Maryland State Arts Council
Strategic Plan

May, 2019
Maryland State Arts Council Strategic Plan

Executive Summary
It is a privilege to share this strategic plan for the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC). This three- to five-year plan is the foundation for our vision to play an essential role ensuring every person has access to the transformative power of the arts. Our mission is to advance the arts in our state by providing leadership that champions creative expression, diverse programming, equitable access, lifelong learning, and the arts as a celebrated contributor to the quality of life for all the people of Maryland.

Further framing this plan is our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout our organization, programs, and initiatives.

We are energized as we embrace our five overarching goals:
• Increasing Participation
• Providing Intentional Support
• Building Capacity
• Leveraging Connections
• Bolstering the Arts in Maryland

We believe this sharpens our focus and responds to the feedback we received as to how MSAC can best advance the arts and build community in the rapidly changing landscape of our state.

We are thankful for the guidance of our strategic planning committee led by Shelley Morhaim; our entire staff and board; the numerous individuals who responded to our survey and attended our listening sessions; leaders from other agencies who shared industry insight; and our arts management consultants and partners at AMS Planning & Research.

1 Final Version (May 2019)
Introduction

Over the past two years, MSAC has welcomed new executive leadership, staff, and invigorated councilors who are deeply engaged in efforts to highlight and strengthen the arts in Maryland in alignment with goals set by the Department of Commerce. Building upon existing momentum and a desire to position MSAC as a catalyst for the sector, the Council engaged AMS Planning & Research in 2018 to provide guidance in the development of a visionary and comprehensive plan for future strategic and operational direction.

MSAC and AMS embarked on a broadly inclusive process which provided room for creative thinking and meaningful conversations. The planning team sought to hear from often unheard voices and intentionally created space for honest expression and varied opinions regarding defining future strategic priorities.

The resulting strategic plan reflects the evolution of a legacy institution. It reimagines a decades-long approach to grant-making, makes recommendations regarding staff capacity and empowerment, encourages increased presence in the field, embraces non-traditional partnerships and relationships, articulates strategies to increase awareness of the Council’s work, and commits to equity, diversity, and inclusion as foundational to the work of MSAC.

Based on statewide listening and goal definition in the strategic planning process, the MSAC staff and Council have already begun implementation of several strategies to improve specific programs.¹ While MSAC recognizes a finite amount of resources exist to pursue the ambitious goals and objectives outlined in this plan, the Council is confident and poised to advance this work and play an essential role in ensuring every person has access to the transformative power of the arts.

¹ See the appendix for a list of interviewees and public listening events.
Planning Context

Maryland’s vibrant arts community is the beneficiary of a committed State appropriation through MSAC, of which over 90 percent has historically been dedicated to grants serving organizations, county arts councils, and individual artists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Area Population</th>
<th>Maryland State Arts Council</th>
<th>Minnesota State Arts Board</th>
<th>DC Commission on the Arts</th>
<th>Indiana Arts Commission</th>
<th>Mass Cultural Council</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>6.05M</td>
<td>5.52M</td>
<td>694K</td>
<td>6.67M</td>
<td>6.86M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual Operating Budget</td>
<td>$20M</td>
<td>$40M</td>
<td>$31M</td>
<td>$6M</td>
<td>$18M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portion for Grants</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>72%</td>
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<tr>
<td># Full-Time Staff</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
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*Figure 1 Summary comparison of benchmark agencies*

MSAC aspires to better adapt its programs in parallel with changing needs of the sector. Furthermore, the Council strives to provide services equitably across the State to break down barriers to engagement as well as grow and diversify constituents served and modes of support. The Council views this plan as a launch pad from which it can broaden the organization’s reach, increase its own capacity, grow resources for the arts community through partnerships, and continue to foster artistic excellence, development, and preservation of cultural heritage. MSAC strives to ensure continued investment in and commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion and articulate the vision for a new facility as an asset that enables the strategic direction.

