



# IDEAS COLLABORATIVE PHASE 1 REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

February 15, 2011

## INTRODUCTION

While the cultural sector of Onondaga County creates a quality of life unmatched by many communities its size, a next generation of audiences for arts and cultural programs can't be presumed. Shifting demographics, rising inflation, limited arts exposure in public schools, reduced public and private funding for the arts, and our national economic recession are all tearing away at the fabric of the cultural community. Continued investment in sustaining current audiences while also building future audiences is vital to the sector's health.

The **IDEAS Collaborative** (Initiative for Developing and Engaging Audiences in Syracuse) was launched in May 2010 in response to national declines in arts audiences and funding and a movement among grantmakers to provide sustainable support for cultural organizations through collaborative funding models. The intent of this initiative is to strengthen the fabric of the cultural community in Syracuse and Onondaga County. By working together, funders, grantees, and community members share the common goals of increasing cultural participation, identifying and growing sustainable audiences, and uncovering opportunities for cooperative activity and resource sharing.

This effort is a partnership between six local funders (**Allyn Foundation, the Central New York Community Foundation, the Gifford Foundation, the Dorothy and Marshall M. Reisman Foundation, the John Ben Snow Foundation and the Trust for Cultural Resources of Onondaga County**) and 43 Onondaga County organizations<sup>1</sup> ranging in budget size from under \$100,000 to over \$10 million. These organizations came together over the course of nine months to use market research, audience feedback, community engagement, and facilitated internal discussions to establish common goals and a design for this unique venture.

The IDEAS Collaborative (led initially by the funding group) retained Surale Phillips, President of Decision Support Partners, Inc., with the charge of assessing current and potential audiences in Onondaga County and surrounding areas. Phillips' work involves extensive research, surveys, and workshops to study the opportunities for stronger cultural participation. The primary research method was geo-demographic analysis, community surveys and forums, and participant meetings.

Funders are often in a reactive rather than proactive role responding to organizations on a project by project basis with little connection to one another and to how the whole ecosystem is working together. Some organizations rely on emergency operational funds from the Cultural Resources Trust which is a finite resource. The funders group also believes that it is imperative

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<sup>1</sup> The participating organizations are listed at the end of this document.

for grantmakers to work together to find creative ways to insure the long-term viability of providers of cultural activities and by taking a longer view, they will be able to collaborate better and create a system whereby a larger pool of resources can be built.

The recommendations in this report include an approach for subsequent phases of project work and a new funding mechanism based on input from all participants, and in response to concerns that funding through the initiative might supplant general operating support—a vital part of the revenue mix. The IDEAS Collaborative offers a new funding strategy that can address the collective marketing needs of the arts and cultural community in Syracuse, and eventually provide grants for specific audience development efforts tailored to an organization's unique circumstances and challenges framed by the research.

## **METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS**

*“I was really interested in reading about the consumers. Who they are, what their interests are, and where they live. The demographics surprised me in a few cases.”—IDEAS Collaborative Organization*

Phase 1 ran from May 2010 through February 2011 at a total cost of \$80,000. All 43 participating arts, cultural, heritage and other entertainment organizations in Onondaga County provided patron data towards an aggregate market analysis. They also participated in three workshops or group meetings with the consultant. The IDEAS organizations provided input into the research, the survey and the final report.

To study the market and the aggregate arts/culture/heritage audience, Decision Support Partners:

- analyzed existing audience characteristics and compared them to the population at large;
- identified consumer demand for arts and culture in local market segments;
- collected community input through public meetings and surveys;
- tested solutions for removing barriers to cultural participation; and,
- recommended solutions for implementation in future project phases.

Research specifics included:

- geodemographic analysis of more than 77,000 households affiliated with the IDEAS Collaborative organizations;
- overlap analysis of audience households among the IDEAS Collaborative organizations;
- community conversations and a public forum (hosted by CNY Speaks) in nine city/county locations involving more than 150 area residents; and,
- community survey of close to 3,000 area residents representing current and potential audiences.

