

# MISSISSIPPI & THE ARTS

*A Partnership for Progress*

*2003-2008 Strategic Plan*



# **Mississippi & The Arts: A Partnership for Progress 2003-08 Strategic Plan**

The arts enrich the lives and broaden the perspectives of the citizens of Mississippi. The arts not only give us pleasure—they also offer new ways by which we experience the world and come to understand our places in it. They are windows into the lives of those who make and perform the art we see and hear. The arts inspire us and make us more human.

This is the Mississippi Arts Commission's strategic plan for the years 2003 through 2008. It will guide us as we strive to bring the arts into the lives of all Mississippians.

## ***The Mississippi Arts Commission***

Even before it became a state in 1817, the land we know as Mississippi has shared with the world its artistic legacy that is rich in music, crafts, visual arts, performance and literature. And since its creation more than 30 years ago, the Mississippi Arts Commission has been honored by its responsibility to support and promote the cultural heritage of our state. As a publicly funded agency, the Commission strives to ensure that citizens have access to the artistic resources across Mississippi.

### **The Mission**

The mission of the Mississippi Arts Commission is to be a catalyst for the arts in Mississippi. Established in 1968 by the state legislature, the Commission is the state's official grantsmaking and service agency for the arts. A 15-member board appointed by the Governor governs the Commission. Funded annually by the state legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts, the Commission uses government funds to carry forth its mission. Government support, working with the private sector

- Provides for the inclusion of all citizens in diverse artists experiences;
- Ties arts to economic development through partnership and collaborations;
- Offers credibility and insists on accountability;
- Ensures openness of decision making; and
- Provides leadership in cultural policies.

### **Enabling Legislation**

In partnership with its grantees and other agencies, the Commission works to fulfill the mandate in its enabling legislation to

- Stimulate and encourage statewide study and presentation of the performing, visual, and literary arts, and public interest and participation therein;
- Encourage participation in, appreciation of, and education in the arts to meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of persons in all parts of the state;
- Take appropriate steps to encourage public interest in the cultural heritage of Mississippi, to expand the state's cultural resources, and to promote the use of arts in the state government's activities and facilities; and
- Encourage excellence and assist freedom of artistic expression essential for the well being of the arts.

### **The Roles of Commission** in Mississippi's cultural development include

- *Funder* of significant arts projects,
- *Convener* of arts constituents and other networks,
- *Supporter* of the professional development of artists,
- *Partner* in the research of strategies that build participation in the arts,
- *Developer* of the non-profit arts industry in Mississippi,
- *Distributor* of information regarding the arts,
- *Broker* of resources that create new partnerships and strengthen organizations,
- *Advocate* of the benefits of the arts to education and communities,
- *Consultant* to arts organizations and artists, and
- *Catalyst* for the development of innovative programs.

### ***Community Conversations***

In writing the plan, we visited with people around the state to learn first hand what the arts mean to their communities and how we can make the arts more vibrant and accessible to every Mississippi citizen. We learned that:

- The arts are integral to community and economic development. The tragedy of the September 11, 2001 has reinforced the value of hearth and home and brought home the need to support the arts in the communities in which Mississippians live and work.
- The arts can play a powerful and effective role in addressing human needs. Awareness of this fact is expanding among public officials and civic leadership. A strong statewide arts alliance could help spread the word about which models of arts involvement work best in which settings.
- Mississippi arts organizations are straining under the present financial crisis. It will be a challenge to sustain the arts in Mississippi at their current levels of activity until conditions improve.
- In this climate, arts organizations are struggling to sustain volunteer leadership and staff. Many are facing the retirement of their leaders and need to recruit and engage a new generation of volunteer and professional leadership.
- Arts organizations also need assistance in reaching and attracting new audiences. The Commission's recent START grant from Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Funds to study and build participation in the arts will afford this agency a unique opportunity to address this challenge.
- The explosion in the uses of electronic information technology provides efficiencies yet poses another challenge to arts organizations. Much of the new technology requires significant front-end financial investment and training if arts organizations are to use it effectively to sustain and improve their viability and efficiency.
- Mississippi has made great strides in arts education over the past several years. The Commission's Whole Schools Initiative has been particularly successful in utilizing the talents of Mississippi artists to improve the educational experiences of schoolchildren and to build the skills of teachers in the public schools in using the arts as learning tools. But while arts education is a priority for most Mississippi arts organizations, it remains

vulnerable whenever cutbacks in local public school expenditures are being considered. Arts educational opportunities for adults are also needed.