The plan identifies attainable, measurable goals which both affirm the organization’s reimagined vision and mission as well as acknowledge issues, ideas, and initiatives important to MSAC stakeholders and the sector broadly. To that end, this strategic plan was developed with a tremendous amount of community input and places considerable emphasis on learning from others. In tandem with listening sessions and town halls MSAC staff held across the state, AMS conducted interviews with several community stakeholders, distributed a broad sector stakeholder survey, and shared learnings from other state arts agencies and service providers.
The planning committee considered MSAC’s current perceived role and how the Council might adapt to best serve Maryland’s arts and culture sector and help address specific challenges artists and arts organizations face. While MSAC plays multiple roles within the sector, its role as a funder is unsurprisingly most prominent. **Ensuring equitable funding** is and will remain a priority as MSAC considers additional **non-monetary modes of support** to engage the sector more deeply.
MSAC's goals broadly mirror some of the challenges faced by Maryland's arts and culture sector. Perceptions of the Council's work are directly correlated with the degree of engagement with its stakeholders and constituents. MSAC must grow awareness of its programs and enable opportunities for **broader participation across the sector**.

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4 Challenges faced by artists and arts organizations from Creative Conversations and other listening sessions hosted by MSAC**

MSAC strives to foster growth and success of the arts in Maryland, and views collaboration as critical to fulfilling this aspiration. MSAC’s network is robust, with hundreds of relationships throughout the state. Whether it is through continued partnerships, new relationships in support of specific initiatives, or facilitating conversations amongst organizations and leaders with unique perspectives, MSAC aspires to **leverage connections** to advance its work and the impacts of the sector.

As a major source of operating support for arts organizations across Maryland, MSAC recognizes the need for its own staff and councilors to be properly resourced and informed to maximize its impact. To that end, MSAC has identified multiple areas in which training, professional development, open lines of communication, and thoughtful allocation of resources (money, time, and personnel) will help the organization **build its own capacity**.

The future of Maryland arts and culture is a vibrant, visible community of artists and organizations that are recognized and celebrated. MSAC's role in this community is to
enable others to engage citizens across all geographies, to produce, present and preserve art of all forms, and contribute to the quality of life in Maryland.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Vision and Mission

Vision
The Maryland State Arts Council plays an essential role ensuring every person has access to the transformative power of the arts.

Mission
Maryland State Arts Council advances the arts in our state by providing leadership that champions creative expression, diverse programming, equitable access, lifelong learning, and the arts as a celebrated contributor to the quality of life for all the people of Maryland.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

**Goal 1. Increase Participation:** Broaden MSAC’s constituency, providing avenues designed to increase pathways to engagement

**Objectives**
- In alignment with our equity, diversity and inclusion plan, proactively communicate and connect with communities and artists not fully served
- Increase MSAC’s presence across the State, promoting and providing more direct access to MSAC resources and personnel
- Create platforms and leverage relationships to grow learning and sharing opportunities within and beyond the sector

**Strategies**
- Engage with community leaders, artists, and organizations from less represented areas or communities to better understand and respond to their needs
- Strengthen efforts to reach new participants through existing grants programs
- Define desired outcomes of and better capitalize on Council and staff attendance at MSAC, partner, and grantee events
- Serve as a convener to share resources and boost knowledge

**Goal 2. Provide Intentional Support:** Embrace thoughtful and targeted approaches to serving known and yet to be known MSAC constituents

**Objectives**
• Improve grant-making policies and processes (both internally and for applicants) to promote equity in applications and resulting fund distribution
• Reevaluate and reimagine portfolio of funding programs to ensure MSAC has the greatest impact and broadest reach possible
• Provide more non-monetary support for grantees, artists, organizations, and the whole sector
• Listen to and understand the needs of artists and organizations to better serve as a responsive matchmaker for resources

**Strategies**
• Incorporate grantee feedback to broaden and diversify the opportunities and outcomes of MSAC funding programs
• Expand practical, educational and hands-on training offerings inclusive of workshops, webinars, or online classes in a variety of relevant topics
  Provide ongoing and rigorous assessment of the grant-making process and program efficacy

