



Number 14

*Join Us in Our
Continuing Discussions*

What are the necessary ingredients for successful community planning? And what are some steps for gaining much needed input and support from the broadest range of stakeholders? Who are your best partners and collaborators?

We're interested in hearing from you on this topic. Send an e-mail to info@wolfkeens.com or fax a response to 617.679.9700.

We'll post your comments in the Publications section of our web site, located at www.wolfkeens.com.

Working Paper

Community Planning: *The New Context at Play*

Marc Goldring
*Vice President
Wolf, Keens & Company*

Much ink has been devoted to the rise of the so-called “creative class” and its potential impact on the revitalization of cities. As part of this trend, governors, mayors, and business leaders are paying increased attention to arts and culture. New building programs, expanded cultural tourism, increased cultural participation, improved arts education, and innovative economic development initiatives have all grown out of planning that has arts and culture at its core.

Such trends are welcome at a time of extraordinary financial pressure on artists and cultural organizations of all sizes and types. But they do not simply represent a return to good times and business as usual. Cultural institutions are being forced to re-examine their missions and activities and relate them more explicitly to community goals that may have little to do with traditional concerns. At the same time, the emphasis on economic development has provided a rationale for including commercial ventures alongside nonprofit providers; the desire to enrich the lives of all citizens justifies the exploration of the role of avocational arts and cultural pursuits as central to building a community's creative ecology.

continued on page 2

What does this mean for community-based planning for arts and culture?

- Enhanced access to leadership: With more municipalities wanting to promote themselves as “creative economy-friendly,” there is greater access to senior government officials (mayors, county executives, council members), city planners, and directors of convention and visitors bureaus or chambers of commerce.
- Increased visibility and the need to produce results: Cultural planning has a higher profile and visibility. But leaders expect to see concrete results within very short time horizons that can leave little time for thoughtful dialogue.
- Fighting miscommunication: Civic leaders may have limited experience in the workings of the cultural sector, just as representatives of the cultural sector may be ignorant of the challenges faced by business leaders and elected officials. Poor communication mixed with heightened expectations can become a recipe for failure.

For those undertaking cultural planning, we recommend keeping the following in mind:

- 1.) Align cultural planning goals with larger community goals. Only a small segment of any community will

focus on a cultural plan. But if its goals and outcomes address other community challenges and align with a city plan or widely supported initiatives, it is more likely to be noticed and, ultimately, supported.

Making connections to those leading these other planning efforts and meeting their timetables is crucial.

- 2.) Use benchmarking and competition as an incentive to action. Every community wants to be better than its competition. Provide information to show where it is deficient and a glide path for how it can surpass others.
- 3.) Enshrine small victories into a larger vision. A plan that is too ambitious and long-term will be forgotten. A plan that is too timid will be ignored. Make sure that the long-term vision is ambitious but that there are small steps that are easily achievable along the way.
- 4.) Enlist the media as a partner early in the process. A cultural plan's success can be significantly enhanced by a fired-up media. Strong editorial support and news stories can be supplemented by surveys and other efforts by local media partners.

We invited three individuals to survey the community planning landscape from their vantage points and to report what they see.

Penelope McPhee

President, Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation

Cultural plans, like New Year's resolutions, rise or fall in their implementation. What are the characteristics of communities that find the energy, resources, and commitment to implement a plan effectively? What distinguishes plans that transform communities from those that sit on a shelf in the office of the local cultural czar?

A History of Planning A cultural planning process will find little traction in a community that has no track record in bringing diverse constituencies together to create a vision for the future. A city that has a history of successful civic planning, whether around housing or parks or transportation, will be better equipped to drive a cultural plan to completion than one where plans pile up but are never executed.

Credible Leaders/Diverse Champions. To steer the plan to realization, leaders of cultural institutions must have established credibility over time in the wider civic arena. They need to be perceived as understanding and caring about the whole community, not simply their own concerns. When they have offered their talent and expertise in the pursuit of other significant community-wide goals, they are able to attract other leaders to be champions of their cause.

