



Arts Council Development Handbook:

**How To Develop a Successful, Sustainable
Arts Council in Your Community**



Welcome to the Georgia Council for the Arts “Arts Council Development Handbook”

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The Georgia Council for the Arts (GCA), a state agency dedicated to funding and supporting the arts in Georgia, has developed this handbook for two purposes: to introduce the basics of arts council development, and to provide helpful tools to determine the best course of action for your community.

The handbook includes case studies, examples, worksheets, articles, tips, and online resource links to guide you.

For the section that outlines the process of becoming a nonprofit corporation, we have teamed up with the Georgia Center for Nonprofits (GCN). GCN supports Georgia nonprofits by offering information, training, consulting, and jobs services.

In addition, we provide links to the Georgia Assembly of Community Arts Agencies (GACAA), whose mission includes strengthening and fostering community arts organizations in Georgia. This website is an especially good resource for new and developing arts councils.

Your arts council will be one of a kind

Your community is unique, so your arts council will be unique, too.

There are many types of arts councils — community, city, county, city-county — and also many different programming goals. Your first challenge is determining which type of arts council is best for your community based on your goals.

A few examples of goals include:

- Presenting touring programs
- Conducting workshops
- Offering classes
- Providing gallery space
- Acting as a resource for local artists and organizations

By choosing appropriately, you can create a workable, sustainable framework that can positively impact your community for years to come.

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Before you start thinking about arts programming, it's important to have a solid understanding of how arts councils work. Then, by moving forward step by step, you can develop an arts council for your community that's best suited for its population and enjoys robust support.

This handbook provides a basic framework for guiding you through the development process, and concludes with suggestions about how to keep your arts council vibrant and viable for years to come. The process varies by community, of course, because each community has its own culture and different existing resources.

Here's how the handbook information is organized:

Understanding Arts Councils

- Examples of four Georgia community arts agencies
- Arts council definitions, functions and activities
- The benefits (and drawbacks) of nonprofit status
- The national arts council movement

Four-Step Action Plan

- Step One: Understanding Your Community
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- Why strategic planning is necessary for viability
- The importance of "passing the baton"

You'll notice that each handbook topic is presented on a single page for easy viewing on-screen or in print, and the outline on the left indicates where you are in the handbook.

Additional Resources

At the bottom of many pages, you'll find added suggestions or tips, plus PDFs* (which you can download) and Internet links to related websites.

For example, use the link below to contact a Georgia Council for the Arts staff member.

LINK: [Send an e-mail to GCA](#)

**PDFs are files in a universal format for use on all computers regardless of age or operating system. You need free software called [Adobe Acrobat Reader \(download now\)](#) to read the files. PDF files in this handbook are virus-free.*



Introduction: Understanding Arts Councils

Four Georgia Community Arts Agency “Stories”

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What type of organization makes sense for your community?

The following case studies illustrate the scope of arts councils, the variety in their functions and goals, and how the most successful councils are those that respond to the needs and interests of their communities. These case studies are presented here not necessarily as examples to follow, but as a way to bolster understanding and generate conversation with others involved in developing an arts council for your community.

Abraham Baldwin Arts Connection

A college campus-based cultural development agency that cultivates arts councils and fosters collaboration.

[Download the case study PDF](#)

[Visit the website](#)

Sautee Nacoochee Community Association

A grassroots nonprofit agency that operates a vibrant cultural center and offers diverse programming.

[Download the case study PDF](#)

[Visit the website](#)

City of Savannah, Department of Cultural Affairs

A city government agency that promotes the arts to revitalize neighborhoods and educate citizens.

[Download the case study PDF](#)

[Visit the website](#)

Madison Morgan Cultural Center (Morgan County Foundation)

A regional arts facility and museum that attracts international visitors and enjoys a robust membership.

[Download the case study PDF](#)

[Visit the website](#)



Introduction: Understanding Arts Councils

What Do Arts Councils Do?

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Let's start with a broad-brush definition of an arts council:

An organization whose primary purpose is to stimulate and promote the arts, increasing access to the arts through services, programs, and/or funding within a specific geographic area; some present arts bookings, some produce arts programming, and some function under the aegis of (are owned by) a local government.

