



Coastal Fairfield County One Coast/One Future Cultural Assessment Summary

December 7, 2006

Craig Dreeszen, Ph.D., Dreeszen & Associates



With funding support from the Small Business Administration coordinated by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and Business Council of Fairfield County

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Executive Summary

The cultural sector is significant This cultural assessment confirms that Coastal Fairfield County’s cultural sector makes important contributions to the region’s quality of life and economic vitality. There are 245 registered, 501 (c) 3 nonprofit arts, cultural and humanities organizations in Fairfield County.¹ Their total budgets exceeded \$93.6 million in the latest fiscal year. Direct spending by cultural institutions significantly understates their total economic impact.

Cultural inventory The Fairfield Cultural Inventory, being developed concurrently with this assessment, has identified at least 20 performing arts centers, 18 museums, six nature and science centers, five visual arts centers, ten local arts agencies, seven symphonies or orchestras, 22 historic sites and districts, and 44 libraries. Eight colleges and universities provide cultural opportunities. Many more volunteer-run community choruses and theaters, writing groups, performing groups, and artists’ alliances serve local cultural needs. There are many opportunities in the performing arts and humanities and relatively fewer in the visual arts and interpretive sciences. The Fairfield Cultural Inventory in progress as of this report lists 350 cultural organizations.

Creative businesses Americans for the Arts documents 2,841 Dun and Bradstreet-registered, arts-related businesses in Fairfield County that employ nearly 15,000 people.²

¹ May 2006 data from IRA 990 records reported by National Center for Charitable Statistics for all Fairfield County, not just the coastal communities

² Americans for the Arts, “The Creative Industries in Connecticut Congressional District 4” January 2006

This creative industry count is conservative. There are significantly more, but unknown numbers of individual artists whose creative work is not tracked in employment data.

Disparities The region is characterized by extremes of wealth and poverty. There are ample opportunities for a good education and cultural participation for many residents and as many barriers for others. There are 966 private foundations registered in the county, half of the state's total, with over \$800 million in annual revenues and \$2.5 billion in assets.³

At the same time, many people live with crippling disadvantages. There is a significant achievement gap for school children. There are major gaps in employment, housing, and health care. All do not have access to the region's opportunities. Over 95% of Bridgeport public school students are eligible for free or reduced cost meals.⁴ The City of Bridgeport and its schools and nonprofit institutions struggle. Arts education has been drastically cut in its schools.

Cultural assets The region's cultural assets include: a large number of nonprofit cultural and educational institutions and facilities, a significant number of creative businesses and individual artists, many families capable of philanthropy, amateur artists, and appreciative audiences. The region's racial and ethnic diversity is growing, providing opportunities to experience many world cultures. There is a concentration of relatively affordable housing and studio space in Bridgeport and other cities that attracts artists. Regional marketing has potential to attract more cultural tourists.

Cultural challenges The assessment identified cultural challenges as well. Current marketing of many of the region's fine cultural programs fails to attract larger audiences from beyond local markets. New York's nearby cultural attractions compete for the region's audiences and contributions. Many artists are economically vulnerable, have less access to health insurance, and struggle to find and keep affordable housing and studios. Cultural organizations are typically under-funded, under-staffed, and lack capacity to raise funds and attract the audiences that would sustain their programs. Some nonprofits need help with marketing, governance, and management. Student achievement gaps indicate that many children have inadequate access to educational opportunities, including arts education. Income, education, and transportation barriers limit some people's access to cultural opportunities.

Economic and political changes have diminished cultural funding from corporations and public agencies. Individual giving and earned revenues have become a much larger portion of nonprofit budgets. Urban organizations especially, have lost traditional funders and have limited access to the remaining sources.

The region's cultural sector makes a significant impact on the region's quality of life and prosperity. The sector is large and generally robust, with significant exceptions. However, significant gaps in opportunity create inequities across the region.