**Goal 3. Build Capacity:** Work strategically to further build organizational and governance capacity to ensure that MSAC is capable of vigorously delivering on its mission

**Objectives**
• Ensure alignment between staff resources and aspirations
• Adhere to best practices in financial transparency and communication throughout MSAC
• Encourage dialogue between staff and Council to enable knowledgeable communication regarding MSAC and its work
• Create an organizational culture that values continuous professional development, learning, and leadership in the sector
• Make MSAC a leader in equity, diversity and inclusion practice

**Strategies**
• Reinforce MSAC’s commitment to staff as arts leaders in the state and nation
• Understand and adopt governance best practices
• Better manage expectations for how State funds are used both internally (understanding of operational finances for staff and Council) and externally by communicating annual funding goals (programmatic funds and the portion of budget toward funding grants)
• Develop and implement an equity, diversity and inclusion plan and training
Goal 4. Leverage Connections: Further enhance current relationships and involve additional partners, collaborators, and constituents who will benefit from and advance the work of MSAC

Objectives
- Amplify the Council's work through focused partnerships with other state and local agencies
- Facilitate connections between artists and organizations as well as the communities in which they operate
- Explore and foster creative and nontraditional new partnerships to engage artists and communities and support our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion

Strategies
- Establish sustainable financial partnerships with organizations whose work complements the goals of existing MSAC programs
- Solidify a two-way connection with Maryland Office of Tourism to further demonstrate the value of the sector and align with the Department of Commerce
- Provide additional exposure to the work of County Arts Councils and Arts & Entertainment Districts while promoting the regions and destinations across the State
- Nurture and bolster MSAC partnerships with Maryland Citizens for the Arts (MCA), Community Arts Alliance of Maryland (CAAM), Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE; and other institutions of higher education), Maryland PTA, Maryland Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (MVLA), Arts Education in Maryland Schools Alliance (AEMS), Maryland Family Network (MFN), etc.
- Partner with community organizations and service providers to connect youth with elders in artistic activities to bolster lifelong learning and help ensure the longevity of MSAC's impact as the population ages
- Work with other governmental entities to advance MSAC's work and partner with organizations to build connections with artists and communities not yet identified
- Connect artists and organizations with other private and public sector funders and other funders across the State (and where appropriate, beyond)

Goal 5. Bolster Maryland Arts: Showcase the high caliber, diverse and relevant work of Maryland's artists and arts organizations; their contributions to community vitality and MSAC’s role as a catalyst

Objectives
- Serve as an ambassador of Maryland's arts
• Expand awareness of MSAC’s purpose and programs and impacts with key stakeholders, partners, audiences, and communities served
• Communicate program changes and reinforce our openness to supporting new and diverse artists and organizations

Strategies
• Promote Maryland as destination for art and festivals in complement to the work of the Office of Tourism
• Further highlight the artist registry and promote artists through MSAC materials and activities
• Grow awareness of MSAC on a micro level, encouraging staff, Council, and constituents to be ambassadors of MSAC, highlighting our work
• Establish reciprocal marketing agreements with MSAC partners and grantees, highlighting statewide sector activities through MSAC marketing efforts
• Harness the potential uses of digital and social media and distribute marketing materials in both electronic and traditional forms that reach people located in all areas of the State

Evaluation Measures

MSAC is committed to rigorous, on-going and transparent evaluation of strategic plan implementation. Council will reference plan intentions as guideposts in ongoing decision-making. We will conduct formal evaluation of our efforts on an annual basis, actively seeking means of quantifying impacts. Evaluation measures we intend to monitor include:

• Ongoing audit of equity, diversity, and inclusion progress
• Efficiency of response to input from and needs of constituents
• Attendance growth at MSAC and partner events
• Number of grant applicants (new, repeating) and characteristics of applicants as well as grantees
• Geographic impacts of services and funding (as we strive to expand our reach across the State)
• Marketing metrics to evaluate increased awareness (across all constituents: beneficiaries and grantees, partners, legislators, etc.)
• Satisfaction metrics across all internal and external stakeholders, beneficiaries, and partners
• Quality and success of partnerships in fulfilling goals

