

## DOWNTOWN SAN ANTONIO AND ARTS AND CULTURE: THE POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE IN OUR COMMUNITY

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### INTRODUCTION

The goals of the *Downtown Development Cause Area* as outlined by SA2020 are broad, with focus on key improvements such as an increase in the number of housing units and number of people working downtown by the year 2020. According to these goals, importance should also be placed on the qualitative experience of living downtown. Measures of this would include perceptions of cleanliness, pedestrian-friendliness, safety, vibrancy, and authenticity tracked by an annual survey meant to measure the satisfaction with the downtown experience. As one of many aspects contributing to the quality of life, arts and culture institutions may be viewed as a catalyst for improving the experience and standard of living in downtown San Antonio. A downtown seen as a destination for arts and culture events, programming, and spaces may give residents a reason to go downtown to live, work, and play. A space rich in arts and culture may be a vehicle through which the *Downtown Development Cause Area* can encourage more residents to live in downtown housing as well as spend leisure time in the area. Likewise, a culturally rich space visited by residents and tourists alike may make downtown San Antonio more attractive to industries looking to locate here.

Made apparent by the key stakeholders involved in both the *Quality of Life* Workgroup meetings developed and led by the Centro Partnership and by community members at the SA2020 event *Convening for a Cause*, there is a clear call for focusing our attention on attracting San Antonio residents from every stage of the life cycle to a vibrant downtown. Specifically, the SA2020 *Quality of Life* workgroup members wish to engage the public with the arts and culture institutions already in downtown San Antonio in order to make downtown a destination for the arts and cultural institutions. This goal corresponds with SA2020's Downtown Development vision which calls for a downtown that is "a center of vibrant activity for citizens to live, work, and play" (Downtown Development, 2013). Such goals are supported by Centro's Strategic Framework Plan for Center City which asserts that "this essential element of civic life is most vital and has the most potential in the Center City and should be further embraced" (Centro Partnership San Antonio, 2011).

Downtown San Antonio is already rich in cultural organizations that are true assets to our city, and if included in a cohesive effort to strengthen them, they have the potential to help fulfill the goals of SA2020 by increasing quality of life and creating a destination for arts and culture downtown. As one of our more well-known institutions, the San Antonio Museum of Art (SAMA) not only provides access to comprehensive collections of ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman, and Asian art, but also provides classes, films, concerts, and gallery talks in conjunction with other arts institutions, restaurants and bars, as well as other downtown entities (Luber, 2012). Another asset, the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, is set to open its doors in the Fall of 2014 and will act as a much needed home to San Antonio's resident performing arts groups -- a development that the Tobin claims will increase quality of life in San Antonio as well as stimulate downtown investment and more downtown living (Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, 2013). The development and success of the Tobin will be contingent on securing funding, beginning first with completing its Capital Campaign goal of \$54 million. In addition to these larger institutions, downtown San Antonio is also rich in smaller and more local arts and culture organizations that add to downtown's list of cultural assets. However, for both large and small institutions, no critical steps have yet to be taken towards strengthening our cultural organizations or creating a cohesive effort specific to the downtown area in order to take advantage of and build upon these assets.

According to the President of Southwest School of Art, Paula Owen, San Antonio is a city with fewer wealthy supporters than most large, American cities, and finding funds to invest in arts and culture in San Antonio in capital improvements, innovative programs, or up-to-date technology is difficult and competitive (Paula Owen, personal communication, July 18, 2013). The Southwest School of Art faces the challenges that many other institutions face- mainly a lack of resources to do anything beyond making annual operation ends meet (Owen, personal communication, July 18, 2013). Among the first of the steps in creating a cohesive arts and culture effort in the downtown area may be assessing and inventorying the current conditions of our downtown arts and culture institutions and subsequently what additional conditions this industry would need in order to grow and thrive. Their strengths and weaknesses within the context of their downtown environment need to be assessed prior to the development of strategies for addressing this call. This paper will focus on potential for arts and culture institutions to act as a catalyst for and as important players in downtown development in San Antonio. Additionally, because of the importance of the cultural industry to downtown development, this paper will also focus on best practices in cities that have had similar goals of strengthening their arts and culture sectors by building on cultural resources they already had through cultural plans. The goal of this research is to glean possible next steps in developing strategies to improve the state of arts and culture in downtown San Antonio. Only then can San Antonio build upon its downtown assets and create a rich arts and culture environment through which to improve quality of life in downtown San Antonio.