The combined culturally-engaged households in Onondaga County and beyond (extending to Fulton, Auburn, Tully and Cazenovia) approach 77,000, or 34% of area households. There is an overlap in households reached of 31%, and several potentially fruitful market segments were identified. The series of community conversations followed by a survey of current and potential audience members added texture to this research.

*“Appeal more to people in my age demographic (20s) than to families with kids/teens. We have more money and time to throw around. ... we want to see stuff that’s new, different and exciting. You need to give us reasons to come out and participate.”—IDEAS Collaborative Survey Response*

In the Phase 1 report the consultant combined the market analysis and the survey outcomes and provided these specific findings:

- The arts and cultural sector has strong market penetration in the greater Syracuse area and the community highly values arts and cultural opportunity.
  - These are strengths on which to build; it is as important to maintain this strong market as it is to look at developing future audiences.
  - Tell the story of the impact of arts and culture better and more often as part of an overall public marketing and PR campaign. Share voices and images from the community in making the case for how the arts benefit people’s lives and the community.
  - Invest in efforts that create more access for active participation (personal creativity) and passive participation (attending).
- There are three distinct arts/culture market segments in the greater Syracuse area each needing attention. (A detailed report identifies these segments and Phase 2 work will provide strategies to reach them.)
  - Invest in collaborative solutions that improve coordination of and access to arts/cultural information; improve the overall cultural “experience,” particularly downtown; directly address community needs and the identified barriers; and encourage organizational risk-taking that may bring organizations and community members out of “comfort zones” to try new activities.
- The practical barriers to cultural participation are: lack of compelling, broad-based, accurate and easy information in addition to high prices and limited scheduling.
  - Establish a task force to oversee development of an integrated web-based tool for public marketing, data capture and warehousing, internal communications, and potentially opt-in list sharing. While considering options for collective marketing tools, it is important that these be developed with input from companies and people running current websites. The goal should be one arts/culture website with one engine that can neatly populate other public sites and mobile devices, and adapt as new information technology tools enter the market.
  - Consider collective packaging that can be advertised with cost-sharing among organizations.
  - Consider ways in which a central entity such as the Cultural Resources Council might coordinate PR on behalf of organizations that do not have adequate resources.
- Broadening audiences may require more program variety and formats in which they are delivered. Consumer demand for arts and culture could be better linked to the supply.
  - Better coordinate and plan as early as possible.

- Ensure that strategies are developed to reach more local audiences and to attract regional day-trippers and more overnight visitors to the area with packages.
  - Use more daytime and weekday hours, and spread out programs more evenly during the year.
  - Make event information more accurate and searchable by times/ days/ months /seasons/ after-school/daytime/etc.
  - Develop product, and experiment with formats for how the product is delivered.
  - Consider cultural way-finding as part of the marketing program; orient people, even locals to the cultural assets that surround them.
  - Consider conducting case studies of supply, demand, and facility, comparing the greater Syracuse area to other benchmark cities such as Rochester, Buffalo, and Albany, NY; Springfield, MA; Grand Rapids, MI; and Erie, PA.
- Onondaga arts and culture needs a brand identity fully supported by a marketing program. Implementing the best “Big Ideas” can also help to diversify the audience base (website, discounts, better scheduling, interactive programming, parking locations etc.).

In priority order, solutions proposed by the community that support the idea of an overall marketing program include:

- a centralized, professional website showcasing all arts, culture, and entertainment offering with links to information, tickets, and an up-to-the-minute calendar;
- better communication from local universities; and, more critical reviews, feature stories, and overall media coverage of arts and cultural events.
- flexible/customized ticket packages; discounted dining/shopping partnerships; arts/cultural samplers that discount and mix organizations; discounted group prices for community groups; and “pay what you can” programs.