MSAC Staff has adopted both qualitative and quantitative metrics for evaluation of the above measures.
Appendix

Stakeholder Interviews

AMS conducted over 20 interviews, including the following individuals:

Staff
- Pamela Dunne, Senior Program Director. Grants for Organizations (Media, Multidiscipline, Visual Arts)
- Chad Edward Buterbaugh, Director Maryland Traditions, Program Director, Folk/Traditional Arts
- Steve Drapalski, Program Director, Grants for Organizations (Dance, Music, Theater) and Maryland Presenting and Touring Accessibility Coordinator
- Liesel Fenner, Public Art Program Director
- Dana Parsons, Director of Grants and Professional Development
- Steven Skerritt Davis, Program Director, Community Arts Development, Arts & Entertainment Districts, and Individual Artists Awards Programs
- Ken Skrzesz, Executive Director
- Christine Stewart, Program Director, Grants for Organizations (Arts Service, Children's Events, Literary Arts), Arts in Education

Council
- Barbara Bershon, St. Mary's County
- Carla Du Pree, Howard County
- Joan M.G. Lyon, Garret County, Board Secretary/Treasurer
- Julie Madden, Howard County
- Shelley Morhaim, Baltimore County, Chair
- John (Jack) Rasmussen, Incoming Chair
- Gary Vikan, Baltimore City

Others
- Nicholas Cohen, Executive Director, Maryland Citizens for the Arts
- Liz Fitzsimmons, Managing Director of the Division of Tourism, Film, and the Arts
- Mike Gill, Secretary of Commerce
- Yumi Hogan, First Lady
- Alysia Lee, Fine Arts Coordinator, MSDE
- Benjamin Wu, Deputy Secretary of Commerce

Listening Sessions
Prior to the strategic planning process, MSAC staff conducted seven program-specific listening sessions to garner feedback about each of the following existing MSAC programs:
- Accessibility and Veterans Programs
- Arts in Education (AiE)
- Grants for Organizations (GFO)
- Individual Artist Awards (IAA, now named Independent Artists Awards)
• Maryland Traditions
• Presenting/Touring
• Public Art

**Creative Conversations**
In tandem with the strategic planning process, MSAC staff conducted seven “Creative Conversations” across the State. During each meeting, MSAC staff solicited feedback on the following five questions to support the strategic plan:

1. What are the most pressing issues you face as an artist or as an arts organization?
2. What challenges exist in your community that intersect with the arts?
3. Are there specific ways MSAC could better support you?
4. What does success look like for MSAC in the short and long-term?
5. What three words best describe your aspiration for the future of arts and culture in Maryland?

9/13 Frederick, The Delaplaine Arts Center
9/17 Havre de Grace, The Cultural Center at Havre de Grace Opera House
9/20 Baltimore, Creative Alliance
9/27 Leonardtown, Leonardtown Town Hall
10/1 Annapolis, Annapolis Shakespeare Company
10/4 Frostburg, City Place

**Stakeholder Survey**
In collaboration with MSAC, AMS conducted a stakeholder survey to understand current perceptions and performance of MSAC and gauge stakeholder priorities for investment. The survey was distributed by email between October and November 2018 and received 740 responses from individual artists, community members, educators, and individuals responding on behalf of arts and culture organizations, government entities, and schools.

Respondents reflect all counties and over a third of all Maryland zip codes. The responses include current and past MSAC grantees, individuals and organizations who have partnered with or participated in an MSAC program, as well as some with no known intersections with MSAC.