Arts councils typically do not focus on a single art discipline. The goal is to enrich a community through a variety of arts experiences.

Arts councils serve two main functions

The first function of an arts council is to provide the "big picture vision" for the arts in a community. This includes understanding and responding to the community's needs, developing long-term strategies, defining goals and objectives, building a strong support network and taking on other visionary responsibilities, such as:

- Raising awareness regarding the value of the arts
- Enhancing the artistic quality of local arts activities
- Preserving diverse cultural and artistic traditions
- Creating resources that enable local artists to flourish

By providing this type of leadership, the council becomes the arts community's collective "voice."

The second function of an arts council has to do with *implementing* strategies. This includes completing the legwork necessary to plan, organize and manage arts programming, making grants to local artists and arts organizations, providing central administrative services that benefit the arts community as a whole (such as maintaining mailing lists, artists directories and a community box office), among other "nuts and bolts" tasks.

When these two functions are operating smoothly and simultaneously, an arts council is most likely to achieve its mission.

Additional Resources

TIP: One of the best ways to learn about how arts councils function is to visit their websites. Use Internet search engines, and make good use of the links in this handbook.



Pros and Cons of Nonprofit Status

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In today's environment, competition for public and private support is intense. Donors want to make sure their funds are going to the very best use, and they expect to see tangible, quantifiable results.

Therefore, to be successful, arts council programming must exhibit quality planning and leadership, and should not duplicate another entity's effort. Your initial information-gathering process will uncover what other organizations are doing, and hopefully help define your niche. If you discover other entities are doing similar work, it may be worthwhile to consider partnering and potentially operating as an arm of a 501 (c)(3) that is already established. This may also strengthen your collective fundraising and programming potential.

Benefits of being a 501 (c)(3) Organization

- Eligible for state and federal tax exemptions
- Donations are tax deductible
- Eligible for government & foundation grants
- Eligible for Bulk Mailing Permit
- Protection from personal liability
- Forces entity to organize (creation of a board of directors) and establish clear purpose and vision

Responsibilities of being a 501 (c)(3) Organization

- Keep adequate records
- File required returns
- Provide donor substantiation
- Obey disclosure laws
- Generate public support
- Avoid "Excess Benefits" for insiders
- Restrictions on political activity, campaigning and lobbying

Will your annual budget be under \$25,000?

If your organization will be local and small, consider forming an unincorporated association or club at first. Your group can have meetings and plan activities, but skip the reporting requirements, including registering as a charitable organization.

Additional Resources

LINK: [Tax Information for Charities & Other Non-Profits](#)



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The National Arts Council Movement

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As an individual interested in developing an arts council in your community, you are part of a decades-long national movement. Since the middle of the last century, arts councils have been springing up from coast to coast — there are several thousand to date, according to Americans for the Arts, the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts in America.

In 1947 and 1948, local civic and cultural groups transformed their concerns about the public's limited access to quality arts events into the nation's first arts councils. After the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was established in 1965, there was a flurry of state arts agencies created because the NEA was required to allocate 20% of its funds to state-run programs. Today, every state and territory has an arts council.

Yet, perhaps the seeds of arts councils were originally sown by the New Deal's Works Project Administration (WPA). WPA's depression-era public arts projects produced over 225,000 works of art for the American people, connecting arts and community in this country ever since.

For comprehensive information about the arts across the country, visit:

LINK: [National Endowment for the Arts](#)

LINK: [Americans for the Arts](#)

How are arts councils funded today?

There are three main categories of financial support for arts councils:

- Earned revenue (i.e., ticket sales)
- Private support (i.e., donations, membership dues and grants from private foundations)
- Public support (i.e., support from local, state and federal programs and grants)

The category that provides the majority of funding often depends on the size of the population served by the arts council. Typically, the more people served, the more public support that's received.

Step One: Understanding Your Community

The Environmental Scan: Collecting and Analyzing Information About Your Community

Welcome

Understanding your community is a prerequisite to attempting to meet its needs and interests.