It's the Audience, Stupid. In the end, a cultural plan must touch the lives of individuals. It must capture the passion, spirit, and imagination not only of civic leaders, but of community residents. It can't just be a grand vision. It must paint a picture of a future in which every member of the community can see himself or herself.

Bernard Kincaid, J.D., Ph.D

Mayor, City of Birmingham, Alabama

An ongoing challenge to every element of modern culture has been the issue of diversity and inclusion. Strategies that have stressed cultural educational opportunities focusing on integrating the past, present, and future, the importance of social responsibility, and partnerships that engage people, seem to have experienced a greater degree of success. These strategies tend to be neither right nor wrong as long as they are an appropriate fit for their community's strengths, challenges, and vision.

The recognition and coexistence of a variety of cultural assets are imperative for the growth and economic development of our communities and should be woven into the planning and/or redevelopment process. As the diversity of our communities increases, there must be a greater focus on community cultural planning that includes reconsideration of the cultural audience of the community and strengthening infra-

structure to assist the cultural sector. Growth and action toward understanding cultural diversity has extraordinary advantages. Implementing inclusive, comprehensive initiatives that raise visibility and promote culture recognition and diversity can foster the economic development of our communities.

We, in Birmingham, have a rich history of bonding and bridging the cultural divide. Sharon Zukin, author of *The Cultures of Cities*, contends that, "culture was used to legitimize the unequal benefits of economic growth." However, as Mayor, I am aware of the work of our community advocates in supporting economic growth and heightened cultural awareness. We work together to reach out to all segments of our society and create spaces where diverse residents can come together to hammer out a common vision for inclusion and social change.

Pamela Wheelock

*Executive Vice President and CFO, Minnesota Sports & Entertainment,
Parent Company of the Minnesota Wild NHL Franchise*

For the average person, the distinction between for-profit entertainment and nonprofit arts and cultural opportunities may be irrelevant. Whether someone in our community goes to the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra at the Ordway or a Paul McCartney concert at the Xcel Energy Center—that consumer wants to be entertained and have a positive experience.

There is competition for disposable income in communities and consumers make choices. For-profit and nonprofits alike need to create a relationship with patrons and fans that is based in a strong sense of value—people must believe the cost of participation delivers strong value. The best run organizations seek to strengthen this proposition and good cultural planning can help by fostering a strong sense of excitement and opportunity.

Arts, culture, and entertainment organizations often operate in close physical proximity, depend on similar

infrastructure for business operations, and seek to build support in the surrounding community. Perhaps one of the untapped opportunities in cultural planning is to exploit these similarities. Collaboration across sectors can be mutually beneficial.

Beyond human resources and payroll functions, investments in ticketing systems, marketing campaigns, and facility management and maintenance might all be shared. Often one organization may have excess capacity that could be extended to meet the needs of others, resulting in improved operating efficiencies for both for-profit and nonprofit arts, culture, and entertainment businesses.

In the end, the best strategy may be to ignore whether an organization is for-profit or nonprofit and embrace an entrepreneurial approach, seeking partnerships with those who can be most helpful.



HAVE YOU SUBSCRIBED?

Stories of the Week is a free service from Wolf, Keens & Company that has previously only been available to our clients.

Each week, we identify articles from around the world that we think will be of interest to our diverse client base. The articles are summarized in a sentence or two and a web link is provided.

We have received so many favorable comments about this service that we have decided to offer it to a wider selection of colleagues and friends.

If you would like to have a preview of Stories of the Week, visit the "What's New" section of our website. To subscribe, simply send an e-mail to us at subscribe@wolfkeens.com.

Learn more about the work we do at www.wolfkeens.com, where you can print additional copies of this and other issues of the highly regarded *Working Paper*.



Wolf, Keens & Company

10 Rogers Street, River Court, Suite 102
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142