### **CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AS A CATALYST FOR DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT: IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE**

In order to understand the possible role of arts and culture institutions in impacting quality of life in downtown San Antonio, one must first understand the possible role such institutions have played in downtown development on a national level in recent years. Cultural organizations, such as SAMA, the Southwest School of Art, and Tobin Center for the Performing Arts in San Antonio, have begun to be recognized for their important role in contemporary revitalization efforts in cities across the United States (Strom, 2002). Overall, the urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 1960s only occasionally included cultural institutions, and most city planners and business people saw investments in culture as incidental to the main city development goals of industrial retention and office and housing development (Strom, 2002, 6). However, today development practitioners and scholars have begun to appreciate that the arts make up a wealth-generating economic sector, in which urban areas are able to retain a competitive advantage. During the past two decades, city officials have learned to value historic communities rather than razing them; have turned empty warehouses into “arts districts”; and have committed local tax dollars to museums and performing arts complexes (Strom, 2002, 3).

In a survey of 65 U.S. cities with populations of 250,000 and above, 71 major performing arts centers and museums have been either built or expanded since 1985 (American Association of Museums, 1999; Strom, 2002). By the 1980s, the dominant urban development policy had shifted away from cities that competed for investment from corporate headquarters and producer service firms by offering low costs, abating taxes, and improving infrastructure (Bailey, 1989). Today’s educated workers are more likely to choose appealing locations with attractive natural and cultural resources because firms that rely on highly skilled labor have greater incentive to choose amenity-rich locations or strive to improve the quality of life in their headquarter cities (Clark, 2000). The “creative class”, as termed by Richard Florida, is attracted to unique food and drink establishments, as well as “authentic” art, retail, and entertainment that are likely to arise organically from surroundings in which a sizeable number of the creators and patrons of culture live close by (Florida, 2002, 182).

In addition to attracting skilled workers and the firms that employ them, cultural institutions help create the recreational infrastructure thought to make a city more appealing to tourists and investors (Eisinger, 2000 and Hannigan, 1998 as cited by Strom, 2002). For instance, Ford Motor’s marketing director noted that the presence of Michigan Opera Theater in Detroit made it easier to recruit white-collar employees, no doubt a motivating factor for the General Motors Corporation, the Ford Motor Company and DaimlerChrysler A.G. in lending their

support to the institution (Bradsher, 1999). Today, the relationship between a city's economy and its cultural institutions is seen as a potential catalyst for rebirth in the city, and many public officials and donors have proclaimed their support for culture as a means of spurring an economic revival (Byrd, 1997 and Davies, 1998 as cited by Strom, 2002). Kicking off a fundraising drive for the expansion of the Newark museum -- which was once recognized as a symbol for local prosperity in 1909 -- New Jersey Governor Tom Kean publicized the museum and other cultural assets as "catalysts for rebirth" which help to create "the kind of public image needed for growth and new jobs" (Courtney 1984).

Thus, whereas the arts were once considered a luxury to be experienced by only an elite group of city dwellers, today's cultural institutions are constructed as a part of a city's economic revitalization program. In fact, cultural institutions have begun to have an increasingly close and mutually beneficial relationship between urban political, economic, and cultural entrepreneurs (Strom, 2002, 6). Several trends have contributed to this relationship. First, cities that seek to attract businesses with quality of life amenities are eager to support the success of cultural institutions as they believe these institutions will increase the city's symbolic capital and catalyze other, unsubsidized commercial activity. Secondly, cultural institutions are drawn by their own economic needs to seek broader audiences and exploit more commercial, income-generating strategies. Finally, the boundaries between high culture and popular culture have blurred in recent years, and thus cultural institutions are today better positioned to become active stakeholders in urban growth policies (Strom 2002, 6).

As shown by recent changes, the relationship between arts and culture institutions and urban development on the national level has begun to evolve and suggests that arts and culture institutions have the potential to positively impact livability and economic development in San Antonio just as it has in cities around the nation. Additionally, and just as importantly, the state of this relationship suggests that cultural institutions may also benefit and even thrive with the help of urban developers. As such, the city may find itself at an ideal crossroads for developing the state of arts and culture institutions in downtown San Antonio specifically as a means to improve quality of life.

