

**THE CREATIVE ECOSYSTEM  
OF ULSTER COUNTY, NY  
AND ENVIRONS**

*An environmental scan, conducted by Seifter Associates of New York City  
January – July, 2008*

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## INTRODUCTION

In December 2007, the Community Creativity Foundation (CCF), a newly formed Ulster County-based philanthropic enterprise, retained Seifter Associates, a New York City-based consulting firm, to conduct an environmental scan of the creative ecosystem of Ulster County and its environs.

CCF's mission is "to build and expand connections and collaborations among the cultural, educational, human service, business, wellness and spiritual communities" and "to create new opportunities for organizations to offer arts-based cultural and educational programs to their local communities" with an initial focus in and around Ulster County. <sup>1</sup>

Aware of the disparity between its relatively modest initial operating resources and the depth of need in the creative community, CCF believed it could maximize its impact by developing highly targeted and effective philanthropic strategies; such efforts, in turn, required a greater contextual understanding of its region's creative ecosystem. CCF selected Seifter Associates (SA) for this project based on its 15-year track record of helping businesses, governments and the non-profit sector develop creative leadership initiatives, effective organizational strategies, strong resource partnerships, and dynamic new community-based programs.

An environmental scan – which by definition is significantly less in scope than a comprehensive assessment or planning study – is designed to take in the big picture and identify key issues, trends, opportunities and challenges. In commissioning this scan, CCF identified two key objectives beyond the development of specific recommendations regarding its own philanthropic activities:

- To help focus local and regional efforts in ways that will contribute to a healthy and vibrant creative ecosystem throughout the region;
- To develop a set of specific actionable recommendations that players at the grass roots level (particularly leaders of arts organizations and community leaders) can begin to implement relatively quickly and – to the extent possible – at modest cost.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://communitycreativity.org/>

The primary source material for this environmental scan has been the direct input of key players and stakeholders in the region's creative ecosystem. Over the course of more than 30 hours, wide-ranging confidential interviews conducted by SA Principal Harvey Seifter (and in most cases accompanied by CCF Executive Director Judy Levine) with artists, directors of arts organizations, educators, public policy-makers, funders and community leaders. A complete list of those interviewed is appended to this report.

The interviews were augmented by a review of materials, reports and studies from Alliance for the Arts, Americans for the Arts, Chamber of Commerce of Ulster County, Columbia County Council on the Arts, Delaware Valley Arts Alliance, Green County Council on the Arts, Marist College Bureau of Economic Research, Orange County Arts, Pattern for Progress, Putnam Arts Council, SUNY New Paltz, Ulster County Arts Council, Ulster County Legislative Committee on Arts, Ulster County Economic Development Corporation, Ulster County Planning Board and Woodstock Arts Consortium, among others. The findings of the environmental scan were presented to regional arts and community leaders at the Cunneen-Hackett Cultural Center in Poughkeepsie, hosted by the Dutchess County Arts Council, on April 14, 2008. The current report, commissioned jointly by the Community Creativity Foundation and the Dutchess County Arts Council, and supported in part by funds from the Dyson Foundation, summarizes the findings of the scan and elaborates on them with specific action recommendations.

This report is addressed to a wide range of stakeholders including artists, leaders of arts organizations, public officials and private sector community leaders. All readers are urged to reflect on the broad perspective of the Ulster County creative ecosystem outlined in the report's opening sections. Hopefully, each reader will also be alert for opportunities to act on the recommendations detailed in the report's final section.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the state of Ulster County's creative ecosystem, exploring the interrelationships between Ulster's creative artists, their audience, and the infrastructure that supports the arts and brings art to the public. In a thriving creative ecosystem, these three elements form an integrated, economically vibrant self-sustaining system.

Ulster has an unusual abundance of artists and small arts organizations coupled with a strikingly slender support base. The result is sector-wide undercapitalization. The county's creative leaders work in relative isolation due to the system's decentralized and regional nature, and its general lack of support infrastructure. These factors limit the creative community's ability to leverage both resources and the county's strengths (its cultural, historical and natural resources; outstanding universities; proximity to New York City, etc.).

Overall, Ulster's creative ecosystem is challenged by deficits in the areas of connectivity, infrastructure and resources. There is little collaboration among arts organizations, and few partnerships with the educational system, businesses and civic institutions. Connections with New York City-based weekend residents are limited as is coordination and cooperation among local jurisdictions. Planning and economic development have not been integrated into a broader regional framework. The infrastructure – arts organizations, service organizations, funders, civic partnerships, work spaces and access to capital – is fragile and underdeveloped.

Resources are inadequate, partially because there are virtually no corporate headquarters, few foundations and individual patrons, and public support is limited. However, to a significant degree, Ulster's resource deficit should also be seen as a symptom of its connectivity and infrastructure deficits. Over time, strategies that address these deficits will speak to the resource deficit as well by strengthening public and private sector support for the arts and artists, and by building the organizational capacity and self-sufficiency of creative enterprises.

