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# THE RICHMOND REGION CULTURAL ACTION PLAN

## CALL TO ACTION

MARCH 2009





# CREATIVE RICHMOND THE RICHMOND REGION CULTURAL ACTION PLAN

This report and the background research conducted for the cultural action plan was completed by a team from WolfBrown, an international consulting firm. A list of those who contributed includes

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## Funders

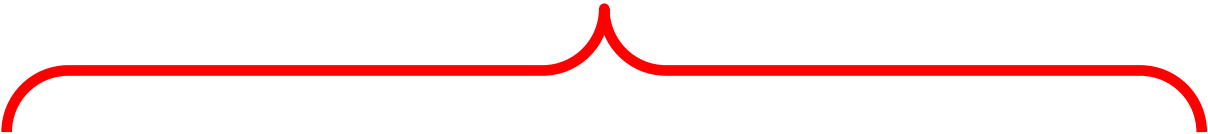
Altria  
Bank of America  
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# A CALL TO ACTION



“You see I am an enthusiast on the subject of the arts. But it is an enthusiasm of which I am not ashamed, as its object is to improve the taste of my countrymen, to increase their reputation, to reconcile them to the rest of the world, and procure them its praise.”

Thomas Jefferson in a letter to James Madison  
September 20, 1785





**This is a call to action. It is a call for all the citizens of the Richmond region to support and advocate for a creative community enriched by the arts, culture, history, heritage, and creative education. It is also a call to the region’s cultural organizations and to governments, corporations, foundations, and service organizations to work together to promote and support cultural opportunities throughout the region more effectively.**

- This is the moment for the Richmond region to build its creative economy and expand its 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.
- It is the moment to enhance its standing as a cultural destination.
- Now is the time for the Richmond region to encourage diverse creative voices – regardless of ethnicity, economic status, or educational attainment.
- It is a moment when leaders across the region should come together to strengthen and support an already rich and varied cultural sector and build on the remarkable organizational resources the region provides in the arts, history, and heritage.
- This is the moment for leadership, for a collective vision, for coordinated action, and for widespread support.

The call to action is directly linked to specific and detailed goals and recommendations that appear in the Richmond Region Cultural Action Plan

## **WHY ARTS AND CULTURE?**

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**Arts and culture contribute to the region in many ways:**

- **Depth and richness:** The Richmond region has a proud history in the arts, culture, history, and heritage that can contribute significantly to moving the community forward. Few regions of comparable size and population can boast such quality, dynamism, and excitement. Yet, much of the wealth of this tremendous resource is yet to be tapped.
- **Distinctiveness and identity:** The cultural sector defines much of what makes Richmond unique and special. It is a major part of the Richmond brand and image. “It tells the nation who we are and want to be.”



- ◉ **Economic activity:** Arts, culture, history, and heritage contribute at least \$300 million annually to the local economy by conservative estimates. With support and attention, these activities can continue to be a growing force for economic vitality.
- ◉ **Creative entrepreneurship and business relocation:** The cultural sector helps make the Richmond region a special place to live and work, offering reasons for corporations, creative businesses, and 21<sup>st</sup> century creative entrepreneurs to relocate to the region.
- ◉ **Cultural tourism:** The cultural sector is a large part of why people visit the Richmond region. Cultural amenities bring more people, encourage them to stay longer, and result in more out-of-region dollars to be spent locally.
- ◉ **Community revitalization:** Individual artists and creative workers enliven our communities and contribute to urban revitalization. Galleries, studios, and live-work spaces have increasingly reclaimed blighted parts of urban landscape at no cost to the taxpayers.
- ◉ **Beauty and quality of life:** The region's cultural facilities and historical monuments provide much of the beauty and fascination that makes the region a special place to live and work. They are a source of local pride.
- ◉ **Commitment to the next generation:** An emerging commitment to creative education – both in school and in the community – offers cutting edge ideas for preparing a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce of innovators, scientists, and creative thinkers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, almost all Nobel laureates in the sciences have actively engaged in the arts as adults. They are twenty-five times as likely as the average scientist to sing, dance, or act; seventeen times as likely to be a visual artist; and twelve times more likely to write poetry and literature. Root-Bernstein RS, Lindsay Allen, Leighanna Beach, Ragini Bhadula, Justin Fast, Chelsea Hosey, Benjamin Kremkow, Jacqueline Lapp, Kaitlin Long, Kendell Pawelec, Abigail Podufaly, Caitlin Russ, Laurie Tennant, Erric Vrtis and Stacey Weinlander. Arts Foster Success: Comparison of Nobel Prizewinners, Royal Society, National Academy, and Sigma Xi Members. *J Psychol Sci Tech* 2008; 1 (2): 51-63.