³ Center for Charitable Statistics

⁴ Bridgeport School District, Strategic School Profile, 2004-2005

Cultural sector coordination The Fairfield Arts Council lists members' events in an online calendar and serves artists and cultural organizations beyond the town. However, there is currently no regional system to represent the county's cultural sector, to advocate on its behalf, to market regionally, to promote and coordinate arts education, to provide capacity-building assistance to providers, or to provide better access to cultural opportunities for those less able to participate. The cultural sector is not yet integrated into regional economic development strategies. It has been difficult to sustain professional local arts agencies within the region, which commonly serve the creative sector in other parts of the country. Addressing this need will be a focus of the second phase of the cultural component of the One Coast/One Future Initiative.

Assessment Objectives

This Coastal Fairfield Cultural Assessment is part of the One Coast/One Future Initiative among thirteen coastal communities of Fairfield County including Greenwich, Stamford, Darien, Norwalk, Westport, Wilton, Easton, Weston, New Canaan, Fairfield, Bridgeport, Trumbull and Stratford. This report documents the region's cultural assets, needs, and capacity to organize for service and support of the creative economy. The project was made organized by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and Business Council of Fairfield County with funding from the Small Business Administration.

Methods

Steering Committee A steering committee of One Coast/One Future partners collected existing cultural inventories, research, and plans. The Steering Committee included: **Robbin Zella**, Housatonic Museum of Art, **Janice Martin**, Bridgeport Regional Business Council, **Ryan Odinak**, Fairfield Arts Council, **John Cusano**, Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, and **Chris Bruhl**, Business Council of Fairfield County. Cultural planner **Craig Dreeszen**, provided a national perspective, conducted research, facilitated assessment meetings, and wrote this report.

Plans and studies review We reviewed previous studies, cultural inventories, and plans. We extracted cultural economic data from reports by Americans for the Arts, National Center for Charitable Statistics, New England Foundation for the Arts, and United States Census.

Cultural inventory The consultant and Steering Committee worked with Housatonic College IT professionals and staff from New England Foundation for the Arts and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism to plan the cultural inventory database. The steering committee has been gathering lists from multiple sources.

Regional forums The steering committee identified and invited key cultural leaders to consultant-facilitated conversations November 8 in Bridgeport and November 9 in Stamford. Twenty five cultural leaders met to affirm the region's cultural strengths and assess issues facing coastal Fairfield County's cultural sector. More leaders will join the

Steering Committee to identify common concerns and regional solutions. The second phase of assessment and planning will engage more cultural sector representatives in discussions.

Limitations of the study This assessment has been a simple review of published plans, inventories, and economic data as well as meetings with a few key opinion leaders. Given the available time and funding, it is necessarily modest in scope. Only the most readily observable assets and needs are presented here. Some cultural features will have been omitted. These findings are necessarily based on observations of the writer, perceptions of assessment participants, and published data. The writer takes sole responsibility for this synthesis of opinions and facts. He shares findings here to encourage further work and clarification of the region's assets, opportunities, and challenges. The One Coast/One Future partners intend to continue the assessment with a second, action phase. Readers may forward corrections, missing information, or alternative interpretations of the issues to craig@dreeszen.com.

Next steps

1. Publish and distribute this cultural assessment.
2. Expand the steering committee to broaden the regional network of cultural leaders.
3. Confirm top priority issues identified in this assessment (from among: regional marketing and tourism, cultural coordination, arts education, advocacy, artist services, funding, and equitable access to cultural opportunities).
4. Build regional support for cooperation around common issues with the second-phase cultural assessment in 2007, using regional meetings and survey to test, refine, and plan initiatives that respond to priority issues.
5. Design, publish, and market the online cultural directory in 2007.
6. Design a system for regional communication, coordination, and advocacy through a coalition of local arts agencies, service organizations, and civic partners.
7. Help Bridgeport leaders respond to increased citizen interest in a local arts agency.
8. Develop an overall regional cultural development strategy to be implemented by the new coalition of local arts agencies and allies.
9. Seek funding to implement priority initiatives.