The report makes the following key recommendations:

- **Strengthen artistic and organizational ties at the grass roots level.** Initiate and support opportunities for creative leaders to interact; and expand

resource-based partnerships, creative collaborations and mergers between organizations.

- **Leverage existing strengths to achieve short-term gains through strategic investments.** Collaborate with nearby organizationally strong non-profit partners (such as the Dutchess County Arts Council, SUNY New Paltz and Pattern for Progress) to strengthen Ulster’s creative infrastructure. Invest in professional development, research and pilot projects.
- **Foster the development of creative ecosystem planning and collaboration at the regional level.** Engage the public sector, create regional initiatives and develop collaborative model projects in cultural tourism and the innovation economy. Integrate New York City into the region’s creative ecosystem through new partnerships, model projects, technical assistance and regional planning.

Fortunately, many of the steps required to begin the process of strengthening Ulster’s creative ecosystem can be accomplished relatively quickly, through individual and local initiatives, and at modest cost. Other steps, of course, will require a larger scale of support, higher level buy-in from public and private sector leadership, and longer term approaches to implementation.

## THE VALUE OF A FLOURISHING CREATIVE ECOSYSTEM

While generally understood to refer to the system from which creative activity emerges, there are many specific definitions of the “creative ecosystem.” One of the earliest uses of the phrase appears in D.M. Harrington’s groundbreaking analysis of the impact of fundamentally social factors on individual creativity. Some of the social factors he referenced were: the opportunity for experimentation and exploration, a non-threatening atmosphere that supports taking risks and making mistakes, exciting or unusual contexts in which activities can take place, an environment in which diversity of opinions and the creativity of others are respected, and the opportunity for generative ideas and thoughts that are greeted openly.<sup>2</sup> Richard Florida’s more recent perspective is based on a vision of an all-encompassing community network of “arts and culture, nightlife, the music scene, restaurants, artists and designers, innovators, entrepreneurs, affordable spaces, lively neighborhoods, spirituality, education, density, public spaces and third places.”<sup>3</sup>

**This report uses the term “creative ecosystem” in a very specific way, referring to the set of dynamic local or regional interrelationships between creative artists, their “audiences”, and the infrastructure that supports artists and brings their work to the public. (The term “audience”, in its broadest sense, encompasses the community in which artists live and work. It also serves as a primary market for their work and as a potential source of engaged volunteers.)**

A healthy ecosystem is one in which both the intrinsic and instrumental values of the arts are broadly recognized within the community, and the contributions of artists are widely appreciated by the general population.<sup>4</sup> In such communities, artists tend to be deeply woven into the fabric of civic life as engaged citizens and respected, empowered constituents. Ample numbers of community members are engaged in the arts as audience members, patrons, volunteers and contributors. Typically, these mutually reinforcing cultural norms and values are fostered by critical infrastructure – a rich network of public and private

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<sup>2</sup> Harrington, D. M (1990), ‘The Ecology of Human Creativity: A psychological perspective’. In M A Runco and R S Albert (eds.) *Theories of Creativity* London: Sage Publications.

<sup>3</sup> <http://creativeclass.typepad.com/thecreativityexchange/2007/12/the-memphis-man.html>

<sup>4</sup> The terms “intrinsic” and “instrumental” used in this context are drawn from the analysis contained in the Wallace Foundation/Rand Corporate “Gifts of the Muse”, [http://www.wallacefoundation.org/NR/rdonlyres/5A501171-C822-447E-9FE7-0A2082EA54C2/0/Gifts\\_of\\_the\\_MuseText.pdf](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/NR/rdonlyres/5A501171-C822-447E-9FE7-0A2082EA54C2/0/Gifts_of_the_MuseText.pdf) (see Appendix B)

institutions that provide the kinds of opportunities and resources needed to sustain a dynamic cycle of artist/audience relationships.

In a thriving creative ecosystem, these three elements – artists, audiences and infrastructure – form a vigorous, integrated, self-sustaining system that advances the promise of lively civic future by providing:

- access to the intrinsic benefits of the arts through the contributions of local and regional artists;
- an economically vibrant creative sector that drives local and regional economic growth as artists directly and indirectly support local businesses, serve as engines to revive downtowns and riverfronts, promote tourism, attract other creative enterprises, etc;
- key resources to fuel 21<sup>st</sup> Century innovation strategies based on education, workforce development for the creativity-based economy, and the development of creativity incubators.

Of course, flourishing creative ecosystems rarely just “happen”. From 15<sup>th</sup> Century Florence to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Brooklyn, a combination of objective circumstances and strategic support choices by community leaders (driven by enlightened self-interest) have fueled the emergence of economically vibrant and culturally transformational artistic communities.

