions. Hurricane Ian was devastating to the regional arts and culture community in many ways. Some examples of storm damages include: the massive flood inundation and roof damage to Florida Repertory Theatre in downtown Fort Myers resulting in financial hardship, the Cultural Park Theatre and the Sanibel Historical Museum and Village, shuttering for several months causing lost revenue, and the historic and symbolic Sanibel Lighthouse damaged. Another historic site, the Cape Coral Yacht Club located on the Caloosahatchee River, provided facilities and amenities including the public beach, a fishing pier, a community pool, and a boat launch until Hurricane Ian ravaged it, leaving damage that will take years to rebuild.

Recovery and establishing a strong partnership to ensure long-term resilience should happen more strategically to coordinate and support collaboration among sector leaders across the jurisdictions. A representative partnership could provide support and insight on recovery priorities and needs as well as help respond to other unexpected changes that impact the arts and culture sector over time. The partnership would be dedicated to supporting and strengthening the arts and culture sector while also articulating the contribution made by the cultural community to the County's economic vitality. The partnership should be convened by a trusted, neutral third-party using a process for stakeholder engagement and collaborating to action. Additionally, a member from the partnership could be a liaison for cultural resources in the Emergency Operations Center after the impact of a disaster.

**Regional Approach:** Art and culture improve the quality of life of the County residents, enrich students' understanding of humanity, provide rewarding jobs, and contribute to diversifying the economy. From Hurricane Ian's destruction of the funky artist village in Matlacha, to the downturn of attendance of live performances during the COVID-19 pandemic, this resilient community has come together across jurisdictional lines to support one another as they revitalize and reinvent. To continue these efforts, the regional partnership of arts and culture organizations could help with the following:

- Identify cross jurisdictional funding opportunities;
- Elevate needs of the community and provide a place for artisans to bring concerns;
- Provide a forum for cross-jurisdictional issues like workforce housing for artists;
- Monitor and assess the vitality of the arts and culture sector; and
- Define and inform the approach to supporting arts across the area.

The cultural and artistic community could identify its own leaders, form a communication channel with points of contact, and be unified in the coordination of leveraging their strengths, supporting small businesses, and making their resource requests. The partnership can also be a forum for establishing shared goals, facilitating a process for collaboration, forming partnerships, and continuing to build the network.

**Impact:** Consensus representation from the cultural and artistic community through a regional group would add value to the area and County through their expertise and creativity in recovery problem solving. The partnership would organize and connect active participants in recovery, resiliency, and long-term planning conversations. The partnership would also build goodwill throughout the artistic sector as artists' contribution to the region are given greater credence, which facilitates getting resources they need to flourish as economic drivers. The arts and culture partnership would be able to identify vulnerabilities and capacities within its community. As this community demonstrated in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian by working with Emergency Management to provide logistic swing spaces and gathering places, it has the potential to be a significant stakeholder in the Resiliency Hub Network and the coordination between this community and public safety in blue skies as well as during hazardous times. The opportunity exists to develop a successful regional arts and cultural partnership, ensuring that all jurisdictions and large and small institutions are well represented in any conversation and opportunities for funding.

### **Key Considerations:**

- Conduct outreach, engage stakeholders, and establish community partnerships.
- Determine the scale and definition of the community; create a partnership that is inclusive and reflective of the following:
  - The interconnectedness between the arts, the economy, the workforce, and education;
  - Stakeholders in the visual, literary, and performing arts;
  - Public-oriented science and humanities institutions, including zoos, botanical gardens, and historic and preservation societies;
  - A neutral third-party (non-governmental) to convene and coordinate the shared work among the partnership;
  - Representatives from local government; and
  - Creative artists at all skill levels who live and work within the County.
- Determine the structure and decision-making process of the Group once it is established.
- Outline the means to strengthen communication between the arts and culture sector and government.

- Use the regular, reoccurring arts and culture assessment as well as regularly analyzing the economic impact this community has in the County to drive strategy.

## Co-Sponsoring Branches:

Cultural Resources, Economic Recovery, Education & Workforce Development

## Stakeholders:

- Municipal experts in Arts and Culture Sector
- Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau
- Nonprofit organizations in the Arts and Culture Sector
- Alliance for the Arts
- Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs
- Arts and cultural institutions and organizations in Lee County
- Historic preservation organizations in Lee County
- Public-oriented science and humanities institutions in Lee County

## Potential Funding Sources:

- Institute of Museum and Library Science
- National Endowment for the Arts
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
- National Institute on Aging (NIA)
- National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
- United States Department of Health and Human Services
- United States Department of Veterans Affairs
- South Arts
- Florida Division of Arts and Culture
- Arts and Innovation Management
- Many private foundations who support arts and culture

## Resources:

- [Arts & Economic Prosperity® 5 - Alliance for the Arts \(artinlee.org\)](http://artinlee.org)