For a copy of the full report, write craig@dreeszen.info.

Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Assessment

Economic and Social Context of the Assessment

Coastal Fairfield County is comprised of 13 communities along Long Island Sound: Greenwich, Stamford, Darien, Norwalk, Westport, Wilton, Easton, Weston, New Canaan, Fairfield, Bridgeport, Trumbull and Stratford. There is no county government, no coordinating authority, nor a single planning agency. Bridgeport is the largest city in the county and state. There are three sub-regions around Stamford, Norwalk, and Bridgeport.

The Federal Reserve considers the region within the New York Metropolitan area. Coastal Fairfield County may be more closely linked economically, socially, and culturally to that New York than to the rest of Connecticut and New England. The proximity to New York is a cultural asset and challenge. Many Fairfield County artists work or market there and many residents have access to some of the world's finest cultural attractions in the City. Regional cultural organizations have access to world class creative talent. New York institutions also challenge their Connecticut counterparts by competing successfully for regional audiences and philanthropy. Commuters in and out of the region make borders quite permeable.

Major transportation routes include I95, Metro-North's New Haven rail line, Merritt Parkway, I84, historic Route 1, and Routes 7 and 8. The train makes commuting to and from New York feasible for many residents. Interstate 95 connects the region, but can be congested, making cultural attractions in adjacent towns less accessible than proximity suggests.

Fairfield County is one of the wealthiest counties in the nation, sometimes dubbed the Gold Coast. There are 966 private foundations registered in Fairfield County, half of the state's total, with over \$800 million in annual revenues (71% of state total) and \$2.5 billion in assets (61% of state total).⁵

The managers of a third of the nation's growing hedge funds reside in the region.⁶ The proximity to Wall Street means some 1,500 of the region's resident business executives receive annual cash distributions in the range of \$1-15 million. A board member for the Audubon Center raised \$14 million in one day with two calls to generous individuals who wanted to make a difference for the region's kids.

At the same time, many disadvantaged people live in the region. There is a significant achievement gap for school children. All do not have equal access to the region's opportunities. Bridgeport's school district is the largest in the state. Over 95% of Bridgeport public school students are eligible for free or reduced cost meals and for 38% of them, English is not their at-home language.⁷

⁵ Center for Charitable Statistics

⁶ Nov 9, 2006 Interview with Chris Bruhl, President and CEO, The Business Council of Fairfield County

⁷ Bridgeport School District, Strategic School Profile, 2004-2005

Baby Boomers have settled and continue to migrate into the region. As they adjust their work lives or retire they offer great potential as audiences, advisors, patrons, volunteers, and board members. Some will consider second-career, public-benefit positions in cultural organizations.

One assessment participant observed that proximity to New York made the region like a border state. Seventeen percent of the region’s residents are foreign born. This immigrant population is primarily Latino, Asian, and eastern European. They are a critical part of the workforce and central to the region’s diversity.

Fairfield County can be generous and help support many nonprofits in the region. There are 3,965 tax exempt 501 (c) 3 charitable organizations⁸ of all kinds in Fairfield County, more than Hartford County or any other Connecticut county. Fairfield County charities attracted more contributions, gifts and grants in 2006 than any other county in the state. Nearly \$1.6 billion in contributions were part of over \$7.3 billion in total revenues for all the county’s nonprofit organizations (including education, religion, health, and human service sectors).

County	Number of all registered nonprofit organizations with % of state total		Number of Organizations Filing Form 990 with % of state total		Total Revenue Reported on Form 990 with % of state total		Assets Reported on Form 990 with % of state total	
Fairfield County, CT	3,965	30.5%	2,326	34.6%	7,319,081,464	32.4%	25,225,474,148	40.1%

Summary of Cultural Assets

Overview There are 245 registered, 501 (c) 3 arts, cultural and humanities organizations in Fairfield County.⁹ Of these 174 cultural organizations file IRS 990 forms, required for organizations with annual revenues of at least \$25,000. The total of cultural organizations’ budgets exceeded \$93.6 million in their last fiscal year, representing nearly a quarter of the state’s nonprofit cultural revenue.