### **EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES: STRENGTHENING CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

According to the SA2020 Downtown Development initiative, downtown San Antonio will be the "heart of San Antonio and everyone's neighborhood by the year 2020" (Downtown Development, 2013). Considering the potential for arts and culture to act as a catalyst for urban development, downtown should be a focus for developing the state of arts and culture institutions in San Antonio. Within recent years, the city as a whole has set precedent and made a conscious effort to support the growth and recognition of San Antonio's creative economy through the *Cultural Collaborative Plan for San Antonio's Creative Economy*, a 10-year plan prepared in 2005 by the TCC Steering Committee and the City of San Antonio Office of Cultural Affairs (City of San Antonio Office of Cultural Affairs, 2005). The *Cultural Collaborative* was a plan for San Antonio's creative economy and entire community and consisted of stakeholders in the arts and culture community ranging from representatives from Texas Commission of the Arts, Gemini Ink, Frost National Bank, and VIA Metropolitan Transit (City of San Antonio Office of Cultural Affairs, 2005). The Plan was developed over 18 months with input from all sectors of the city. It is innovative in planning for the entire spectrum of our creative economy: nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, creative businesses, and creative individuals.

At the time of the *Cultural Collaborative Plans'* initial release, specific strategies, an implementation timeline, as well as implementation partners and their responsibilities were outlined in detail. These steps for implementation were developed considering the demographics, cultural environment, and political realities of San Antonio at the time. The Plan's strategies fell under the categories of Access, Economic Development, Community Awareness, Authenticity and Creativity, and Resources as they related to the arts in San Antonio (City of San Antonio Office of Cultural Affairs, 2005). Since 2005, the Department of Culture and Creative Development (DCCD), previously the Office of Cultural Affairs, has implemented 88% of the *Cultural Collaborative* strategies - 33 out of 38- with \$3.7 million in funding support (Department of Culture and

Creative Development, 2013). Based on support for the Cultural Collaborative, City Council increased the allocation of hotel occupancy tax (HOT) funds for arts programs from 8% to 15%, significantly increasing the amount of funding available for the arts. In FY2012, DCCD began to transition funding from the Cultural Collaborative strategies to SA2020 strategies in support of the Arts and Culture Cause Area goals (Department of Culture and Creative Development, 2013).

According to the 2011 report on the creative economy released by the Office of Cultural Affairs, the *Cultural Collaborative Plan* may have played a role in some of the growth of San Antonio's creative economy between 2006 and 2011. The 2011 economic impact of the creative industry in San Antonio increased to \$4.6 billion with employment rising 11.6 percent since 2006 (City of San Antonio Office of Cultural Affairs, 2011). The *Cultural Collaborative* may have had a positive impact in raising the stature of the creative industry in San Antonio as a whole, and as such serves as a successful model for planning for the arts in San Antonio. A more focused collaborative and plan in support of downtown's existing arts and culture assets led by an institution invested in the state of arts and culture downtown may have an even greater impact on the arts in the downtown area. A downtown-specific plan based off of this model may improve the quality of life in downtown San Antonio while strengthening our arts and culture institutions downtown- building on the momentum of both the Downtown Development and Arts and Culture Cause Areas. As the "heart of San Antonio" and as the face of our city, downtown should be an initial focus for developing our arts and culture institutions in San Antonio (Downtown Development, 2013). As the relationship between a city's economy and its cultural institutions is now seen as a potential catalyst for rebirth in the city, a plan in support of arts and culture institutions in downtown San Antonio may positively impact Downtown Development indicators such as Housing Units Downtown and Downtown Employment.

The development of a collaborative and plan to develop arts and culture organizations specific to downtown San Antonio may also be informed by successful arts and culture initiatives developed in peer cities in addition to San Antonio's 2005 *Cultural Collaborative Plan* precedent. Many cities have embarked on strategies with the goal of improving the state of arts and culture in their community and building upon their assets to create a rich arts and culture environment. The following plans which are reviewed are not specific to downtowns. Most arts and culture planning processes are efforts that engage institutions and assets citywide. A plan focused on downtown would be unique to SA2020 and to San Antonio, but would build off of academic support for the use of creative institutions in downtown development particularly. Specifically, the *Imagine2020* initiative, Denver's cultural planning process, demonstrates the early stages of a cultural planning process led by the government agency Denver Arts and Venues, the Office of Economic Development, and the Mayor's office. In addition, the *City of Chicago Cultural Plan 2012* provides a healthy framework for a strategy-based plan grounded by research, and guided by the categories of people, policies, places, and planning culturally. Finally, the *Creative City Planning Framework* developed by the City of Toronto creates a basis and context within which to situate future plans, policies, and initiatives in order to build Toronto's capacity as a creative city, and led to a re-vamped cultural plan in 2011.