Implications:

- ✓ Create identity and plan for overall marketing campaign before designing or launching a website. Think big when it comes to the identity of this sector, looking at strong models in other communities.
  - ✓ Invest in the top collaborative solutions and have the CRC facilitate planning for these projects with the IDEAS Collaborative organizations.
  - ✓ Secure the talents of local professional media and marketing professionals through competitive bid.
  - ✓ Involve the IDEAS Collaborative participants in decision-making.
- Existing audiences are the hottest market for increasing frequency and variety of cultural participation. Understanding what drives enjoyment can inform what types of experiences are most compelling to different types of audiences. (Again, Phase 2 will help organizations use specific findings to reach out to new audiences.)
    - Invest in the capacity of organizations to track audiences.
    - Explore implementing a professional opt-in list trade system
    - Explore ways to cross-pollinate audiences with new partners.
    - Target “after work” audiences and grandparents.
    - Explore promotional partnerships with non-arts entertainment (e.g. movie theaters, sports, recreation).
    - Explore ways to better leverage the strong connection between public media and arts/culture.

- Use Phase 2 report on overlap specifics as a guide to potential collaborators.
- If funds are available, help organizations
  - understand who the target audience is for programs/projects;
  - improve or invest in very high-quality work, new work, renowned artists;
  - include dynamic and interactive experiences, multi-venue experiences;
  - enable social opportunities and social connections driven by peer networks.

*“My husband and I frequently find out about really great events AFTERWARDS or in some cases the DAY it’s going on. We are busy people who love to enjoy our community and culture—we do not have the time (nor energy) to explore a bazillion different avenues to figure out what is available. A dedicated ... Events and Activities website—well organized and thought through—would be invaluable! And I would definitely have it bookmarked.”*

*– IDEAS survey respondent*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations for Phase 2 (from March 2011 to February 2012) have been adopted:

1. Develop a broad-based marketing campaign to promote arts and culture in our area, to include a comprehensive website and other new media, traditional elements as well (billboards, etc.) Establish a Task Force to develop the website in partnership with other local sites to share one database engine.
2. Build the capacity of the Cultural Resources Council
  - a. to become a stronger arts council that responds to the needs of community and organizations,
  - b. to manage a widespread marketing campaign and website,
  - c. to eventually administer planning and implementation grants for audience development activity.
3. Provide each IDEAS organization with their specific marketing analysis with explanations by the consultant and the opportunity to further utilize her advice in implementing new approaches.
4. Establish an IDEAS Fund at the CNY Community Foundation to distribute grants for both collective and individual implementation efforts. Distributions would be determined by an advisory committee made up of funder representatives, local leaders, and the consultant.
5. Encourage organizations to continue to meet and collaborate – aggregate as well as individual data will support natural linkages. Also build the capacity of these organizations and the community by
  - a. Scheduling marketing workshops to explore new methodologies.
  - b. Sending three organizations to the National Arts Marketing conference and bringing best practices back to IDEAS participants.
  - c. Bringing someone from another community who has successfully implemented audience development changes to speak to local officials.

*“Sometimes it seems like there’s not much going on for several weeks at a time, then suddenly multiple events are happening the same weekend or over the same day. It’s unfortunate where*

*there are two or three different things you'd like to attend, and you're forced to choose one over the other.”—IDEAS Collaborative Survey Response.*

Implementing a collaborative marketing program for local arts, culture, and entertainment can benefit all cultural providers and community residents. Since there are several local websites that are not consistently well-used, it is strongly recommended that the CRC establish a Task Force that includes individuals from the local media, local universities, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and all entities currently coordinating and disseminating “cultural calendars” to ensure that efforts are not duplicative and local resources are leveraged.

The consultant also recommended that this website not be limited to just promoting the arts. It should include an online mechanism for artists, organizations, and others to communicate with one another, plan and coordinate events and activities. A variety of options and models should be explored before developing the site. In addition, the site should also be considered as only one element of an overall campaign. Professional services should be secured to create a compelling and contemporary branded campaign that includes collaborative promotional tactics. The campaign might be presented in phases with the overall design and basic elements of the public website coming first.

