

Tucson Citizen

# Report: Tucson dreadful at nurturing its culture

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The draft Pima Cultural Plan unveiled Wednesday pulls no punches in describing Tucson's innate reluctance to make the most of the "immense and diverse range of arts and cultural resources" that exist here.

The 58-page plan thoroughly outlines the region's cultural panorama and spells out the city's strengths, challenges and opportunities and how to elevate Tucson among other major cities in terms of nurturing its culture.

Problem one: The Tucson community does not fully appreciate its creative sector or its vital role in regional economic growth.

Nor is there much evidence of public or private financial support for the cultural realm, which includes the culture, nature and heritage sectors and "even Food City (selling) Mexican religious statuary next to the dairy section!!" according to the plan.

Plan author Bill Bulick, a Portland, Ore., cultural planner, repeatedly laments the lack of collaboration, be it among arts and heritage groups, the arts with government, the arts with schools, or the arts and the greater community.

"There has been little collaboration among cultural funders to support 'big picture' initiatives," Bulick wrote. "This intense micro-regionalism limits Tucson's ability to compete in the larger field of cultural funding." Among the 50 largest city arts councils, Tucson's ranks 46th in terms of per capita local government support, Bulick found. Government funding amounts to 94 cents per capita in Tucson compared with the average \$6.13 among top 50 cities and the \$10 to \$25 per capita range in the top six cities: San Francisco; Mesa; New York City; San Jose, Calif.; Dallas; and Las Vegas.

Tucson fares no better in annual grants to cultural organizations. The Tucson Pima Arts Council distributes \$375,000 a year, but grants given out by arts councils in other major cities typically range between \$1 million and \$10 million, according to Bulick's research.

Tucson organizations rely on ticket sales for 68 percent of their revenue compared with a national average of 50 percent. This means ticket prices need to be higher, which will price out some people, the plan states.

Conversely, individual contributions make up 20 percent of revenue for Tucson cultural organizations, well below the national average of 35 percent.

Since October, Bulick has conducted 50 interviews and led several focus groups and community forums directly involving 500 people and engaging 5,000 people in some way.

The Tucson Pima Arts Council and the community's Nature Arts Culture Heritage Organization brought in Bulick to assemble a cultural plan, which is funded by a \$50,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The city and Pima County each supplied \$30,000.

Bulick spells out exhaustive recommended strategies to overcome pitfalls in arts and cultural facilities, creative sector economy, government policy and arts education and to increase cultural resources.

Recommendations include:

- Establish a Tucson music and entertainment commission.
- Create an online cultural directory to give a one-stop look at all of Tucson's offerings.
- "Establish and document the nexus between a thriving creative sector and regional economic growth."
- Establish a cultural facilities committee to assess the competing needs for new facilities and advise the city and county.
- Preserve and redevelop the Warehouse District as an enclave for artists, studios, galleries and other cultural businesses.
- Increase strength and reach through collaboration, partnerships and pairing, including an annual arts and culture summit.
- Establish high-level cultural liaison positions at City Hall and Pima County.

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#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

##### **ON THE WEB**

To read the complete Pima Cultural Plan, go to <http://pimaculturalplan.org/pcc> and download the DRAFT pdf.