County	Number of registered arts, culture, and humanities organizations		Number of Organizations Filing Form 990 with % of state total		Total Revenue Reported on Form 990 with % of state total		Assets Reported on Form 990 with % of state total	
Fairfield	245	28.3%	174	30.4%	93,659,136	24.0%	206,413,343	19.2%

There are at least 20 performing arts centers, 18 museums, six nature and science centers, five visual arts centers, 22 historic sites and districts, and 44 libraries. Eight colleges and

⁸ May 2006 data from IRS 990 records reported by National Center for Charitable Statistics

⁹ May 2006 data from IRA 990 records reported by National Center for Charitable Statistics

universities provide cultural opportunities. Seven symphonies or orchestras serve the region. There are many opportunities in the performing arts and humanities and relatively fewer in the visual arts and interpretive sciences.

Creative Industries Americans for the Arts documents 2,841 arts-related businesses in Fairfield County that employ 15,000 people¹⁰. The Dun and Bradstreet data is a conservative source as individual artists and nonprofit organizations are under-represented. There are significant, but unknown numbers of individual artists whose creative work is not tracked by employment data systems.

Demonstrated success Some community leaders have demonstrated it is possible to create thriving, first-class cultural organizations in the region. The Westport Community Theatre under Joanne Woodward's artistic leadership, raised \$50 million in a capital campaign, including \$34 million from private sources. The Stepping Stones Museum exists because a small group of savvy mothers saw a need, organized, raised money, hired a professional director, and created the museum. The Maritime Aquarium is a world class institution. One interviewee attributed these and other successful cultural organizations to a combination of talent, individual wealth, proximity to New York, and high expectations of residents for cultural programs and services.

Yet other cultural organizations are struggling with inadequate funding, staff, and audiences. Performing arts organization leaders reported at our regional meeting in Bridgeport that loss of grants and contributions, and declining audiences made it difficult to sustain their programs. Orchestras in the region are reported to be struggling as well with aging audiences, increasing costs, and reduced contributions. Some parts of the region have little access to the region's assets.

Volunteer groups There are many volunteer-run community organizations including local arts agencies, performing groups, poetry and reading groups, historical societies, community theatres, festivals, arts fairs, and other events. These are locally important and important to the region's culture. Many of the culture-specific programs are presented by volunteers. Many of these organizations operate independently, seek no public funding, and operate without attracting the attention of regional initiatives. Our inventory seeks to identify these groups, though this can be a challenge.

Artists There are many artists in the region, though these are even more difficult to identify and assess than organizations. These artists include professional musicians, actors, writers, photographers, electronic media artists, visual artists, craftspeople, stage professionals, and many others with well-established local, New York, and international markets and employers. The area's seven orchestras are staffed by world class musicians, many of whom also play in New York. There are also many other creative professionals including designers, advertisers, motion picture professionals, arts teachers, and creative services providers.

¹⁰ Americans for the Arts, "The Creative Industries in Connecticut Congressional District 4" January 2006

A significant number of emerging artists are drawn by the region's cultural amenities and relatively affordable studio space or accommodations. Artists' spaces like the Read's building in Bridgeport and the Artists Loft in Stamford have attracted hundreds of artists. Arts clubs, classes, arts supply stores, community exhibitions, and performances indicate that there are also many amateur artists and writers. National studies typically discover a significant portion of the population participates in creative pastimes. Immigrant populations include many practitioners of visual and performing arts.