The CRC should be appropriately supported so that it can grow as a full-service local arts agency. Strong arts councils are true stewards of cultural development in their communities because they focus all resources and energy on ensuring that the cultural sector is healthy, effective, and thriving. They are the nexus between supply and demand—they keep one eye on important community agendas at all times and facilitate the involvement of the cultural sector in doing whatever it can to help advance those important agendas. They help the sector stay viable, vital, and relevant.

## **CONCLUSION**

By channeling investment in the overall arts ecosystem into new audience development and a sustainable system for ongoing collective marketing, the funding group hopes to leverage long-term benefits that are sustainable as well as responsive to larger economic development opportunities. A stronger arts and cultural landscape in Syracuse benefits the entire region by improving quality of life, increasing tourism, engaging residents and strengthening workforces, and can act as an economic engine to revitalize the community. In turn, a more vital Onondaga County benefits each and every one of the arts and culture organizations through an increased tax base, healthier businesses, and population growth.

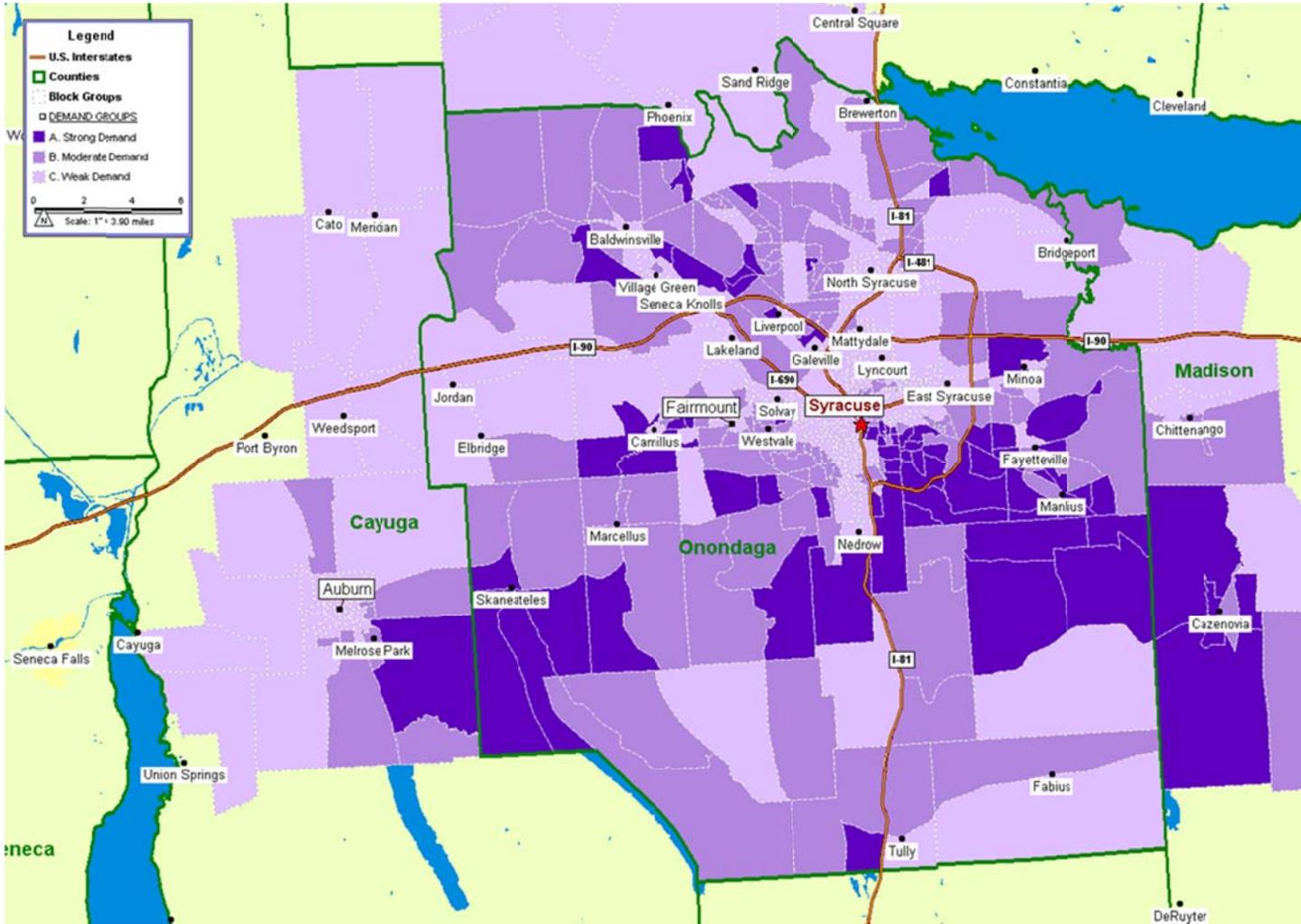
The fact that these 43 organizations willingly shared not only their patron data but also their time and commitment to this project is to be honored. This is an opportunity to diminish the current competitive environment, strengthen earned income streams and encourage collaboration. Communities who have utilized this approach have found that audiences grew from 5% to 10% with increased collaboration, leveraging of additional funds for both individual and collective marketing strategies, and new knowledge about the community useful for advocacy and fundraising. This is the first time that a group of funders this diverse have come together on such a targeted subject matter.