**Best Practices**
In addition to the modes of primary research described above, AMS conducted research across the sector and interviewed four agencies on the topics below:
• Agency capacity building, board training, development, and structure
• Non-monetary support, training, facility models, and supporting non-501(c)3s
• Leading in equity, diversity, and inclusion and promoting access
MSAC Alignment with the Department of Commerce

As we developed our strategic plan, we considered how our goals align with the Department of Commerce, and identified many connections:

- Increase Participation
- Provide Intentional Support
- Build Capacity
- Leverage Connections
- Bolster Maryland Arts

Achieve Operational Excellence
Foster a Competitive Business Environment
Advance Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Expand Targeted Growth Clusters and Industries
Enhance Community Development
Improve Brand and Attract Talent

Implementation Timing

Within each goal, MSAC considered how we should prioritize the strategies over time. Based on early listening efforts and goal definition in the strategic planning process, the MSAC staff and Council have already begun implementation of several strategies to improve specific programs. To that end, the strategies described in the plan are prioritized in the tables which follow within the construct of NOW, SOON, NEXT, and LATER as MSAC works to accomplish the objectives articulated in this plan.
**Goal 1. Increase Participation:** Broaden MSAC’s constituency, providing avenues designed to increase pathways to engagement

**Objectives**
- In alignment with our equity, diversity and inclusion plan, proactively communicate and connect with communities and artists not fully served
- Increase MSAC’s presence across the State, promoting and providing more direct access to MSAC resources and personnel
- Create platforms and leverage relationships to grow learning and sharing opportunities within and beyond the sector

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<th>Now</th>
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</table>
| Engage with community leaders, artists, and organizations from less represented areas or communities to better understand and respond to their needs | • Connect emerging and established artists to encourage learning opportunities and possible collaborations  
• Connect with communities to preserve artistic engagement and cultural heritage | | | | |
| Strengthen efforts to reach new participants through existing grants programs | • Revise and clarify intent of Independent Artist Awards (IAA)  
• Expand participation in the Arts in Education (AiE) Visiting Performer and Artist in Residence programs  
• Strengthen and increase diversity of each MSAC grant program  
• Institute new panel structures  
• Encourage new applicants to apply for funding | | | | |
| Define desired outcomes of and better capitalize on Council and staff attendance at MSAC, partner, and grantee events | • Balance program administration with time in the field to educate agencies and the public for each of MSAC’s programs  
• Increase the level of staff engagement with County Arts Councils and statewide organizations to cultivate MSAC ambassadors across the State who can represent the Council both informally and formally  
• Boost MSAC’s presence by participating in relevant speaking engagements  
• Work with partners to hold regional office hours in other counties | | | | |
| Serve as a convener to share resources and boost knowledge | • Host focused conversations on equity, diversity and inclusion, accessibility, philanthropy, and other sector priorities  
• Collect and share economic impact data and stories  
• Showcase grantees with gallery and performance space in the new facility | | | | |
**Goal 2. Provide Intentional Support:** Embrace thoughtful and targeted approaches to serving known and yet to be known MSAC constituents

**Objectives**
- Improve grant-making policies and processes (both internally and for applicants) to promote equity in applications and resulting fund distribution
- Reevaluate and reimagine portfolio of funding programs to ensure MSAC has the greatest impact and broadest reach possible
- Provide more non-monetary support for grantees, artists, organizations, and the whole sector
- Listen to and understand the needs of artists and organizations to better serve as a responsive matchmaker for resources

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| Incorporate grantee feedback to broaden and diversify the opportunities and outcomes of MSAC funding programs | • Consider different grant types and amounts; for example: flexible grants, project grants, funding for “other” expenses, increased award amounts, etc.  
• Consider if/how the CAD program funding formula should evolve  
• Re-think approach to GFO funding formula, application process, and eligibility to minimize barriers to entry  
• Review Touring Grant applications quarterly to allow presenters pre-season funding and increase requests to allow roster artists to increase fees and allow presenters to offer larger and/or additional contracts  
• Expand artist information resources to be all-inclusive (makerspaces, exhibiting, studios, readings, etc.)  
• Encourage IAA participation through inclusive categories, requirements, process, and amounts  
• Evaluate approach to AiE funding opportunities, eligibility, and amounts to ensure statewide equity  
• Increase the realization of public art projects statewide through planning and project implementation support through both the Public Art Across Maryland and Percent for Art programs | | | | |