Public policies and private initiatives that focus on practical measures, leverage existing community strengths, and close gaps in critical infrastructure strongly encourage the emergence of vibrant creative ecosystems. Using this model can strengthen the ability of arts organizations and community leaders in Ulster County to make informed choices and strategic decisions.



## KEY FINDINGS

### A. Six Principal Characteristics of the Ulster County Creative Ecosystem

1. Even the most cursory investigation into the creative ecosystem of Ulster County and its environs reveals that **the region is home to an extraordinarily large and diverse population of artists**, working in many different styles, forms and disciplines. While hard data of the number of working artists is hard to come by, one indicator is the number of arts and cultural organizations doing business in Ulster County. The numbers tell the story: in 2005, the Ulster County Arts Council identified 156 Ulster County-based such organizations<sup>5</sup> in a county with only 182,742 residents! Small wonder that a 2007 Business Week survey identified Kingston (Ulster County's seat and largest city) as ranking 5<sup>th</sup> in the entire United States in art establishments per capita, and 6<sup>th</sup> in its overall ranking of "best places to live for artists."<sup>6</sup>
2. **Ulster County's many artists and arts organizations are confronted by a strikingly slender support base.** The county has virtually no corporate headquarters and very few charitable foundations (with even fewer prepared to make the arts a philanthropic priority). Ulster arts organizations do receive support from the New York State Council on the Arts, either directly or through the Decentralization Program. In 2008, for the first time in recent years, the Ulster County Legislature appropriated arts funds to be distributed through a peer panel review process. The Ulster County Legislature and Decentralization Programs are both administered by the Dutchess County Arts Council. Public support for artists and arts organizations remains at very modest levels. Individual giving also lags; Ulster County's arts organizations have rarely been able to attract individuals with "deep pockets" to their boards.
3. **As a result, Ulster's creative ecosystem is characterized by overall sector-wide undercapitalization and a scarcity of programmatic financial resources.** The vast majority of Ulster County's many arts organizations are tiny artist-operated entities, struggling to function

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hudsonvalleybusinessnews.com/archive/071607/0716070001.php>

<sup>6</sup> [http://images.businessweek.com/ss/07/02/0226\\_artists/index\\_01.htm](http://images.businessweek.com/ss/07/02/0226_artists/index_01.htm)

under severe resource constraints. Most experience shortages in funds for programs, operations, organizational development and capital improvements. For many, if not most, survival and subsistence are daily preoccupations. Only a handful of Ulster County arts organizations have annual operating budgets that exceed \$250,000; most have annual budgets of less than \$100,000 and many operate on less than \$25,000 per year. The scarcity of resources manifests itself at the high end of the scale as well. The 2006 operating budgets of the six largest Ulster County-based arts organizations averaged only \$333,142. In Dutchess County, directly across the river from Ulster, the 2006 operating budgets of the six largest arts organizations averaged \$647,252 – nearly twice as much.<sup>7</sup> As a result, even the largest Ulster organizations are chronically understaffed and find it difficult to devote time, energy and financial resources to planning, professional development, artist support services, collaborations and the like.

4. Ulster’s principal arts organizations are headed by a group of dedicated, entrepreneurial, tenacious and talented creative leaders. **However, arts leaders are often stymied by the lack of supportive infrastructure available to them.** Huge gaps in leadership development opportunities, advocacy and professional services exist throughout the region and they are particularly acute in Ulster. According to data drawn from the Alliance for the Arts website, there is not a single locally or regionally-based organization currently focused on serving the needs of Ulster County artists or arts professionals in such key areas as advocacy, audience services, legal counseling, training, marketing, research and planning, or technology support.<sup>8</sup> Opportunities for collaboration or even peer interaction among the sector’s leaders are few and far between.

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<sup>7</sup> Data is from publicly available 990’s filed by the organizations. Ulster data excludes UPAC (a locally-based division of the Dutchess County-based Bardavon). Dutchess data excludes Bardavon (because its operations are also based in Ulster County), and Dia: Beacon (a locally-based division of the New York City Dia Foundation). Both Dutchess and Ulster data exclude colleges and universities. Its worth noting that the net impact of including such data would be to further underline the gap between the two counties. Its also worth noting that even the much higher Dutchess County figure is strikingly low when compared with national averages.