## WHY NOW?

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### This is the moment to:

- **Build on an emerging consensus:** For the first time in many years, there is a unified commitment among key players to move forward together on cultural development for the region. Past differences have been set aside. New parties have come to the table. There is excitement about what is possible.
- **Address economic challenges:** The Richmond region, like the rest of the nation, faces economic challenges not experienced since the Great Depression. But concerted action from the cultural sector can be part of a regional solution to these problems.
- **Utilize magnificent new facilities:** The timing is right to take advantage of extraordinary new and renovated facilities for visual and performing arts and for higher education. Along with these major monuments, there has been an accompanying grass roots effort in urban redevelopment through the arts.
- **Build on the contributions of the artist community:** Few regions have benefited so greatly from the activity of artists who have revitalized much of the community. That energy can be harnessed if there is forward movement now. This is the time to acknowledge and support their continuing contribution.
- **Expand regional cooperation:** Regional cooperation across city and counties is now more than an aspiration. It is important to build on models that already exist with economic development ventures, the regional airport, libraries, food pantries, and programs for the homeless. There is also an opportunity to extend the connections that have been built through the cultural planning process and to provide a model for continued regional planning and development in other sectors.
- **Rise to the challenge being set by other cities and regions:** From coast to coast, mid-sized cities and multi-county regions have begun the effort to transform themselves into creative communities. The Richmond region must act now and boldly if it wants to be part of the vanguard of this movement.
- **Take advantage of a new national policy and funding:** A new administration in Washington, DC has already lent its support to arts and cultural development through an additional \$50 million to the National Endowment for the Arts and what promises to be culture-friendly policies in other agencies. The Richmond region has an opportunity to build on that commitment and ensure its local





realization though the efforts, involvement, and encouragement of local governments.

## WHAT OTHER RESOURCES WILL CONTRIBUTE TO CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION FOR THE RICHMOND REGION?

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**The cultural sector can find help as it strives to foster a creative Richmond region by:**

- **Building on history:** Few areas of the United States are blessed with such a rich and varied history. Regardless of race, creed, wealth, or social status, countless individuals, families, and clans in numerous neighborhoods and communities within the region can make their varied histories part of the region's exciting future.
- **Conjoining strong southern traditions:** The region brings together two distinctive streams of southern traditions – the more formal traditions of southern culture and the less formal community-centered and participatory traditions. The creative sector can harness both as it balances its support of formal traditional venue-based activities of symphony and museum-going with the less formal participatory traditions seen in street festivals, quilting, and church choirs.
- **Taking advantage of Richmond as the capital city:** As the capital city of Virginia, Richmond is the home of many state-wide institutions and agencies, both public and private. They bring extraordinary resources, both financial and human, and provide important linkages to the rest of the state and nation.
- **Benefitting from higher education institutions:** The region is blessed with a wealth of colleges and universities that turn out bright and creative graduates not only in the arts and humanities but in the sciences, business, and other fields. Many of these individuals stay in the region and provide a next generation of creative leadership.
- **Investing in innovation:** The region has leading corporations that are committed to research and innovation. Whether it is finding new uses for agricultural products in medicine or developing new high technology products, the Richmond region is committed to being on the forefront of change. The local cutting edge public relations industry and Virginia Biotech Park offer two examples of innovation that have direct links to the creative sector.



## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

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There are challenges that must be overcome:

- **Inadequate financial support:** The cultural sector is under-resourced. It has historically low levels of local public support and an over-reliance on generous families and a few large corporations. Today, the traditional major funders cannot continue to carry the arts, culture, history and heritage. If the funding is to grow, as it must, the pool of donors must be expanded. Current economic challenges to philanthropy are real; but so is the potential for expansion over time.
- **Unfocused leadership:** Despite the remarkable contributions of many individuals and institutions on behalf of specific cultural institutions and initiatives, there has been a lack of leadership on behalf of the cultural sector as a whole. Public and private leadership have not been able to forge a bond to plan boldly and speak persuasively for the cultural sector of Richmond. There is a need for leaders who can mobilize local citizens at every level to advocate for arts and culture.
- **Inequitable access:** Resources, whether programs, educational opportunities, or money, are unevenly distributed. This inequity stems from long established patterns that extend well beyond the arts and culture and include such factors as race, class, and economic status.
- **Fragmented coordination:** The cultural aspirations of the region will not be realized without more effective coordination. In many communities and regions as large as the Richmond region, a single designated agency (recognized by both government and the private sector) provides coordination, advocacy, information, visibility, and often funding to the cultural community. It allows the cultural community to speak with one voice on important community issues and encourages a seat at the table when such issues are discussed. Such mechanisms are underdeveloped in the Richmond region.



## **WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE FUTURE?**

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There are clear goals and action steps that must guide the region in this effort.