Buildings and housing Among the region's assets are under-used buildings with potential for cultural use. The Read's building in Bridgeport was a vacant department store successfully converted to affordable artist housing. The City and ArtSpace developed the facility in a private/public partnership. In a region with generally expensive housing and commercial space, many affordable opportunities remain for cultural development. Leased facilities are, however vulnerable to developmental pressures. The well-documented SoHo effect predicts that pioneering artists who help recover blighted areas by setting up studios and housing, set the stage for later commercial and residential developments that will displace them.

Cultural Needs

This assessment identifies several compelling needs that would benefit from regional coordination.

Arts and cultural education The education gap is a significant problem and an opportunity for the cultural sector. Regional organization could narrow the educational achievement gap with increased opportunities for arts and cultural education. Opportunities for arts education vary widely across the region. Many students enjoy strong visual and performing arts education classes in school. Others have access only if they can afford private instruction. Cultural organizations and schools have potential for greater collaboration to enrich students' learning but are handicapped by inadequate funding, little coordinated planning, transportation costs, and high-stakes pressures on educators. The region's cultural organizations are an asset that some schools have tapped to improve student learning. Science centers, including the Beardsley Zoo and Maritime Museum, have coordinated with schools across the region to better integrate their collections and programs with students' science education. This is a model that arts organizations may wish to emulate.

Marketing and audience development Anecdotal information suggests that most cultural programs could reach more people with better marketing. Some are doing well, while others are struggling. Many venues, programs, and special events are part of the region's cultural tourism industry. Coastal Fairfield County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) and the Connecticut Commission on Cultural and Tourism are working to develop a message that helps position the region for visitors. The CVB is organizing collaborative marketing. The CVB is also doing market research on cultural events as part of the One Coast initiative. Partnerships among cultural attractions, the CVB, and the Connecticut Commission can promote the region. The small and mid-sized cultural

organizations may need technical assistance to develop their capacity to frame their message, identify and cultivate relations with audiences, develop marketing materials, and create information systems to track marketing efforts and audiences.

Cultural funding has shifted. Many forum participants described the loss of corporate funding from businesses that merged, moved away, or stopped funding cultural organizations. State funding dropped precipitously after 2001. Two community foundations continue to provide modest funding for cultural programs and operations. Individuals have become the primary funders within the region. Stamford has a municipal grants program, perhaps the only such municipal funding program in Connecticut. Some municipalities provide line-item funding, facilities, or in-kind support for their cultural organizations, but this funding is difficult to track.

Many of wealthy executives are in the financial sector and off the usual radar screens of potential cultural contributors. The Business Council of Fairfield County convenes a business contributions group, which could be alerted to the opportunities and regional disparities in cultural funding.

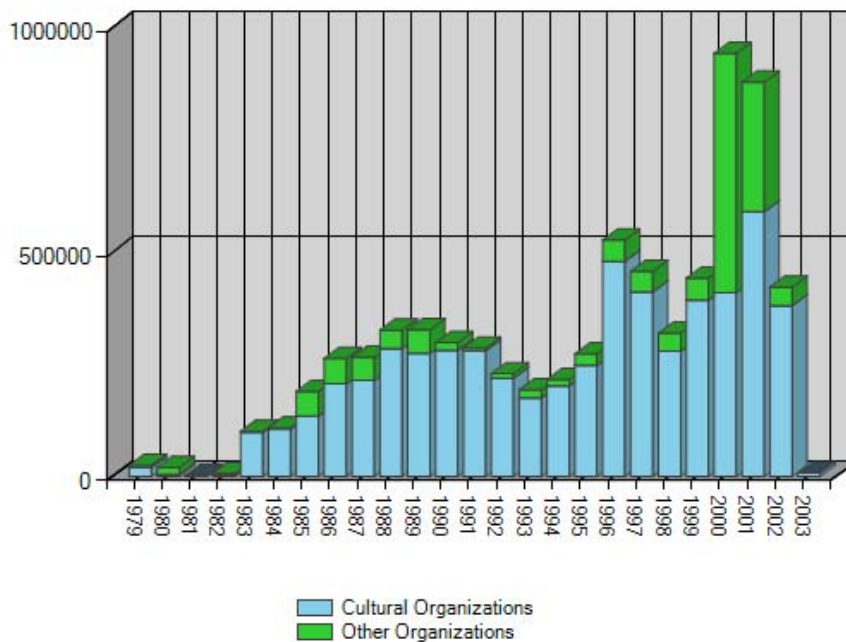
There is a significant funding gap. As with other regional resources, there is disparity. There is significantly more philanthropic funding, mostly from individuals, in the affluent towns, and much less funding in Bridgeport and some other areas of the county.