#### *Imagine2020: Denver's Cultural Planning Process*

In March of 2013, Mayor Michael B. Hancock and Denver Arts and Venues kicked off the city's cultural planning process with the launch of *Imagine2020: Creating a Future for Denver's Culture* (Denver Arts and Venues, 2013). The last cultural plan to be published in Denver was in 1898, and resulted in increased financial, policy, and program support for the arts. The goal of *Imagine2020* is to connect the city's vast network of cultural asset and support systems to foster continued growth, development, and education of the arts (Denver Arts and Venues, 2013). The cultural plan's development is funded by Arts and Venues with support from the Office of Economic Development and the Mayor's Office. The city will be seeking input from residents on what they imagine Denver's arts, cultural, and creative scene to look like in the year 2020. As the process moves forward, Corona Insights, a Denver-based consulting firm that focuses on research, analytics, and strategy will facilitate the process. Residents' input will be gathered through a public survey, community meetings, and cultural events. In addition to surveying the public, Corona will be gathering input from a

stakeholder leadership group consisting of 120 members, as well as from broader artistic, cultural, and creative sectors through planned events (Denver Arts and Venues, 2013).

### *City of Chicago Cultural Plan 2012*

In 2012, the City of Chicago released its *City of Chicago Cultural Plan 2012* which aimed to translate the cultural needs and identity of its community into a tool for implementing recommendations (Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, 2012). Overall, the plan was meant to serve as a planning document for enhancing Chicago's thriving arts and culture sector, supporting creativity, innovation, and excellence in the arts. Specifically, the plan's recommendations seek to address gaps in cultural service delivery, expand participation, broaden the impact of culture, identify new activities, and stake out the City's identity through cultural expression. Methodology for drafting the plan occurred in phases following the request for proposal. Following the request in October of 2011, phases included research and analysis of Chicago's cultural environment, public engagement, visioning and setting direction, and finally the creation of a plan in 2012 (Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, 2012).

Since the release of the plan in 2012, four areas of focus for implementation of the *Chicago Cultural Plan in 2013* have been chosen, including Arts Education, Creative Industries, Cultural Districts and tourism. Through this focus, roughly 20 percent of the 241 initiatives of the cultural plan are done or are nearly done as of January 31, 2013 as reported in the Plan's Action Update (Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, 2013). An additional 46 percent are near-term items that are anticipated to be completed by the end of 2013 (Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, 2013). All action items are categorized and tracked under the categories of people, policies, places, or planning culturally as well as under recommendations attached to each category. Recommendations such as "Make equal access to arts education a reality" and "Advocate for high-quality arts education" fall under the category of people. In this way, progress can be easily measured under each broad focus area (Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, 2013).

### *The Creative City Planning Framework and Cultural Plan – Toronto*

The *Creative City Planning Framework* developed by the City of Toronto in 2008, is a planning effort that seeks to link creativity and culture to a new economic development strategy in progress for the City of Toronto (AuthentiCity, 2008). Although the plan does not offer comprehensive strategies for the city, it does provide a larger planning and policy context within to situate future plans, policies, and initiatives in order to build Toronto's capacity as a creative city. In doing so, it offers up a snapshot of Toronto's strengths and challenges when it comes to arts and culture, including data on its creative industry and potential -- much like the San Antonio Creative Industry 2011 report. The Framework reviews major policies and plans, strategies and reports, projects, initiatives, and investments, and city divisions and community partners that are already established in Toronto for the following spheres of creative city plans: Creative Cities, Creative Economies, Creative and Cultural Industries, Creative Hubs and Districts (AuthentiCity, 2008). It also acts as a resource as it reviews strategies for approaching issues such as zoning, taxation, and financing the public infrastructure in order to build a creative city.

This Framework reviews Mayor David Miller's call for creativity as the economic development strategy for Toronto as laid out in his city-wide Agenda for Prosperity (AuthentiCity, 2008). Creativity is embraced as one of the city's most important economic drivers and is directly correlated with the Strategy's themes of Prosperity, Livability, and Opportunity. Strategy is organized around the areas of: Global Toronto-Internationalization; Proactive Toronto- Business Climate; Creative Toronto -- Creativity, Productivity, and Growth; and One Toronto -- Economic Opportunity and Inclusion for All (AuthentiCity, 2008). Each area of focus, similar to SA2020's Cause Areas, includes a series of goals and recommendations related to the area of focus. This initiative, in addition to the data and other inventoried policies, plans, and initiatives are brought

together in Toronto's Creative City Planning Framework to act as a resource for future steps to transform Toronto into a creative city.