<sup>8</sup>[http://nystatearts.org/aso/orgs?search\\_type=aso%5ftype&aso\\_type=artist&artist\\_service=&discipline=&service\\_county=Ulster&page=6](http://nystatearts.org/aso/orgs?search_type=aso%5ftype&aso_type=artist&artist_service=&discipline=&service_county=Ulster&page=6)

5. In an encouraging trend, over the past two years, Ulster’s community leaders have begun to demonstrate **a heightened awareness of the importance of the creative sector to the regional economy, and of the critical roles played by artists and arts organizations in that sector.** One manifestation of that trend is the recent decision of the Ulster County Legislature to appropriate funds for modest program-related grants to selected Ulster County arts organizations. Another is the designation of the creative economy in general, and the arts in particular, as “key industries” in the recent “Ulster Tomorrow” economic development plan produced jointly by the Ulster County Development Corporation, the Ulster County Industrial Development Agency, and the Ulster County Planning Board. The report identifies the “cultivation and promotion of a thriving arts and creative export sector” as a strategic goal central to the future economic development and competitive positioning of Ulster County.<sup>9</sup> The modest “action steps” contained in the report’s technical annex<sup>10</sup>, though falling short of addressing the principal challenges confronting the county’s creative ecosystem, are certainly steps in the right direction. However, in the 17 months since the recommendations were issued, neither concrete initiatives nor implementation strategies to support the creative economy have yet emerged.
  
6. **Ulster County’s creative ecosystem is regional and diffuse, rather than local and centralized.** Creative activity is geographically dispersed throughout the county, with significant concentrations of artists, arts organizations, cultural institutions and creative entrepreneurs forming distinct (but far from self-sufficient) communities in Kingston, Woodstock, New Paltz and, to a lesser degree in Ellenville, Phoenicia, Stone Ridge and Saugerties. Not surprisingly in a decentralized and thinly populated region, the Ulster creative ecosystem spreads beyond the borders of Ulster County as well – Ulster artists routinely collaborate with institutions in Dutchess County and beyond; there is a large regional overlap in advertising markets, media outlets and audiences; and New York City inevitably exerts a powerful gravitational pull on the Ulster creative community. As a result, the county’s efforts to support and strengthen its creative ecosystem are

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.ulsterny.com/ulst\\_tomorrow/common/FINAL\\_UT\\_Report\\_for\\_Comp\\_Circulation.pdf](http://www.ulsterny.com/ulst_tomorrow/common/FINAL_UT_Report_for_Comp_Circulation.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.ulsterny.com/ulst\\_tomorrow/common/FINAL\\_Tech\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ulsterny.com/ulst_tomorrow/common/FINAL_Tech_Report.pdf)

severely challenged by the need to address the complex issues of an unusually large number of creative communities, many of which see one another as competitors for scarce resources, and some of which lie beyond the County's jurisdiction. There are no purely local ways to leverage the opportunities or address the challenges facing the ecosystem.

## **B. Other Significant Contextual Strengths and Opportunities**

Beyond the positive factors noted above, a number of other significant regional environmental strengths stand out, notably:

- The region's extraordinary richness of cultural, historical and natural resources, which make it an attractive place to visit, live and work;
- An extensive and excellent regional network of colleges and universities, including several with global stature in the arts and innovation;
- The presence of the Dutchess County Arts Council, a dynamic, well-managed and successful institution, which is a key anchor for artists, arts organizations and arts communities throughout the entire region;
- Ulster County's proximity to New York City, America's creative and financial capital, generating an unparalleled set of potential opportunities for artistic collaboration and resource development. New York City is one of the world's largest markets for cultural consumption, producing considerable commercial and export opportunities.

## **C. Three Key Deficits**

The overall state of the creative ecosystem of Ulster County and its environs can best be understood in terms of an interrelated series of three deficits:

1. **Connectivity Deficit:** By definition, a healthy ecosystem requires a high degree of interconnectivity among and between its key elements. The environmental scan revealed very little such interconnectivity in

and around Ulster County. Examples of the kinds of interconnections which were either entirely absent or strikingly underdeveloped:

- Creative and resource-based collaborations among arts organizations;
- Partnerships between arts organizations, the educational system, businesses and civic institutions;
- Connections between year-round resident artists and arts organizations, and New York City-based weekend residents
- Coordination and cooperation among local jurisdictions
- Integration of planning into a broader regional framework

Until these gaps are effectively addressed, it will be very difficult for Ulster County to reap the benefits of a healthy creative ecosystem.

- 2. Infrastructure Deficit:** The tapestry of arts organizations, service organizations, funders, civic partnerships, work spaces and access to capital in and around Ulster County is fragile and underdeveloped. Local and regional arts organizations – even the very largest – are quite small by any objective national measure. The creative community has very few opportunities for interaction (which exacerbates the connectivity deficit noted above); professional development opportunities are few and far between; and (with the exception of those provided by the Dutchess County Arts Council) arts council services are lacking in Ulster.
- 3. Resource Deficit:** As noted elsewhere in this report, the entire arts and culture sector in Ulster County is plagued by undercapitalization. Based on key economic indicators such as arts organization size and the local availability of support infrastructure to artistic entrepreneurs, it is clear that Ulster’s arts and culture sector lags far behind those of Dutchess and Columbia Counties economically – a gap which significantly exceeds the gap in the overall economic position of these

counties.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the extreme undercapitalization of the arts and culture sector in Ulster County can only partially be explained by broader economic conditions and trends in the community.