Introduction: Understanding Arts Councils

The best way to get a comprehensive, birds-eye view of your community is by conducting an “environmental scan.” An environmental scan is basically an information-gathering process that asks and answers key questions about your community. With the resulting data in mind, you can create a plan for your arts council that is relevant to your community and, therefore, most likely to be supported by its residents.

Step One: Understanding Your Community > **The Environmental Scan: Collecting and Analyzing Information About Your Community**

- Information to Collect
- Information Collection Methods
- How to Analyze the Information

The environmental scanning process can be a team effort or a one-person endeavor. In some communities, completing the process can take 18 months or longer. Whether it’s completed quickly or over time, laying a firm foundation of understanding before moving forward is well worth the effort.

Step Two: Building a Strong Organizational Foundation

“Community Asset Mapping” — Philosophy and Practice

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a planning process that identifies and mobilizes the skills, talents, resources, and other assets in your community toward a specific goal. By focusing on areas of proven success instead of areas of deficit, ABCD builds cooperation and confidence, and enhances sustainability.

Step Three: Establishing Your Arts Council as a Nonprofit Organization

This is a very good tool to use as you conduct your environmental scan.

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Additional Resources

LINK: [The Asset-Based Community Development Institute](#)



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To conduct your environmental scan, you will need to collect information about the people who live in your community and about its local groups and organizations, including businesses and available resources. The goal is to be as inclusive as possible, gathering facts about the entire community and not just people and entities already interested in the arts.

Information about individuals

What are your community’s demographics? This includes data on its population, age, race, ethnicity, number of people per household, number of people per square mile (urban or rural), income, education, employment, crime statistics, health and home ownership.

What are your community’s psychographics? This includes information about its values, attitudes, opinions, interests, habits and lifestyles.

Information about groups and organizations

What arts-related entities are currently operating in your community? This includes information about all of the groups, individuals, activities and events that are involved artistic endeavors of any kind. You may want to include those that are no longer operational for analytical purposes.

What business, government and other potential resources exist in your community? This includes information about all of the corporations operating in your area (from large regional employers to small store-front businesses), plus any business groups, civic groups, schools, local and county government agencies, and other entities that help define and shape your community.

Additional Resources

LINK: [Yellow Pages online](#)

TIP: Your local phone book (the blue and yellow pages) and newspaper can provide a wealth of information about your community — including the ads.

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Information Collection Methods

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There are three basic methods to gather information about your community:

- Research existing information sources
- Create and distribute surveys
- Talk to people directly

Each method is best suited for gathering different kinds of information. It's a good idea to use all three methods to get the most complete understanding of your community.

Research existing information

Start by taking advantage of information collected by the **U.S. Census Bureau**. The bureau's website, <http://www.census.gov>, provides "demographic" profiles for all Georgia counties and municipalities. Local government websites may provide more up-to-date information if your community has experienced significant changes since the last census.

Internet search engines, such as [Google](#) or [Yahoo](#), can turn up a surprising amount of relevant information about your community.

Create and distribute surveys

Surveys provide invaluable "psychographic" information. They can be distributed through newspapers, magazines, electronic media (websites and email lists), at community venues (stores, restaurants and events), at community meetings, and at other locations and events. Offering prize drawings, such as gift certificates, from completed surveys can increase response.

Link: [Sample Community Survey](#)

Talk with community leaders

Finally, open up **conversations** with others who might be interested in the benefits of an arts council, and with community leaders in general. Look to leaders and volunteers at existing organizations, to artists and owners of arts-related venues and businesses, and also to government leaders for their insights and opinions. Individuals who operate businesses unrelated to the arts can also provide valuable input.



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How to Analyze the Information

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Now that you have collected a considerable amount of information about your community, it's time to organize and analyze your findings to determine the feasibility and viability of your arts council. SWOT Analysis is an easy-to-use tool that yields impressive results.

SWOT Analysis

The **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats** (SWOT) **Analysis** give you an in-depth understanding of both the positive and negative aspects of an organization or project so that you can make good decisions about moving forward.