We are delighted with the work that Surale Phillips of Decision Support Partners has accomplished over the past nine months. We are equally grateful for the willingness of the 43 organizations to share their data, time and knowledge to make this project happen. This

diverse group of organizations ranges in size from small, all-volunteer groups to all of the county's universities; from performing arts to public television to sports. Finally this report would not have been possible without the members of this community who participated in focus groups, forums and our survey.

Truly vital and seismic transformations can occur when thoughtful intentions are paired with bold maneuvers. Syracuse and Onondaga County are now on the cusp of such a moment. It will not happen overnight and it will take patience and innovation. The potential is there, the pieces are in place; the transformation is already beginning.

Map of Consumer Demand Groups for Arts/Culture



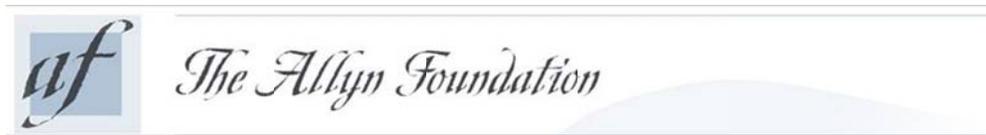
## IDEAS COLLABORATIVE PARTICIPANTS

ArtRage Gallery  
CNY Jazz Arts Foundation, Inc.  
Community Folk Art Center  
Cultural Resources Council  
Erie Canal Museum  
Everson Museum of Art  
Friends of the Central Library/Rosamond Gifford Lecture Series  
Rosamond Gifford Zoo  
Gifford Family Theatre  
LeMoyne College Theatre  
Matilda Joslyn Gage Center  
MOST (Museum of Science and Technology)  
Northside Urban Partnership  
OnCenter Complex (entertainment, sports, family events)  
Onondaga Community College  
Onondaga Historical Association  
Open Hand Theater  
Parents Promoting Dance  
Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company  
Rarely Done Productions  
Red House Arts Center  
Salt City Center for the Performing Arts  
Skaneateles Festival  
Society for New Music  
Spanish Action League - La Liga  
Syracuse Landmark Theatre  
Syracuse Childrens Chorus  
Syracuse City Ballet  
Syracuse Community Choir  
Syracuse Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Syracuse Friends of Chamber Music  
Syracuse Gay and Lesbian Chorus  
Syracuse International Film Festival  
Syracuse Opera  
Syracuse Poster Project  
Syracuse Stage  
Syracuse Symphony Orchestra  
Syracuse University (lectures, arts, sports)  
Syracuse Vocal Ensemble  
Wacheva Cultural Center  
WAER – FM  
WCNY - Public Broadcasting Council of CNY  
Y-Arts: the Arts Branch of the YMCA of Greater Syracuse



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