**To a significant degree, Ulster's resource deficit should also be viewed as a condition specific to the County's arts and culture sector, a symptom of the connectivity and infrastructure deficits noted above. Encouragingly, many positive steps to begin the process and prime the pump of systemic vitality, can be accomplished relatively quickly, through individual and local initiatives, and at modest cost. Other steps, of course, will require larger scale and higher level buy-in from public and private sector leadership, and longer term approaches to implementation. Key recommendations for both kinds of actions are contained in the following section.**

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<sup>11</sup> For example, between 2001 and 2005, per capital income in Ulster grew by 16.58%; in Dutchess by 14.55%; in Columbia by 14.67%. During the same years, housing value appreciated by 3.84% (Ulster), 3.99% (Dutchess) and 3.72% (Columbia). Ulster is certainly more economically challenged than its neighbors, as evidenced by the gap in per capital income (in 2005, Ulster's \$29,881 stands in contrast to Dutchess' \$36,467 and Columbia's \$31,937). Still, the creative sector gap remains disproportionate to the overall gap in economic performance, and its hard to avoid the conclusion that other factors are at work. These statistics are drawn from the 2006 Economic Report of the Hudson Valley prepared by the Marist College Bureau of Economic Research. See [http://www.marist.edu/management/pdfs/report\\_06.pdf](http://www.marist.edu/management/pdfs/report_06.pdf)

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. **Strengthen artistic and organizational ties at the grass roots level.**

In general, collaboration may be the single most effective and readily available strategy for Ulster County's artists, organizations and community leaders as they seek to strengthen their creative ecosystem. With expanded partnerships, these players will directly address the connectivity deficit. Over time, the strong relationships resulting from increased collaboration will significantly offset the impacts of the infrastructure and resource deficits.

Promising strategies for local leaders include:

#### 1. **Identifying and removing barriers to effective grass roots collaboration**

- **Barrier:** Lack of opportunities for leaders to interact
- **Solution:** Convene periodic informal gatherings for the leaders of Ulster's arts community. Regular get-togethers in different areas of Ulster can go a long way toward creating a context from which collaboration can emerge. Meetings might feature presentations or structured discussions on topics of shared interest and concern, and should always include ample time for relaxed and informal social exchange. These gatherings could be convened by virtually any community leader (or group of leaders) willing to devote the time and minimal financial resources to the organizational task.
  
- **Barrier:** Arts leaders lack the institutional resources to devote to the development of collaborations.
- **Solution:** Create very simple and modest ways to help arts organizations offset the direct costs they incur when their leaders invest time, energy and money in the development of collaborations – a process that is inherently labor intensive and time consuming. Very small grants of \$250 - \$500 would go a long way toward reimbursing chronically understaffed and financial constrained organizations for staff time spent in planning sessions, travel, etc. For example, a

\$300 grant could support the cost of a leader's attending three planning sessions of 2 hours each (at \$30/hour) plus travel time and mileage reimbursement. Funds could come from supportive individuals, arts organization Boards (by "passing the hat" at Board meetings), or from one or more institutional funders. In addition to the providing direct benefit to grantees, such grants would have the added benefit of helping to promote the value of collaborative planning to the community as a whole.

**2. Building new grass roots partnerships and strategic alliances.**

- In environments of scarcity, resource-sharing can be a very effective grass-roots strategy; one that is surely underutilized by the region's creative enterprises. Taking the Woodstock Arts Consortium as a successful local model, there are many formal and informal ways in which even the smallest arts organizations can help one another through joint or cooperative purchasing, barter, shared back-office operations and the like.
- Wherever mission-appropriate and operationally sensible, organizations which have already developed successful resource-based partnerships should consider the potential benefit of strategic alliances, joint business ventures and even full-blown mergers. The Bardavon/UPAC/Mid-Hudson Philharmonic merger is an outstanding example of this approach; three regionally significant organizations were able to strengthen their organizational positions, expand their creative output and enhance their level of service to the community through a well-designed and executed strategic alliance. Some organizations are artistically valuable but structurally inadequate. Artistic and community leaders struggling to sustain such organizations should carefully assess the relevance of this option to their situations.

**3. Developing genuine creative collaborations among creative enterprises**

Most collaborations between Ulster County arts organizations are grounded in resource-sharing, such as those between presenting organizations and performing ensembles. While important in an operational sense, these collaborations tend to be transactional in nature, and do relatively little to address the connectivity deficit.



The development of project-based creative collaborations among arts organizations, and between arts organizations and culturally-oriented enterprises that engage the energies and passions of the community have great potential, and should be encouraged. These might include educational, environmental, human services, wellness and spiritual organizations. By exploring and building on shared history, culture and values many new opportunities are likely to arise.