To make the best use of this technique, be as honest and as insightful as possible. Also, remember to consider the perceptions of others in the community and not just those of the individuals conducting the analysis.

Here are some questions you can ask during your analysis:

Strengths:

- What will people value about the arts council?
- Which community arts events and programming have been successful in the past?
- What types of resources currently exist?

Weaknesses:

- What types of community events have not been successful?
- What existing efforts or relationships could the arts council improve?

Opportunities:

- What opportunities for programming already exist?
- What untapped resources exist in your community?
- What community interests can you capitalize on?

Threats:

- What are the various obstacles that may lie ahead?
- What competition currently exists (for audience, financial support, programming, etc)?
- What current trends are acting against the development of an arts council or its sustainability?

Additional Resources

PDF: [SWOT Worksheet](#)

Growing the “Vision” and a Foundation of Support

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The activities in Step Two aren't necessarily linear. You will move from one activity to another, then back again as the vision for your arts council takes hold and support for the council builds.

“Visioning” — Be creative, innovative and inspiring

Most likely, you had a vision for what your arts council could ultimately become before opening this handbook. Now that you have done the research to substantiate your understanding of your community and its existing cultural climate, it's time to provide a clear framework for what “success” will look like.

Ask these questions to help build your arts council's vision:

- What principles, beliefs or values will guide your organization's work?
- What activities can you offer that are not already offered by other community organizations?
- How can you balance activities between demographic groups and across various arts disciplines?
- What connections emerge from within your environmental scan data?
- What will become the lasting improvements and sustainable impact your arts council will provide?

Team building and community support

The key to success is to articulate your vision so others can “see” it, too. When the vision is met with enthusiasm from individuals who might be involved in leadership roles, it's time to also present the vision to the community at large for additional input.

Without a clear vision right from the start, it will be difficult to secure the commitment of a leadership team or attain the necessary support for your planning, programming and fundraising down the road.

Additional Resources

LINK: communityarts.net

The Mission Statement: What Purpose Will the Arts Council Serve?

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Writing a mission statement is a process that typically involves many rewrites, especially in the beginning.

The first draft

The first draft mission statement is a jumping-off point that allows you to share your vision with others. While the first draft should represent the initial “big idea” about what the arts council will do, the description should be broad-brush at this point.

The team draft

Once your arts council has a steering committee in place, it will usually refine the mission statement based on input from participants in outreach activities.

The fine-tuned draft

A fine-tuned mission statement is required when filing Articles of Incorporation (Step Three). The best examples of fine-tuned mission statements are those that allow you to identify the organization *without* first knowing the name. Can you identify these organizations by their mission statements?

1. *The XXX is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education.*
2. *To enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.*
3. The mission of XXX is to Leave No Child Behind and to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start*, and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

Download this [Mission Statement Worksheet](#) for the answers, and for a practical method to crafting your own mission statement.

Step Two: Building a Strong Organizational Foundation

Team Building, Part 1: Establishing Broad Support

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With the first-draft mission statement in hand — along with a community meeting survey and a well-planned agenda — it’s time to hold the first community meeting.

Why hold a public meeting?

This is your opportunity to present the vision of your potential arts council to the people in your community. This can be an exciting and productive event.

It’s also an opportunity to establish broad support, create alliances and build the initial leadership team. The more layers of connections that can be established across the community at this time, the better.

Other benefits of a public meeting include:

- Enlisting the support of artists and existing arts organizations
- Involving local leaders and businesses
- Stimulating interest, exchanging ideas, and gathering survey information from attendees

Agenda considerations

Present your agenda at the start of the meeting, then stick to it.

Make sure to build in plenty of time for attendees to share their ideas and respond to the information you present. Keep in mind that a lively, positive meeting that encourages participation and appreciates all points of view will generate the most enthusiasm.

The first public meeting is also the best time to fill short-term leadership roles. Ask everyone to complete the interest survey, and ask for volunteers to participate in the committees that are needed to move the arts council development forward.