The necessarily selective sampling of this assessment found that some cultural organizations are stable and thriving while others in the region are struggling. The most vulnerable may be Bridgeport-based nonprofit institutions, symphonies, leased artist spaces, and some of the small under-staffed and volunteer-run groups. Organizational assessments in more comprehensive assessments typically find that most nonprofit cultural organizations are significantly under-resourced. In Hartford and New Haven, local arts agencies¹¹ and community foundations build the capacity of their cultural organizations with operating and program funding, professional development training, and consulting services.

The pending/potential conversion of People's Bank to a publicly-traded company creates the potential for a new foundation based in the region.

¹¹ The Greater Hartford Arts Council is a united arts funding agency that also provides capacity building assistance. The New Haven Arts Council provides information, services, and training, but not funding.

Cultural Grants to Fairfield County Cultural Organizations from all Sources¹²



The chart above illustrates the steep drop in grants from all sources to Fairfield County cultural organizations and other nonprofits in 2003.

Inclusion and integration of immigrants and people of color There is a need and opportunity to tap and serve the region’s increasingly diverse population. In other communities, arts education is a means to engage children in effective learning and to celebrate diversity. Multicultural programs are means to honor and include people of color and to help people of the dominant culture to better appreciate their neighbors. Many residents may be unaware of the rich cultural life of their ethnic neighbors, whose creativity may be expressed more often on porches and in churches than on stages.

Creative economic and community development The creative sector is a significant economic force in Coastal Fairfield County. The sector employs more than 15,000 creative workers. Total nonprofit cultural organizations’ direct spending exceeds \$93 million a year invested in wages and services in the region. As Richard Florida has documented in *Rise of the Creative Class*, these creative people help attract and retain other creative people essential to contemporary business.

Creative people also vote, serve on municipal commissions and task forces, join community boards, and contribute to the quality of life of their communities. In many

¹² Source: New England Cultural Database, New England Foundation for the Arts, November 2004 The information provided here is limited to the funders currently contained in the NECD database.

places, creative people have helped municipalities plan for smart growth and to protect aesthetic values that help define communities.

In many parts of the country, municipalities and counties are organizing to mobilize their creative economies as an explicit economic and community development strategy. The ULI economic development study in Bridgeport recommends this. The City of Tampa employs a creative economy coordinator to represent the sector in negotiations with developers, planners, and to promote cultural tourism and cultural trade. In Coastal Fairfield County the interests of the creative sector are closely entwined with the rest of the business community. This Cultural Assessment is an excellent example of the benefits of such collaboration.

Artist services Artists are the basis of the creative economy and have much to offer the region. But, they are economically vulnerable. A series of artist meetings organized by the Black Rock Arts Center clarified artists' needs in greater Bridgeport. In spite of artist centers, many artists have problems finding affordable housing and studio space. It is rare to find the right combination of affordable housing, workspace, and retail opportunity.

Health insurance is a major problem for artists. National studies consistently document that artists are significantly less often insured for health, fire, and business losses than others. Artist forums in Bridgeport confirm this problem.

Many artists also have trouble finding a market or audience for their work. Some want help learning to market their work and manage their businesses. Financing is difficult. Some don't know where to look for information or training. Artists value opportunities to gather for information sharing and mutual support. Artists in Bridgeport asked for an arts council to represent their interests.