By moving beyond transactional cooperation to embrace creative collaboration, small organizations and even individual artists can take advantage of a powerful grass roots strategy to build connectivity within the creative community and extending outward to their audiences.

**B. Leverage existing strengths to achieve short-term gains through strategic investments.**

In Ulster's severely undercapitalized environment, every new expenditure should be seen as an investment, and available dollar needs to be invested in ways that will produce maximize positive impact on the creative ecosystem. In general, investment strategies that focus on the stabilization and strengthening of existing and well-functioning creative enterprises and support organizations are likely to prove more effective than those that seek to launch or attract new ventures, or to resuscitate moribund enterprises.

Incremental strategies that build on small and practical initial steps, will, if carefully targeted, prove to be an effective way to address the deficits currently challenging Ulster's creative enterprises. The importance of modest first steps that have actual "on the ground" impact should not be overlooked. They are indispensable to the ultimate development of implementation mechanisms, which in turn will enable the more ambitious large-scale and long-term strategic initiatives recommended in Section C below.

Incremental strategies that address the following key priorities are likely to have significant, beneficial and relatively short-term impact on the creative ecosystem:

## 1. Engaging partners to build the ecosystem

The basic idea is a simple one – focus on leveraging (and bolstering) the strengths of existing players in the creative ecosystem. Three non-profit institutions are already playing vital roles in the creative ecosystem of Ulster County; each has strong leadership, effective administrative capacity, a regional focus and the potential to do more than they are presently to contribute to the strengthening of the system:

- **The Dutchess County Arts Council (DCAC)**, one of the nation’s most comprehensive and best-run such organizations, which already provides a significant services to Ulster County arts organizations;
- **SUNY New Paltz**, which provides the region with exceptionally high quality creative programs and educational resources in the visual and performing arts, and makes community engagement a major focus;
- **Pattern for Progress**, a regional research, policy and planning organization for nine Hudson Valley counties, with a strong emphasis on leadership development and fostering collaboration;

Under the right circumstances (and subject, of course, to the availability of necessary funding), each is likely to give serious consideration to undertaking the kinds of incremental programmatic expansion that will help stabilize and strengthen the creative ecosystem of Ulster County. [Note: this is **not** meant to be an exclusive list; there are many other potential developmental partners and collaborative opportunities to engage them should be explored as well.]<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, it is worth considering whether Ulster Tomorrow’s modest set of approaches and implementation mechanisms for accomplishing strategy objective 12d: “Nurture a Creative Economy” might not benefit from explicit linkage to the more robust recommendations and implementation mechanisms accompanying Strategy 10: “Retain and Expand Existing Businesses”. Clearly, retaining and expanding existing enterprises is critical to the revitalization of the creative ecosystem, and the objective is far more likely to be achieved if the Ulster County Development Corporation, Ulster County Industrial Development Organization, Small Business Development Center, Hudson Valley Center for Innovation and the Ulster Chamber of Commerce – all currently marginal but potentially catalytic forces within the creative ecosystem -- can be brought to the table. See [http://www.ulsterny.com/ulst\\_tomorrow/common/FINAL\\_Tech\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ulsterny.com/ulst_tomorrow/common/FINAL_Tech_Report.pdf)

## **2. Finding ways to provide vital arts council services to Ulster County**

While the focus of the Dutchess County Arts Council is (not surprisingly) Dutchess County, its mission encompasses the entire Mid-Hudson Valley region and it has a 30 year track record of providing New York State Council on the Arts regrant services to Ulster County, as well as technical assistance for Ulster County artists and organizations.

In recent years, DCAC's Ulster role has grown to include other regranting programs including Ulster County Legislative funds and JP Morgan Chase grants. Indeed, DCAC is presently the only entity providing arts council services in Ulster County; it has been drawn into that role by the historic ineffectiveness (and recent virtual abandonment) of the Ulster County Arts Council.

DCAC is not presently funded to provide such services as direct support to Ulster arts organizations or individual artists, arts advocacy within Ulster, or broad based technical assistance to Ulster's creative entrepreneurs. The inherent limitation in how far DCAC can go in strengthening Ulster County's creative ecosystem is one of funding; to a lesser extent, political factors also play a role.

**The Ulster County creative ecosystem urgently needs expanded arts council services to help address all three of the key deficits identified in this report. It does not urgently need its own arts council, per se.**

Finding ways to fund DCAC or other regional centers of strength to expand arts council services in Ulster County is likely to be far quicker and more effective than recreating the virtually-defunct Ulster County Arts Council *and then* finding ways to fund its programs. The Dutchess/Ulster Community Foundation collaborative structure, which has proven to be an effective way for the community to address a similar set of challenges in a related arena, may provide a useful model.