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**Goal 2. Provide Intentional Support (continued):** Embrace thoughtful and targeted approaches to serving known and yet to be known MSAC constituents

| Expand practical, educational and hands-on training offerings inclusive of workshops, webinars, or online classes in a variety of relevant topics | • Provide more effective staff support for first-time grant applicants  
• Use formal feedback from panelists to inform future workshops and training opportunities  
• Provide more and better technical assistance, both formally and informally  
• Highlight opportunities for professional development and achievement within and beyond Maryland  
• Share staff expertise through publication of articles and other educational materials as well as on-site visits or consultation |
|---|---|
| Provide ongoing and rigorous assessment of the grant-making process and program efficacy | • Formally orient, train, and facilitate funding panels  
• Introduce regular, ongoing evaluation of funding criteria  
• Increase communication and trust with grantees  
• Increase the accountability of grantees in follow-up evaluations  
• Determine the best approach to program evaluation |
**Goal 3. Build Capacity:** Work strategically to further build organizational and governance capacity to ensure that MSAC is capable of vigorously delivering on its mission

**Objectives**
- Ensure alignment between staff resources and aspirations
- Adhere to best practices in financial transparency and communication throughout MSAC
- Encourage dialogue between staff and Council to enable knowledgeable communication regarding MSAC and its work
- Create an organizational culture that values continuous professional development, learning, and leadership in the sector
- Make MSAC a leader in equity, diversity and inclusion practice

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reinforce MSAC’s commitment to staff as arts leaders in the state and nation</td>
<td>• Consistent with State policy, ensure MSAC’s staffing and salary structure is aligned with other “best practice” state arts agencies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Develop and communicate staff onboarding process to convey agency vision and strategic intention</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Encourage more staff engagement in the field and increase professional development opportunities and budget</td>
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<td>Understand and adopt governance best practices</td>
<td>• Promote consistent dialogue and transparency between staff and Council members</td>
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**Goal 4. Leverage Connections:** Further enhance current relationships and involve additional partners, collaborators, and constituents who will benefit from and advance the work of MSAC

**Objectives**
- Amplify the Council’s work through focused partnerships with other state and local agencies
- Facilitate connections between artists and organizations as well as the communities in which they operate
- Explore and foster creative and nontraditional new partnerships to engage artists and communities and support our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion

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<tr>
<td>Establish staple sustainable granting programs benefiting organizations whose work complements the mission of Maryland Traditions</td>
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<td>Solidify a two-way connection with Maryland Office of Tourism to further demonstrate the value of the sector and align with the Department of Commerce</td>
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<td>Partner with community organizations and service providers to connect youth with elders in artistic activities to bolster lifelong learning and help ensure the longevity of MSAC’s impact as the population ages</td>
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<td>Work with other governmental entities to advance MSAC’s work and partner with organizations to build connections with artists and communities not yet identified</td>
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<td>Connect artists and organizations with other private and public sector funders and other funders across the State (and where appropriate, beyond)</td>
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**Goal 5. Bolster Maryland Arts:** Showcase the high caliber, diverse and relevant work of Maryland's artists and arts organizations; their contributions to community vitality and MSAC's role as a catalyst

**Objectives**
- Serve as an ambassador of Maryland's arts
- Expand awareness of MSAC's purpose and programs and impacts with key stakeholders, partners, audiences, and communities served
- Communicate program changes and reinforce our openness to supporting new and diverse artists and organizations

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<td>Further highlight the artist registry and promote artists through MSAC materials and activities</td>
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<td>Grow awareness of MSAC on a micro level, encouraging staff, Council, and constituents to be ambassadors of MSAC, highlighting our work</td>
<td>• Institute a rigorous practice of shared acknowledgement with MSAC partners and grantees to build awareness of MSAC funding and impacts; develop and provide specific guidelines and training as needed</td>
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<td>Establish reciprocal marketing agreements with MSAC partners and grantees, highlighting statewide sector activities through MSAC marketing efforts</td>
<td>• Share features on different art forms and activities happening across the State as well as constituents served by MSAC, its grantees, partners, and other sector exemplars</td>
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<td>Harness the potential uses of digital and social media and distribute marketing materials in both electronic and traditional forms that reach people located in all areas of the State</td>
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