Arts, culture, and creativity are among the core elements that make Washtenaw County a special place. Look at any of the “best of” awards that the communities in this county regularly win and chances doubtless be listed a reference to the area’s high quality of life, with its cultural assets typically highlighted.

Arts and culture have a long history in Washtenaw County, with groups such as the University Musical Society and the Ann Arbor Art Center reaching their 100th anniversaries and beyond. This longevity and the lively appearance of the cultural community, however, mask the true fragility of this sector. Peer behind the polished facades of many cultural organizations or talk to the artists practicing their craft here and you’ll find a vulnerable industry struggling to survive.

This Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan is a response to that challenge.
Cultural Plan Highlights
The Washtenaw County Cultural Plan is a strategic vision of the future that includes 34 Actions to be implemented over a 5-year period. These Actions are organized into six areas:

- Lifelong Arts & Education
- Cultural Facilities
- Methodology
- Communications, Audience Development, and Advocacy
- Creative Economy
- Capacity Building, Funding, and Investment

O C T O B E R  2 0 0 8

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Make Arts and Culture an Integral Part of K-12 Education Throughout Washtenaw County
- From the master plan, the Arts Alliance will emphasize the participation of cultural, community-based planning effort that is an organized, ongoing, and comprehensive process. Engagement opportunities will expose students to cultures different than their own and prepare them to face an increasingly diverse 21st century. Authentic arts education is critical to the development of students.
- Increase the Visibility of the Cultural Sector Through Collaborative Marketing
- What! Cultural activities will capture greater visibility and generate increased revenue when marketed in joint advertising and promotional venues. A coordinated cultural web portal will make finding cultural information of any kind easy. Middle size businesses will heavily identify the region as a place where things are happening. What! The cultural sector is fragmented and does not communicate its offerings or its value as effectively as its quality merits and artistic worth. Strengthen the visibility the culture sector needs to success in this plan.
- Increase Public and Private Sector Funding for Arts and Culture
- What! A “user-friendly” panel will be established to guide the allocation of funds to arts and culture and make recommendations for implementing a county-wide system. Cultural organizations will learn the skills to diversify and increase their earned income streams.
- Provide Services That Support the Growth of the Creative Economy
- What! Artists, cultural organizations, and creative businesses will be more business skills training that will enable them to function more successfully. Resources such as artist incubators and micro-loans will assist artists and creative businesses to patronize.
- Strengthen the Arts Alliance
- What! An Arts Alliance that is adequately funded will be able to unite under one roof the interests of artists, non-profit creative businesses throughout the county.
- Key Findings of the Cultural Plan
- People in Washtenaw County Value Arts and Culture
- While 44% of all cultural programs were very important in their choice to live in Washtenaw County. 75% said that public support for culture made a difference when they chose what businesses to patronize.
- Many Businesses Recognize the Value of Arts and Culture to the Bottom Line
- 44% said that access to arts and culture was important in their decision to locate or keep their businesses in Washtenaw County. 57% thought access to cultural programs was important in recruiting and retaining qualified workers.
- The Creative Sector Plays a Distinct Role in the County’s Economy
- 44% of the county’s total workforce is part of the creative sector. 10% of the county’s total payroll is generated by the creative economy. 82% students from the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University agreed named related to the creative economy in 2007.
- The Quality of Our Cultural Offerings is Generally High, but Not Everyone Has Access to Them
- 98% agreed that local foundations should help support non-profit arts and cultural programs. 89% that local foundations should include culture in their funding priorities.
- Arts (visual, performing and literary) are a Significant Force in Washtenaw County
- 3,516 individuals responded to the Arts’ Census and were classified as Washtenaw County Artists. Of these, 1,173 individuals specified specific criteria and were identified as Working Artists. 17% of Working Artists and their supporters entrepreneur new businesses, while 32% reported saving a long from a day job that was related to their creative work.
- Artists said their most important needs were to: network with others with similar interests; increase sales or other earnings; marketing; validation of their work.

Public and Charitable Organizations Should Help Support Cultural Organizations
- 89% agreed that public funding through local governments (city or county) should help support nonprofit arts and cultural programs. 98% agreed that local foundations should include culture in their funding priorities.

The Washtenaw County Cultural Plan is a result of a 18-month, county-wide service organization. The Arts Alliance will be able to represent the cultural sector in discussions of county-wide importance, which will create a stronger cultural sector as well as generate increased revenues when marketed in joint advertising.

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Creative Economy

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Key Findings of the Cultural Plan

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