- The demographic profile of the citizenry is changing as people from immigrant cultures new to Mississippi take up residence. This requires that we re-examine the ways the Commission preserves and celebrates the enduring aspects of our unique heritage. This is a crucial task, since it is well established that the arts foster tolerance of peoples from different ethnic and racial backgrounds and deepen our understanding of and appreciation for our common humanity.
- Despite reductions in state support occasioned by the recent economic downturn, the Commission enjoys the continuing high regard of its constituents and partners. This is due in large part to the concerted efforts of the agency to listen to its stakeholders, pursue goals that address their concerns, and distribute grant funds equitably. This being said, the Commission must do its best to further expand its presence and visibility throughout the state.
- The recent economic downturn has changed the climate for both the Commission and the Mississippi arts community. So we must sustain as best we can the effort we have all been making, with fewer resources in the near term available to do so.

### ***Looking Ahead in Uncertain Times: The Commission's Goals, 2003-08***

We combined the observations of Mississippians with findings from extensive research in fashioning this new strategic plan. Current goals were revisited and new goals considered. Ultimately, six long-range goals were adopted for 2003-2008

***Goal 1. Support development of Mississippi communities through the arts.***

***Goal 2. Improve the capacity and stability of Mississippi's arts organizations.***

***Goal 3. Strengthen education in and through the arts.***

***Goal 4. Increase knowledge of and pride in Mississippi arts and culture.***

***Goal 5. Recognize and encourage Mississippi artists.***

***Goal 6. Sustain the Commission's administrative effectiveness.***

### ***Implementing the Goals***

The Commission will pursue the goals through a broad range of approaches that include

- Grants to arts and community organizations for programming, community building, audience development, and organizational stability;
- Recognizing both established and emerging artists through fellowships, apprenticeships and the continuing development of the Mississippi Artist Roster;

- Continuing support for the arts throughout the entire public school curriculum through Whole Schools and related arts education activities;
  - Expanding citizen participation and access to the arts – particularly underserved and new immigrant communities, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and preschool children through the Commission’s *START* initiative;
  - Providing information and technical assistance to arts, local arts councils and organizations regarding effective approaches to leadership development, fundraising, governance, audience development, and improved management; and
  - Supporting the development/redevelopment of arts facilities and community infrastructure through the Commission’s *Building Fund for the Arts* initiative.
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### ***Goal 1***

#### ***Support development of Mississippi communities through the arts***

The arts enliven communities and play an important role in addressing such social issues as poverty, illiteracy, and youth crime. They bring people of different backgrounds together. Local arts councils and social service organizations can use the arts to effect positive community change. Our aim is to engage artists and arts organizations in working with these groups to improve the quality of life. The Commission will help to strengthen local arts agencies and service organizations that are working to effect such changes.

We will strive to

Make operating grants and supportive services to local arts agencies that offer community development services.

Provide leadership, services, and funding to support a peer mentoring network.

Explore the feasibility of initiating a community arts internship program in partnership with Institutions of Higher Learning and arts management programs.

Develop a roster of emerging and experienced arts managers and provide training via grants, conference workshops, technical assistance, and the emerging peer mentor network.

Recruit non-arts community organizations, such as housing authorities, libraries, community development corporations, and child-care facilities, for community arts projects.

Encourage training in cultural diversity, local partnerships and community cultural planning.

Update our publications and web site to promote interactive, resourceful, imaginative arts-based community development programming.

## **Goal 2**

### **Improve the Capacity and Stability of Mississippi Arts Organizations**

Nonprofit arts and cultural organizations are essential to the ways in which Mississippians experience the arts. They provide quality programs despite budget constraints that often limit the depth and range of their offerings. The Commission is committed to helping them expand their capacity, assure the adequacy of critical resources, strengthen management, and participate as full partners with other civic institutions in their communities.

We will strive to

Encourage nonprofit arts organizations to work with arts management professionals in the areas of strategic planning, board development, and financial management.

Strengthen partnerships with organizations such as the Center for Nonprofits that can help build and sustain the arts organizational infrastructure.

Convene discussions with discipline-specific arts organizations to foster networking and peer mentoring.

In cooperation with VSA ARTS - Very Special Arts of Mississippi, work to improve opportunities for artists with disabilities.

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## **Goal 3**

### ***Strengthen education in and through the arts***

Education in and through the arts is an essential component of the learning experience of Mississippi schoolchildren. It is a basic right of all children, not simply the socially advantaged or gifted and talented. Our task is to place artists, arts specialists, seed money for innovative projects, and technical assistance at the disposal of local schools. The Commission's Whole Schools Initiative (WSI) has proven particularly successful in encouraging schools to place the arts at the forefront of students' learning experiences throughout the entire curriculum. The Mississippi Alliance for Arts Education and the State Department of Education are key partners in advocating for arts education throughout the state.