Additional Resources

PDF: [Sample Community Meeting Agenda](#)

PDF: [Checklist for Holding a Successful Community Meeting](#)

PDF: [Sample Community Meeting Survey](#)



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Team Building, Part 2: Cultivating Key Players

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Successful arts councils are a team effort. The following is an overview of development and implementation roles, from conception through full-scale operation:

- **Visionaries** — Generate the idea for the arts council
- **Initiators** — Begin the actual development process, including completion and analysis of the environmental scan and coordination of the first public meeting
- **Steering Committee** — Creates the formal “arts council” by refining the goals set forth in the public meeting(s) and determining how they can be achieved
- **By-laws Committee** — Writes the arts council by-laws to be submitted to the initial Board of Directors for approval, and later to be included in the incorporation materials (often this is a subcommittee of the Steering Committee)
- **Nominating Committee** — Proposes the initial board of directors (often this is a subcommittee of the Steering Committee)
- **Initial Board of Directors** — Adopts the by-laws, develops the organizational and business structure, establishes nonprofit status (if applicable), establishes a base of financial support, follows up on legal matters, plans the initial calendar or events, holds first activity or activities, and creates mechanisms for community visibility and involvement
- **Subsequent Boards of Directors** — Brings expertise, refines previous policy decisions, ensures financial support, provides direction, looks for additional opportunities, and interacts with the community on behalf of the arts council
- **Paid Staff** — Once the arts council is underway, part- and full-time employees may be required for day-to-day operations.

Additional Resources

LINK: [Interaction Institute for Social Change](#)

Step Two: Building a Strong Organizational Foundation

Community Support: Tips From Successful Arts Councils

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Here are some suggestions for start-up arts councils gathered from Executive Directors across Georgia:

Tips on getting started

- Elect or appoint a temporary chairperson and organizing committee. They will probably become a large part of the new board of directors.
- Be intentional about who is on your board. Include artists, but do not have a full board of artists to avoid a “self-serving” board. Balances should be maintained to bring the diversity needed to accomplish the mission.
- Once the group comes together, it's essential that assignments and timetables be flushed out and adhered to — this will be a never-ending task.
- While the vision for an arts council focuses on the arts and artists, recognize the only way to gain community support and secure the arts council's position in the community is to involve business leaders and those in political positions, especially city councils and commissioners.
- Never borrow money to start your arts council!

“Swamp Gravy”

You may have heard of “Swamp Gravy,” a series of plays produced by the **Colquitt/Miller Arts Council** in southwest Georgia. It has gained a reputation as one of the nation's most creative and innovative performing arts productions.

While certainly one-of-a-kind, the “Swamp Gravy” genesis and evolution may help you think “outside the box” as you create the foundation for your own community arts council.

PDF: [Swamp Gravy Case Study](#)

LINK: [The History of Swamp Gravy](#)



Step Three: Establishing Your Arts Council as a Nonprofit Organization

Process and Paperwork: An Overview

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The process of establishing your arts council as a nonprofit corporation isn't difficult, but it includes many tasks and a fair amount of paperwork.

The Georgia Center for Nonprofits (GCN), as mentioned previously, provides support to agencies at every level of development. You can download its start-up packet, "Starting an Nonprofit Organization in Georgia," from the GCN website. Below you'll find a link to the packet in its entirety, links to specific items within the packet, and other useful links and PDFs as well.

If you choose to work with an attorney during the incorporation process, as many organizations do, consider Georgia Lawyers for the Arts (GLA). GLA works with many arts agencies and councils.

Three distinct phases

The incorporation process can be looked at in three phases:

- Phase 1:** Becoming a "Corporation"
- Phase 2:** Conducting the Initial Corporate Meeting
- Phase 3:** Applying for Tax-Exempt Status

This handbook presents the phases in checklist form to help you with your planning and progress tracking.

Additional Resources

LINK: [Georgia Lawyers for the Arts](#)

LINK: [Starting an Nonprofit Organization in Georgia](#) (GCN's start-up packet)

LINK: [Eleven Steps to Nonprofit Incorporation](#)
(Section 3, "Your Incorporation Checklist," GCN's start-up packet)

LINK: [Ten Common Mistakes Made When Starting a Nonprofit Organization](#)
(in Section 1, "Nonprofit Organizations: Planning for Success," GCN's start-up packet)



Step Three: Establishing Your Arts Council as a Nonprofit Organization

Phase One: Becoming a “Corporation”

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The Georgia Secretary of State will soon begin to provide online filings for nonprofit corporations, which will streamline the process outlined below. Please visit the website to see if this service is operational at this time.