## **3. Strengthening the capacity of creative enterprises to collaborate with one another, and with other community institutions**

- Investing in professional development for arts leaders will enormously strengthen these leaders' collaborative skills and the collaborative capacities of their institutions;
- Support for local pilot projects that model collaboration and connectivity will create positive incentives for creative enterprises to invest in collaborative planning and development, and beneficial opportunities to foster the behaviors of collaboration, while sparking the emergence of broader collaborative plans among the pilot project participants, as well as success stories and replicable models for broader impact.
- Research and planning around the development of Ulster's creativity economy will create new opportunities to broaden the conversation, and ultimately deepen the connection, between arts organizations and community leadership. By moving beyond the traditional fundraising oriented focus of arts/business interactions, both the process and outcomes of research and planning will allow arts leaders to engage public and private sector leaders in a context that's *not* about fundraising. Ulster Tomorrow wisely identifies research and planning as key to its creative economy strategy and indeed, UCDC, UCIDC and the UC Planning Board are all important potential partners in that process. However, the specific research and planning agenda needs considerable analysis and refinement, and an implementation mechanism along with funding for implementation will need to be identified.

**C. Foster the development of creative ecosystem planning and collaboration at the regional level**

The development of the County's creative ecosystem has historically been viewed as a local endeavor, with some modest degree of collaboration between Ulster and Dutchess County institutions. However, the information gathered over the course of this environmental scan makes it clear that the natural scale of the Ulster County creative ecosystem is regional<sup>13</sup>, and the task of bringing Ulster's artists, audiences,

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<sup>13</sup> Analyzing or fixing the precise geographic composition of regional creativity planning is beyond the scope of this environmental scan. Clearly, at the very least, the natural boundaries of the region's creative

communities, infrastructure and resources into constructive alignment requires approaches that reach beyond any one town or county.

**1. Supporting a regional framework for collaboration and planning.**

Since there are no purely local ways for Ulster to develop an economically viable creative ecosystem, the development of collaboration and planning at the regional level is an imperative.

Broadly speaking, the same kinds of grass roots and small scale approaches to fostering collaborative opportunities recommended for the local level will prove beneficial at the regional level as well. These include creating and supporting opportunities for leaders to interact; exploring the potential benefits of strategic alliances; leveraging existing centers of strength; and targeting natural opportunities for model projects and initiatives. Cultural tourism is one area with enormous potential in this regard.

Another complementary approach is to seek opportunities to bring the region's creative leadership to the regional planning table around initiatives in related realms such as the environment, sustainability, and innovation.

Since a coherent regional approach to planning is only possible if many local jurisdictions find effective ways to work together, priority should be given to convening interested public sector leaders from throughout the region to develop an appropriate collaborative policy framework.

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ecosystem encompass both Ulster and Dutchess Counties – artists routinely collaborate with institutions in both counties; there is a large overlap in advertising markets, media outlets and audiences; the Dutchess County Arts Council provides a large and growing range of key services to both counties; Ulster/Dutchess collaboration in the philanthropic sector has grown considerably in recent years; and the 2007 merger of Dutchess County's Bardavon with Ulster's Performing Arts Center appears to have been a success, popular with local audiences and funders. Beyond Dutchess, many of those interviewed perceived logical links with Columbia, Greene and Orange Counties as well. Taking a more expansive approach, Pattern for Progress is a 43-year old regional policy and research institute that provides a collaborative planning framework encompassing Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester Counties. Finally, New York City has an enormous influence on the mid-Hudson Valley's economy, cultural development and creative endeavors; any comprehensive approach to strengthening the creative ecosystem of Ulster County will seek to integrate New York City more productively into the system. A flexible approach that looks at opportunities to strengthen the regional creative ecosystem on a case-by-case basis while always seeking to advance the broad cause of regional cooperation and collaboration, is likely to be the most fruitful way to approach these questions.

## 2. **Linking the region's arts, artists and creativity planning to New York City.**

New York City, one of the world's great centers for creativity and markets for creative products, is located only two hours away from Ulster County, but at present that proximity provides Ulster's artists and arts organizations with relatively few benefits. Integrating New York City into Ulster's regional planning framework will dramatically transform this situation, by opening new creative and marketing opportunities for Ulster's artists and arts organizations and creating opportunities to engage New York-based corporate and institutional arts funders. Priority should be given to:

- Encouraging creative and marketing-oriented collaborations between Ulster artists/arts organizations and the large numbers of New York City artists who are drawn to Ulster as a creative environment by its natural beauty, relaxed surroundings and inexpensive workspace.
- Encouraging New York City residents who own weekend and vacation homes in Ulster County to become involved with Ulster's arts organizations as customers and supporters.
- Organizing the region's creative resources in ways that can contribute to New York City's globally-oriented innovation economy (and thereby attract New York-based capital) through corporate retreats, conference centers, and arts-based innovation incubators.