Advocacy Coastal Fairfield County has a significant cultural sector, yet the many different individuals and organizations have no means to organize advocacy on behalf of local and state public policies, leveraged funding, or creative solutions to regional needs. This assessment identified several opportunities, but no sustainable means to organize and represent the cultural sector's interests to take advantage of these possibilities.

Coordination and communication This assessment finds a need for coordination and communication among leaders within the cultural sector and between this sector and its allies in economic development, education, tourism, and community development. The cultural assets and needs identified here call for leadership and systems to direct advocacy, information, assistance, and resources to resolve issues and seize opportunities.

Potential of Local Arts Agencies

Many communities and counties organize their cultural sectors through local arts agencies. The potential for one or more local arts agencies was a stimulus for this assessment.

Local arts agencies defined A local arts agency is a nonprofit organization (often called “council”) or government agency (often called “commission”) that represents the cultural sector within a community, county, or region; develops the capacity of cultural organizations; provides services to artists; and/or presents arts programming to the public. Local arts agencies may promote lifelong education in and through the arts, arts participation, arts accessibility, public art, arts and civic collaborations, cultural economic development and tourism, cultural planning, and integration of arts and culture within the fabric of communities. Arts councils used to focus on programming and now more often focus on services. Some local arts agencies raise and re-grant funds.

Calls to organize The Urban Land Institute (ULI) report on economic development strategies for Bridgeport¹³ called for a municipal arts and entertainment commission as one of three recommendations for immediate initiatives. Artists who have gathered in a series of meetings organized by the Black Rock Arts Center have also called for the creation of a local arts council. The Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism has recognized the gap in arts services and has encouraged the creation of a local arts agency with capacity to serve the region.

Existing arts councils There are currently ten local arts agencies in the county recognized by the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. Of these, only the Fairfield and Greenwich Arts Councils are staffed. The others are led by volunteers who advise their municipal governments on cultural policy and/or present cultural programs. The new Norwalk’s Advisory Commission on Arts and Culture is an example of a volunteer commission of citizens who have successfully organized to influence development that accommodates the City’s cultural needs. Others are primarily concerned with presenting cultural programs.

Challenge of sustainability It has been difficult to sustain professionally-staffed arts councils in Fairfield County. There have been local arts agency-like organizations that served Bridgeport, most recently ArtForce. When its primary funder, the Department of Tourism, reorganized into the new Commission on Culture and Tourism, ArtForce lost funding and took a lower profile. Stamford’s cultural community was represented and served by the Stamford Community Development Corporation (SCDC) until it lost its municipal and corporate funding in 2005. Stamford’s cultural grants program is being sustained by City of Stamford’s grants office, but the information and cultural

¹³ Bridgeport, Connecticut Citywide Economic Development Strategies, January 16-21, 2005, An Advisory Services Panel Report by the Urban Land Institute

development work of the SCDC has been discontinued. The nonprofit tax exempt status of ArtForce the SCDC have been preserved.

The Fairfield Arts Council has expanded its information and events-listing services to neighboring municipalities. Affiliated organizations outside the town of Fairfield list their events on the Arts Council's calendars. Exploring an alternative model, Waterbury recently initiated a creative industry cluster (not a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit), based in its chamber of commerce.

A small steering committee organized to conduct this assessment as part of the One Coast/One Future initiative. A small fund was earmarked for a second phase of this assessment to explore actions like organizing an arts council that respond to these findings.

The next phase of this assessment will explore options for providing the information and services called for by participants in this assessment. The One Coast/One Future initiative and the state cultural commission both favor a regional approach. Artists in Bridgeport asked for a local organization.