LINK: [Georgia Secretary of State \[file online page\]](#)

Below are the basic steps to incorporating. For detailed information on how to complete each step, please follow the links provided.

- Research the availability of your arts council name, and reserve it if it's available.

LINK: [Georgia Secretary of State \[corporations search page\]](#)

LINK: [Georgia Secretary of State \[name reservation page\]](#)

- Determine who will make up your initial board of directors.
- File your Articles of Incorporation with the Georgia Secretary of State.

LINK: [Georgia Secretary of State \[filing page\]](#)

- At the same time you file your Articles of Incorporation, publish your Intent to Incorporate in a county newspaper of record.
- Apply for your Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN).

LINK: [Federal Employment Identification Number \(FEIN\)?](#)



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Phase Two: Conducting The Initial Corporate Meeting

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Below are the main action items to accomplish during your first corporate meeting. For detailed information on these items, please follow the links provided.

- Elect the "official" Board of Directors

LINK: [Your Board of Directors](#)
(all articles in Section 4, "Your Board of Directors," of GCN's start-up packet)

- Appoint Officers.

- Adopt By-Laws.

LINK: [The Whats, Whys and Whos or By-laws](#)
(in Section 5, "Your Mission Statement and By-laws," of GCN's start-up packet)

LINK: [Sample By-Laws](#)
(in Section 5, "Sample By-laws," of GCN's start-up packet)

- Ratify your arts council's Articles of Incorporation.
- Discuss opening a bank account and other procedural requirements, such as regular meetings.



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Phase Three: Applying for Tax-Exempt Status

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You will need to file requests and provide information to federal, state and local governments to complete the tax-exempt process.

Before you begin, consider enlisting the temporary help of a fiscal agent or a "parent organization." It has been a useful way for new nonprofit organizations to manage the financial learning curve.

LINK: [The Benefits of Having a Fiscal Agent](#)
(in Section 2, "Your Nonprofit 'Corporation,'" of GCN's start-up packet)

Federal government

The IRS has a section within its website called "Life Cycle of a Public Charity." Included in this section are the most updated forms, instructions, guides and other items you need for your ongoing interactions with the federal tax authority.

LINK: [Life Cycle of a Public Charity](#)

- Apply for federal tax-exempt status with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) within 15 months of filing your Articles of Incorporation.

State of Georgia government

- Once you receive your federal exempt status, apply for Georgia tax-exempt status.
- Apply for Georgia State ID Number
- Register as a charitable organization in the state of Georgia

Local government(s)

- Obtain a business license from city/county governments

Congratulations — you have now completed all three phases of establishing your arts council as a nonprofit organization.



Step Four: Operating A Successful, Sustainable Arts Council

Year One... and Beyond

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Operating a successful, sustainable arts council requires building proficiency in a variety of processes. Your initial arts council board of directors is responsible for these processes the first year, and lays the foundation for subsequent years.

It's a good idea to begin slowly the initial year of operation, planning just a few arts activities or events. This will allow the board and volunteers to work out first-time challenges, gain experience and build a track record of success.

Four main processes on which to focus during the arts council's initial year of operation include:

- **Planning** — Defining short- and long-term objectives, preferably through development of a comprehensive strategic plan, and arranging for day-to-day operations.
- **Programming** — Creating the first in a series of arts events and activities that will interest the community, encourage participation, and fulfill the arts council's mission.
- **Fundraising** — Developing a mix of funding opportunities, based on research attained during the environmental scan, that is varied, repeatable (if possible), and spread out over the year.
- **Communicating** — Getting the word out to the public in a deliberate, consistent manner using as many different media as possible.

You can find an abundance of Information about these and other processes online. The resources below are highly recommended.