We will strive to

Recruit schools to participate in arts education through email bulletins, presentations at education conferences and regional visits.

Provide technical assistance to schools through professional development workshops at education conferences and education organizations' meetings.

With the Mississippi Department of Special Education staff and Very Special Arts, explore ways the arts can better serve special education students.

Provide technical assistance and educational consultancy minigrants to support quality arts education programming.

Work with Institutions of Higher Learning to develop workshops that prepare educators and arts majors to integrate the arts into the entire public school curriculum.

Explore new sources of funding to support the continuation and expansion of the Whole Schools Initiative and consider the prospects for its expansion into middle and high schools.

Strengthen the Commission's partnerships with the Department of Education and the Mississippi Alliance for Arts Education. With the Department of Human Services and other organizations, search for ways to encourage the use of the arts to foster early childhood development.

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#### **Goal 4:** ***Increase knowledge of and pride in Mississippi arts and culture***

The "traditional arts" are indigenous arts forms whose skills are generally taught within communities rather than in formal educational settings. They help define what makes Mississippi communities distinctive. Many traditional artists have brought the state international attention, but traditional artistry is still sometimes undervalued and inadequately appreciated within Mississippi. The Commission's Heritage Program seeks to broaden public awareness and support for the traditional arts through public education and by support for traditional artists and the organizations that work with them.

We will strive to

Encourage local supporters of traditional arts to locate and help document traditional artists.

Help traditional artists obtain funding and recognition on the Artists Roster.

Nominate traditional artists for national awards and help them pursue new opportunities to present and perform their art.

Work with the state's public television network to continue to publicly document and celebrate traditional artists and artistry.

Encourage the establishment of university programs that research, document, and disseminate information about the traditional arts.

Through funding and technical assistance, continue to support the Mississippi Folklife Association's programming and documentation activities.

## **Goal 5**

### **Recognize and Encourage Mississippi Artists**

The Arts Commission supports artists and artistry in all disciplines: music, visual arts, craft, theater, dance, literature, film and video and computer art. We appreciate artists working in both traditional and contemporary modes—those with roots in Mississippi traditions as well as those of other regions and nations. Since artists of every kind and description are critical to the success of projects initiated by cultural organizations and schools, the Commission nurtures artists who pursue their art professionally and those who do so avocationally. Although state policy currently prevents the Commission from providing direct grants to artists, it sustains them and their artistry through recognition programs, fellowships, promotional activities, public information, and training.

We will strive to

Continue to offer fellowships to Mississippi artists and publicly celebrate fellowship winners in the Arts Commission newsletter and on its web site.

Pursue opportunities for Mississippi artists to participate in public arts projects.

Continue to offer Minigrants for artist fee support.

Promote regional and national literary, musical and visual art competitions and honors programs to Mississippi Artists.

Continue to celebrate Mississippi artists through the Governors Awards for Excellence in the Arts.

Disseminate information to the public concerning the contribution of Mississippi artists to tourism and economic development.

Provide professional development opportunities for individual artists in areas such as marketing, budgeting, taxation, and agent relations.

Provide networking opportunities for individual artists at conferences and workshops.

Use the Commission newsletter and web site to alert artists about competitions and other opportunities.

Recruit and assist applicants to the Artist Roster and distribute the roster to presenters, schools and festivals throughout Mississippi.

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## **Goal 6**

### **Sustain the Mississippi Arts Commission's effectiveness**



Successful implementation of this strategic plan requires that the Commission be effectively governed and managed. The plan is based on the presumption that state support will remain level for 2003 and will increase modestly thereafter. Given current fiscal constraints, we intend to build on initiatives and programs already underway before developing new programs. We will seek to diversify our funding sources via partnerships with other state agencies and the federal government and pursue participation in initiatives funded by national foundations.

We will strive to

Support the recruitment of new members to the Board of Commissioners by suggesting candidates to the Governor's office who possess a broad range of skills and reflect the geographical, racial and ethnic diversity of the Mississippi citizenry.

Assure that the Board of Commissioners possesses the resources, information and administrative support to govern the agency effectively and advocate persuasively for the arts.

Coordinate and present the agency's annual Day at the Capitol.

Disseminate information about the Commission's activities and programs via its web site, newsletter, brochures and annual report.

Enable each staff member to participate in one significant professional development program each year.

Maintain Commission membership in national and regional arts service organizations.

Administer and monitor implementation of the strategic plan and report on progress to the Board of Commissioners at its meetings.

Continually evaluate the effectiveness of Commission programs and services.

Design and implement an annual work planning and monitoring system.