Some Local Arts Agency Options

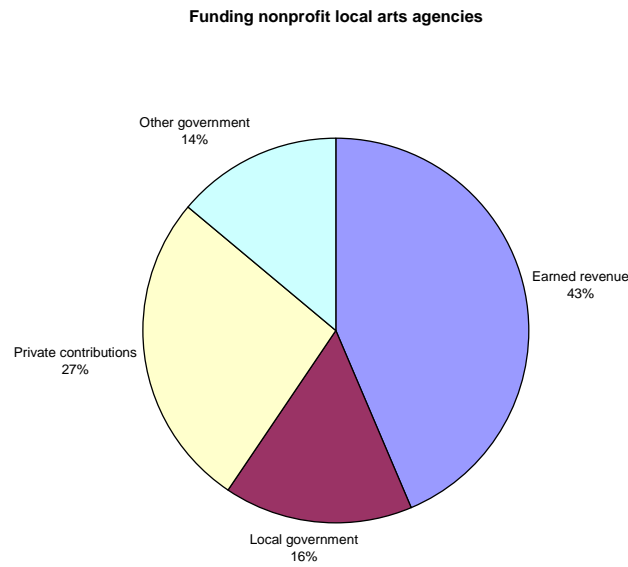
The next phase of the assessment will explore options to provide cultural information and services. *This assessment has properly focused on what assets and needs would benefit from regional services rather than what should be the structure of organizations to provide those services.* It is premature to design a service delivery system until there is consensus (e.g. agreement with the assessment) on what are the needs. However, many have asked about organizational and structural options for a local arts agency, so here is a preliminary list of options.

While any of the five options listed below may work individually or in combination, the unresolved challenge is to create services and providers that can be sustained. Nationally, most local arts agencies are supported by earned revenue and private contributions (see figure 1). While much can be done by volunteer alliances, the significant opportunities and challenges described in this assessment are best addressed by professionally-staffed agencies.

1. Expand existing local arts agencies (e.g., Stamford Cultural Development Council and/or the Fairfield Arts Council) to provide regional services.
2. Ask the City of Bridgeport to create a new arts commission as recommended by the ULI report and Bridgeport artists.
3. Create a network or alliance of arts councils and arts service organizations to coordinate information and services among existing organizations.
4. Create a Bridgeport Artist Alliance to represent and serve artists in greater Bridgeport.
5. Encourage one or more of the regional business councils to establish a cultural committee.

Who pays? The assessment found considerable interest in organizing a local arts agency. The critical question is this: who cares enough to pay for it? National data on average local arts agency funding for nonprofit arts councils may help illustrate the options. Municipal arts commissions receive more local public funding.

Figure 1 Funding sources for nonprofit local arts agencies from Americans for the Arts national survey 2004



Other Opportunities

This assessment identified a number of compelling opportunities, which would take advantage of the region’s strengths and address some challenges.

State cultural funding Governor’s proposal to increase state cultural and tourism funding through cable tax could provide new public funding to under-served areas of the state including Bridgeport. The region’s business and cultural sectors should actively advocate for this funding, which could address some of the critical gaps in funding.

People Bank conversion has potential to create a significant new private-sector funder in the region. The cultural sector might influence this so that a new foundation has adequate resources and funding criteria able help support cultural development.

Cultural Inventory

One Coast/One Future partners are developing an inventory of the region’s cultural resources. The inventory will be made public as a searchable, online directory to help residents and visitors find cultural programs and events.

The Consultant

Craig Dreeszen, Ph.D. directs Dreeszen & Associates, a consulting firm in Northampton Massachusetts. Dr. Dreeszen provides planning, evaluation, teaching, facilitation and research for nonprofits, foundations, and public agencies. He is an educator, consultant, and writer who works nationally with arts and other community organizations to do organizational development and strategic planning, collaborative planning, program evaluation, and community cultural planning. He has helped over 40 communities, counties, and regions develop cultural plans. Craig Dreeszen earned his Ph.D. in planning and his M.ED. in organizational development at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is author of books, articles, and courses on planning, board development, arts education collaborations, and program evaluation. Dreeszen directed the Arts Extension Service at the University of Massachusetts for twelve years.