Additional Resources

TIP: Visit the [Georgia Assembly of Community Arts Agencies \(GACAA\)](#) to keep up to date on the annual conference, workshops, funding sources, consultant services and other timely news for arts councils in Georgia.

LINK: [National Endowment for the Arts \(NEA\) Planning Toolsite](#)

LINK: [Boardsource.org](#)

LINK: [Basic Guide to Nonprofit Financial Management](#)

LINK: [Fieldstone Alliance — Free Tools](#)

Planning:

Draft a Winning First-Year Road Map

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The likelihood of getting where you want to go increases considerably when you have a good map to follow.

Defining short- and long-term objectives

What are the three most important objectives the arts council needs to accomplish during its first year? What are the three most important objectives for the following years? How will these objectives be met? Who will do the actual work? How will the activities be financed? How will success be measured? What will determine if the arts council continues along the same track or adjusts its course?

These are the kinds of questions your initial board of directors will ask as it creates the first-year road map. They are part of what constitutes a strategic plan, a written document that incorporates short- and long-term objectives into an action plan. A well-conceived strategic plan can be the difference between success and failure.

Running an efficient “office”

Even the best road map can be derailed by ineffective office management systems. Take care to create systems that can be understood and operated by the entire team and not just a single person, and choose computer hardware and software that can be easily updated to grow with your arts council. Making good choices now prevents having to reinvent the wheel later.

Take advantage of existing talent and opportunities

Your initial board of directors brings with it a wealth of talent, and so do your volunteers — don't be shy about enlisting help. Also, board members and volunteer leaders might consider attending seminars, workshops, and conferences to gain additional knowledge and skills.

Additional Resources

LINK: [Georgia Center for Nonprofits \(GCN\) Training Services](#)

Programming: Choose Activities That Will Interest Your Community Most

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Many consider this responsibility — planning original programming — the most exciting part of developing an arts council. The programming options are practically endless. Your best choices will be based on the community’s interests as revealed during your environmental scan and public meeting, and be organized into an annual and possibly multi-year programming plan.

Key Questions for Program Planning

Here are some questions to ask as you put together your programming plan:

- What are the activities your community has expressed interest in?
- What “holes” exist in arts programming locally?
- What resources exist locally?
- What is your annual budget?
- What project ideas align with the organization’s mission statement?
- What types of programs could be offered that would stimulate public dialogue and understanding of an art form, and encourage its appreciation by a wide audience?

Programming “traps” to avoid:

- Don’t be afraid to challenge your audience by offering programs that are creative, diverse in form and somewhat “outside the box.”
- Don’t plan beyond your financial resources.
- Don’t lose sight of constantly striving for artistic excellence.
- Don’t offer the same programs over and over again. Offer new projects to keep your audience engaged.

Additional Resources

PDF: [Project Planning: A Step-By-Step Approach](#)

LINK: [Arts and Humanities in Rural America](#)

Fundraising: Develop a Mix Specific to Your Community

Welcome

Effective fundraising depends on this straightforward premise:
You must ask in order to receive.

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Who you ask — and when — depends on your unique community. Your arts council will need to raise funds from a variety of different sources throughout the year to remain viable.

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Circle back to your environmental scan

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Which kinds of fundraising efforts will be most successful in your community? The answers can usually be found in the research already completed during Step One — plus some trial and error.

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Review your environmental scan with an eye towards potential partnerships, untapped resources and unique fundraising opportunities. Find out what's worked for other organizations, and which corporations or government entities offer (or have offered) funding or sponsorships. Get creative. Send out "feelers." Every community has resources, no matter what its size.

**> Fundraising: Develop
a Mix Specific to Your
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Overall, your fundraising success will be determined by how well you do three main things:

- Meet your community's needs
- Team up with existing organizations and businesses
- Present your appeals into win-win frameworks

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Keep in mind that a well-rounded fundraising calendar includes efforts that raise funds for programming *and* efforts that raise the "unrestricted" funds you need to pay operating expenses.