In 2011, Toronto's City Hall Council chamber voted to approve a revamped cultural plan based upon the Framework's recommendations. Prepared by the City of Toronto Economic Development Committee and the Toronto City Council, the plan provides one key recommendation for each of the following areas of focus: Cultural Place, Access and Diversity, Cultural Scenes and Creative Clusters, Positioning Toronto as Creative Capital, The City's Leadership, and Finance and Funding. Each key recommendation is paired with specific *Actions* to implement change. To date, the Plan has complete 60% of its recommendations while only being halfway through its timeline.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR AND ARTS AND CULTURE STRATEGY IN DOWNTOWN SAN ANTONIO**

Although each planning process consists of different methodologies and that are at different levels of implementation, they each have critical implications for a potential arts and culture collaborative and plan specific to downtown San Antonio and led by an institution invested in the state of arts and culture downtown. The plans provide support for the methodologies of the Cultural Collaborative Plan, as well as for building off of the momentum of the Downtown Development and Arts and Culture Cause Areas. Together, their success thus far provides support for a strategy that is first informed by an extended period of research that incorporates the policy context of downtown San Antonio as well as the strengths and weaknesses of our arts and culture institutions. All three cultural planning processes, as well as the Cultural Collaborative Plan, were developed after extended periods of research and/or public engagement in order to outline relevant policy, the strengths and weaknesses of the cultural economy and institutions, and gather input from arts and culture organizations and the general public.

Secondly, the cultural plans provide support for a strategy that has very clear areas of focus with recommendations and action items, along with responsible parties to ensure that progress and success is easily tracked. Specifically the *City of Chicago Cultural Plan* provided an *Action Update*, while the City of Toronto's cultural plan tracked each key recommendation by specific actions taken to implement change. Both plans are able to track the percentage of initiatives complete so far. The *City of Chicago Cultural Plan* has 20% of its focus items completed to date, while the City of Toronto's cultural plan has 60% of its action items completed to date. The development of a downtown specific cultural collaborative and plan should be organized by distinct areas of focus with recommendations based on research for each, and specific action items that can be tracked for progress with entities outlined responsible for their completion.

Finally, the cultural plans provide support for a strategy that is directly tied to the Cause Areas of Arts and Culture and Downtown Development in order to build off of the momentum of SA2020 planning efforts. Toronto's *Framework* reviews the mayor's city-wide initiative -- the Agenda for Prosperity -- as an asset for future cultural planning that provides important opportunities to connect creativity and culture to a new core planning document for the city. SA2020 should be viewed as an opportunity to connect arts and culture needs specific to downtown to a city-wide plan that already benefits from a significant amount of momentum and support. Any potential collaborative and planning effort should be directly tied to the Cause Areas of Arts and Culture and Downtown Development in order to build off of one of San Antonio's greatest planning efforts.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Downtown San Antonio is rich in cultural organizations that are true assets to our city, and if included in a cohesive effort to strengthen them, these assets have the potential to increase quality of life and create a destination for arts and culture downtown. According to the SA2020 initiative, Downtown San Antonio will be the heart of San Antonio and everyone's neighborhood by the year 2020 (Downtown Development, 2013). As such, considering the potential for arts and culture to act as a catalyst for urban development, downtown should be a focus for developing the state of arts and culture in San Antonio in support of the goals of SA2020. A cultural planning process that fosters collaboration between stakeholders in arts and culture downtown and

results in measurable results tied to the SA2020 planning effort may be a good fit for downtown San Antonio -- especially considering the precedent set by the Cultural Collaborative Plan. The *Cultural Collaborative* model was successful in convening stakeholders in San Antonio's arts and culture community and in developing a strategic plan to address arts and culture needs in San Antonio as a whole.

A more focused cultural collaborative geared specifically towards arts and culture in downtown San Antonio that would build off of the recent academic support for the use of creative institutions in downtown development may result in greater impact than a city wide effort. Evidence-based practices in other cities as well as past precedent in San Antonio would also inform strategy for a successful downtown arts plan. Strategy should be influenced by an extended period of research, have clear areas of focus with recommendations, action items, and responsible parties, and should be directly tied to the Cause Areas of Arts and Culture and Downtown Development. With the momentum of the SA2020 initiative, San Antonio could lay the groundwork for the importance of arts and culture in the downtown of a city, not only by initially creating positive change in downtown but by impacting the entire city through its growth as an arts and culture destination. Doing so would allow San Antonio to build upon its downtown assets and create a rich arts and culture environment through which to improve quality of life in downtown San Antonio.

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