Practical steps might include:

- Creating a regional on-line informational clearing house to connect local and New York City-based artist/arts organizations, to foster new creative and marketing-based collaborations;
- Technical assistance to help local artists and organizations identify niches and develop strategies to tap into potential collaborative opportunities with New York City arts organizations;

- Periodic “meet and greets” designed to introduce to potential New York City-based audiences and patrons with second homes in Ulster to local arts organizations;
- Technical assistance to help local arts organizations develop strategies to form learning-based partnerships with corporations, and to attract and integrate New York City-based board members;
- Modest grants to encourage collaborations that create opportunities to introduce Ulster artists and arts organizations into the New York City market;
- A feasibility study to explore the economic viability of developing one or more regional creativity centers for the New York corporate market.

**D. A Final Word**

Ulster County is one of the richest places in the country when it comes to artistic, cultural, historical, educational and environmental resources. At present, three key deficits – connectivity, infrastructure and financial resources – form barriers to the development of a dynamic, healthy creative ecosystem. Breaking down those barriers will generate exciting new levels of economic development and community engagement for Ulster residents. There are many accessible and affordable ways to accomplish this objective. Collaborations, communication, opportunities for professional and organizational development plus targeted financing form a pathway toward the development of a truly extraordinary 21<sup>st</sup> Century creative community in the mid-Hudson Valley.

## APPENDIX A

### Stakeholders Interviewed

Bryant Andrews	Artistic Director, Center for Creative Education
Nicole Andrews	Administrative Director, Center for Creative Education
Sheila Appel	Community Relations Director, IBM
Stuart Bigley	Executive Director, Unison Arts and Learning Center
Brendan Burke	Producing Artistic Director, Shadowland Theater
Carole Cowan	Music Department Chair, SUNY New Paltz
Kate Daley	Educator, Mid Hudson Children's Museum
Kurt Daw	Dean of Fine & Performing Arts, SUNY New Paltz
Lisa DiMarzo	Educator, Mid Hudson Children's Museum
Steven Evans	Dia Foundation, Assistant Director for Beacon
Ed Glisson	Executive Director, Mid Hudson Children's Museum
Diana M. Gurieva	Executive Vice President, Dyson Foundation
Benjamin Krevolin	President, Dutchess County Arts Council
Gary Kvistad	Founder & CEO, Woodstock Chimes
Nancy Lautenbach	Director of Arts Services, SUNY New Paltz
Judy Levine	Executive Director, Community Creativity Foundation
Cynthia Lowe	Director, Ulster County Community Foundation
Iain Machell	Former Board President, Ulster County Arts Council
Evry Mann	Executive Director, Center for Creative Education
Ronald Marquette	Chair, Ulster County Development Corporation
Lance Matteson	President, Ulster County Development Corporation
Elisa Pritzker	Former Director, Highland Cultural Center
Andrea Reynolds	President/CEO, Dutchess County Community Foundation
Burnelle Roser	Assistant Director, SUNY Ulster College Foundation
Jennifer Schwartz	Deputy Director, Ulster County Planning Board
Chris Silva	Executive Director, Bardavon/UPAC/Hudson Valley Phil.
Carla Smith	Executive Director, Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild
Vindora Wixom	Executive Director, Arts Society of Kingston
Reva Wolf	Professor of Art History, SUNY New Paltz



## APPENDIX B

From *Gifts of the Muse*<sup>14</sup> regarding instrumental and intrinsic benefits of the arts:

“ The arts are said to improve test scores and self-esteem among the young. They are said to be an antidote to myriad social problems, such as involvement in gangs and drugs. They are said to be good for business and a stimulus to the tourist industry and thus to local economies. They are even said to be a mechanism for urban revitalization. The argument, in short, seeks to justify the arts in terms of their *instrumental* benefits to society.

As we explained in Chapter One, intrinsic benefits refer to effects inherent in the arts experience that add value to people’s lives. Obvious examples are the sheer joy one can feel in response to a piece of music or to movements in dance or to a painting. Beyond these immediate effects, there are personal effects that develop with recurrent aesthetic experiences, such as growth in one’s capacity to feel, perceive, and judge for oneself and growth in one’s capacity to participate imaginatively in the lives of others and to empathize with others. And some works go beyond such personal effects, providing a common experience that draws people together and influences the way the community perceives itself, thereby creating intrinsic benefits that accrue to the public.”

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.wallacefoundation.org/NR/rdonlyres/5A501171-C822-447E-9FE7-0A2082EA54C2/0/Gifts\\_of\\_the\\_MuseText.pdf](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/NR/rdonlyres/5A501171-C822-447E-9FE7-0A2082EA54C2/0/Gifts_of_the_MuseText.pdf)