Additional Resources

TIP: Spend some time on the [Association of Fundraising Professionals \(AFP\)](#) website. AFP is a professional organization that educates, trains and advocates for nonprofits, and offers a robust website and online bookstore

LINK: [Foundation Center](#)

PDF: [Sample Fundraising Calendar](#)

Communicating: Reach Out Using a Variety of Media and Tools

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Successful arts councils understand they must create a recognizable identity and continually reach out to the community in order to build and maintain support. They use as many different media as possible because community members differ in how they get their information.

Sharing your visions, events and accomplishments

Here is a list of materials and activities needed to “spread the word” about your arts council:

Brand identity — your arts council’s “persona,” which is the combination of your visual identity (logo) and perhaps a tag line (slogan), and the reputation you build through consistent action and communication

Case For Support (or Case Statement) — your arts council’s vision written in a format that makes a compelling “case” for why your arts council deserves to be funded; also an excellent tool for marketing and training

Website — a central “location” to share information about the arts council and its vision, programming, events calendar, fundraising activities, recent successes and other items of interest

Advertising — ads (print and web-based), billboards, flyers, and other items, plus broadcast Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

Email and e-newsletters — inexpensive communication vehicles to keep in touch with the community on a monthly or quarterly basis

Collateral — brochures and other printed material that define your arts council and its programs, special events, and other activities

Membership, Fundraising and Acknowledgement materials — communication pieces that ask for financial support or continued participation, or thank contributors for their support

Public Relations — the activities associated with proactively seeking and generating goodwill, primarily through favorable media coverage; a “press kit,” which provides background information, includes a selection of the materials listed above

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Techniques For Long-Lasting Success

Among the many elements required for long-term success, two are critical: strategic planning and succession planning.

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Strategic Planning

Some arts councils, especially those with a strong desire to become professional organizations, will be ready and eager to undertake a formal strategic planning process within a year or two after inception. The arts council leadership team can undertake this process itself, or can hire a consultant for guidance and facilitation.

A strategic plan should be considered a “living” document that is updated regularly to adapt to a community’s changing population, culture, and needs. By staying actively involved in the community, leadership can see these changes as they’re happening. Bringing in new volunteers with fresh ideas from throughout the community is also an important part of a successful arts council’s strategic plan.

In addition, using analytic tools to delve into “what’s working and what’s not,” such as SWOT Analysis (described earlier), can be instrumental to the success of your strategic planning process.

Succession Planning

Arts councils that are prepared to “pass the baton” operate most effectively – and last the longest. No matter how dedicated the initial leadership team, eventually these people will move on.

Which volunteer, community and business leaders are being cultivated to become the next board members? How will new board members be nurtured so they can take over chairperson’s roles? Who will step into the Executive Director’s role if this person suddenly is no longer available? How will each of these transitions be managed?

Working out the answers to these succession questions *before* the situations arise will assure smooth transitions and promote efficiency, effectiveness, longevity — and success.

Additional Resources

LINK: [Succession Planning and Sustainability in Nonprofit Organizations](#)

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Sustainability: Tips From Successful Arts Councils

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> **Sustainability: Tips
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- National Resources

Here are some suggestions for sustainability gathered from arts council Executive Directors across Georgia:

Tips for success

- Continue to form partnerships with all facets of your community, and showcase your partners —they will do the same for you.
- When staff is hired, make sure at least three years of salary is earmarked in advance so your arts council can raise the funds necessary to sustain the staff positions.
- Diversify your funding base!
- Create a “Board Profile Survey” for board candidates so you can continually pursue qualified individuals with skill sets that address deficiencies.
- Plan for the future and plan for growth, but maintain flexibility and be responsive to your community.
- Constantly seek out new things: new audiences, new partners, new volunteers, new collaborations, new art forms and arts experiences to which you can expose your audience.

If you have any questions about the materials included in this handbook, or are interested in additional resource information, please contact [Georgia Council for the Arts](#).



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National Resources

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> **National Resources**

The **National Endowment for the Arts** and **Americans for the Arts** are two of the most relevant and informative resources for arts councils operating in communities across the nation. Consider taking some time to explore these organizations' in-depth and comprehensive websites:

LINK: [National Endowment for the Arts](#)

LINK: [Americans for the Arts](#)