### **Goal I: *Increase the contribution of arts and culture to the economic vitality of the region.***

- Increase cultural tourism.
- Integrate arts and culture into economic planning for the region.
- Implement a culture-friendly downtown development strategy.
- Foster creative collaborations in the work place.

### **Goal II: *Expand cultural participation on a regional basis.***

- Encourage events and activities that address the unfulfilled cultural interests of regional residents.
- Develop a regional network of non-traditional spaces for cultural activities that encourage events and activities at the neighborhood level.
- Foster the growth of satellite programming in the counties by Richmond-based cultural organizations as well as partnerships across geographic boundaries.
- Encourage greater participation and new audiences through improved transportation, subsidized ticketing, and other audience development strategies.

### **Goal III: *Promote cultural equity and build on cultural diversity.***

- Encourage and promote more ethnic, historic, and religious festivals and celebrations that reflect the rich multi-cultural traditions of the region.
- Support the reuse of facilities to enhance the historic assets of neighborhoods and provide culturally diverse organizations and artists with low cost performance/exhibition/office space.
- Develop a mini-grant program to provide greater access to funding to culturally-specific artists, organizations, and audiences.



- ◉ Foster greater dialogue on issues of race, ethnicity, and cultural heritage and their implications for cultural policy.

**Goal IV: *Build a coordinated, equitable, and innovative system for creative education.***

- ◉ Develop mechanisms that bring coherence to the organization and promotion of arts and cultural education.
- ◉ Offer new approaches to program delivery that overcome barriers of cost, transportation, and safety for families.
- ◉ Create sustained pathways for learning that connect young people to arts and culture from pre-school through early adulthood.
- ◉ Create a variety of opportunities and rewards that recognize and support young people for their engagement in arts and culture.
- ◉ Build support for arts and cultural education through linkages to other types of activities and funding in the areas of after-school, youth employment, crime prevention, and school-to-work preparedness.

**Goal V: *Sustain the Richmond region's artists and cultural organizations.***

- ◉ Offer incentives for mergers, shared services, and strategic alliances for cultural organizations of all sizes.
- ◉ Provide opportunities for technical assistance for artists and organizations.
- ◉ Develop an on-line system to assist artists in finding space and connecting with opportunities to show or perform their work.
- ◉ Establish programs to assist working artists and emerging cultural organizations in navigating City and county government.
- ◉ Develop more rational and effective systems for coordinated funding and grantmaking.



***Goal VI: Provide for ongoing coordination, advocacy, and dialogue on behalf of arts and culture.***

- Build on the nascent sense of collaboration that has informed the cultural planning process, working together as a sector, avoiding fragmentation, and forging broad networks that cross traditional boundaries.
- Work with the Richmond Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau to develop a computerized regional cultural calendar, a cultural tourism initiative, and other vehicles to promote the arts, culture, history, and heritage.
- Complete the plan for a regionally-appropriate coordination mechanism for arts and cultural education in performing arts, visual arts, history and heritage, science and nature, and literary arts.
- Work with the leadership of the Arts Council of Richmond to transform the agency into a regional body capable of coordinating the implementation of this cultural plan after the first year.

**In order to accomplish these aspirations, it will be necessary to widen the circle of those involved. Throughout this cultural plan, there are opportunities for groups of citizens to participate on working committees to ensure broad participation in translating recommendations into reality.**

## **WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?**

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- A reconstituted Task Force should continue to shepherd the cultural plan in its initial phases but plan to go out of business on the one-year anniversary of the delivery of this cultural plan.
- The Task Force should ensure that community dialogue around the plan continues over the coming months throughout the region. A series of working sessions (or “studios”) should be held to build the intellectual capital around the recommendations contained in the report.
- The Task Force should explicitly monitor progress in the area of coordination, ensuring that designated entities are prepared to carry the plan forward after the Task Force ceases operation.
- The Task Force should issue a progress report on first year implementation before going out of business.



## **HOW CAN ACCOUNTABILITY BE ASSURED?**

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**The region must hold itself accountable to keep the promises it makes regarding the bright future that is represented by this cultural action plan.**

The Task Force will monitor progress during the first year and issue its progress report to the community. Each year thereafter, new targets should be established for the cultural action plan and the realization of those targets must be assessed by the designated agency responsible for plan coordination. An annual scorecard on plan implementation will be an integral part of demonstrating that the cultural sector can deliver on its promises.

In addition, there must be a continuing role for the public – those who work in the cultural sector, those who volunteer, those who are consumers, and those who believe that local arts, culture, history, and heritage are critical ingredients for their children and their communities. Everyone must have a stake in continuing to set the cultural agenda from year to year and sharing pride in its accomplishment.

**This constitutes the Executive Summary of the Richmond Region Cultural Action Plan.**