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Cultural Affairs Council

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# The New Century Community Program

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### **Why is the New Century Community Program important?**

As a nation, we are beginning to understand that social, cultural and economic well being are intimately connected. People who study the arts and culture in school get a better education. People with a good education get better jobs. People with good jobs build better communities. And good communities give their children better arts, cultural and general education--thus closing the loop on a sustainably better way of life. The *New Century Community Program* is a remarkably innovative program -- attracting national attention as a unique collaborative among private and state agencies -- that aims to strengthen the arts and culture at several stages in this important cycle.

### **What is the program's goal?**

For those communities experiencing either urban sprawl or out-migration of their population, the program works to preserve and strengthen what's unique about Maine by helping communities understand that local arts and culture lie at the heart of their social and economic well-being. For some, this is a new idea. In many communities, art and culture have for years been treated as unimportant "frosting on the cake." This is now increasingly recognized as a mistake. Since its inception two years ago, the program has been planting seed money to strengthen community life by helping to:

- Preserve unique historic properties, artifacts and documents.
- Expand educational resources by promoting literacy and community access to art and cultural information.
- Develop stronger, more self-reliant libraries, school programs, museums, theaters, and other arts and cultural resources.

### **What does the program do?**

- Helps communities compile and publish cultural inventories of local artists, historic sites, performing organizations, traditional craftspeople, exhibits, etc.- thus building awareness of them as a community resource and economic force.
- Helps communities identify and preserve historic architecture, newspapers, artworks, scientific specimens, photographs, manuscripts, artifacts and even shipwrecks. (Maine is home to some 700 shipwrecks of importance to maritime and commercial history.)
- Helps community libraries rebuild and expand, share resources by networking, and improve information technology.
- Helps communities expand their literacy programs. (A well-educated work force is essential to attracting new industry. Yet one in six Mainers is unable to read well enough to fill out a job application or decipher a road map.)
- Helps communities strengthen local education by making stories, images, maps, photographs and documents of Maine history available on the Internet.
- Helps communities explore and celebrate their history and culture by developing local festivals, exhibits and other public events. Use the cultural inventories (above) to plan and develop a vigorous local cultural life and economy.



### **Who benefits from the New Century Community Program?**

The program serves individual Maine towns, cities, rural areas and other communities (including loosely defined communities, such as "Maine theater companies") by encouraging them to apply for seed money and technical assistance for projects of the kind outlined above. This is benefiting Maine citizens, the state economy as a whole and ultimately our children-the citizens of Maine's future.

### **What are the benefits?**

- Great things can begin "snowballing" when a community develops its arts and culture. In 1996 the town of Brunswick used \$2,000 in seed money from the Maine Arts Commission to create its first-ever "inventory" of local arts organizations. This led to the creation of an annual town-wide arts festival, which promptly became a money-maker. As a result, the town received a \$30,000 grant from HUD to develop cultural tourism in the area, which could eventually be worth millions of dollars a year to the local economy.
- Studies show that a solid education in the arts and culture improves student achievement. According to the College Boards, students who study the arts increase standardized test scores up to 59 points on the verbal section and 44 points on the math section. People with a better education report greater career satisfaction, income and overall happiness.
- A community with a vibrant culture is manifestly a better place to live and work. Young people are more apt to stay, building families and careers. Tourists are more apt to visit, spending money. Businesses are more apt to move in and flourish.

### **What has the program accomplished so far?**

In its first two years, the program distributed *more than \$2.3 million* in state funds through more than 420 grants to communities in all areas of Maine -- especially to rural areas. It spent \$859,000 for direct service and outreach to libraries, schools, daycare centers, historic sites, museums and other communities institutions. In all, it benefited 183 communities and attracted a remarkable \$31 million in other funds and in-kind assistance.

Response to the program to date has been far greater than the funds available, with grant requests amounting to two-and-a-half times the amounts granted. This constitutes clear evidence that the program meets a statewide need and that an even great need persists.

### **How does this help the economy?**

- In 1998 the New England Council began research on how culture impacts the New England economy. They determined that nonprofit cultural organizations and attractions generate \$3.9 billion in revenue each year throughout the region. This "Creative Economy" is alive and well, and clearly a viable industry as highlighted in their recent report, *The Creative Economy Initiative*.
- As an industry, arts and culture play a significant role in Maine's economy. According to a study by the New England Foundation for the Arts, Maine had over 1,000 arts and cultural organizations in 1996, with a total economic impact of \$150 million a year. These organizations employ roughly 6,000 people. They deserve as much intelligent support and attention as any other Maine industry. (This has now been recognized by the Maine Economic Growth Council.)



- Arts and culture are a key attraction for so-called "cultural tourists"-people who come to Maine to visit historic sites, museums, galleries, etc. These arts and cultural organizations admitted nearly 7 million visitors in 1996, 34 percent of whom were from out of state and spent millions of dollars while in the state.
- Tourism will soon be Maine's (and the world's) largest industry-and cultural tourism is one of its fastest-growing sectors. Cultural tourism creates some 14,000 jobs in Maine and generates \$1.3 billion in direct and indirect expenditures. Arts and culture are a sustainable growth industry. They use virtually no natural resources and enhance Maine's worldwide reputation as a beautiful and fascinating travel destination.
- Businesses benefit directly from arts and culture. CEOs routinely cite "quality of life" cultural opportunities as a factor in relocating their businesses and in the success of existing businesses. People who studied arts and culture in school are better educated and hence make better employees. Strong local libraries are an important, free source of research data for local businesses.
- The state government is trying to attract more retirees (and their abundant dollars). A state report recently concluded, "National research has shown that among the strongest factors that influence where a person decides to retire are natural and cultural amenities." Interestingly, the town of Brunswick, a cultural hot spot, was cited by *Money* magazine last year as one of America's best places to retire.

#### **Doesn't this cost a lot of money?**

- It doesn't. So far, the program has cost only \$3.2 million. This is a minuscule fraction of Maine's general-fund budget-about .138 percent.
- The seven agencies standing behind the program worked hard to craft a modern, cost-effective proposal. Their goal was to inject relatively small amounts of money in the right places to help communities discover the true value of their cultural life, attract matching funds and generate local self-perpetuating energy and excitement-in short, to multiply the power of our dollars in every way. The agencies have monitored the program's results and will soon deliver an independent report about it to the legislature and the public.
- To continue and expand the program, these 7 cultural agencies which make up the Maine Cultural Affairs Council, are requesting legislative appropriations of \$4,355,000 each for FY 2002 and FY 2003. Based on experience in FY 2000, these appropriations would generate for Maine communities an estimated \$27 million in matching funds from private donors and other public funders.

#### **Why so many agencies?**

The *New Century Community Program* is a joint initiative of seven major arts and cultural agencies, some public and some private. In the old days, these agencies would have competed for funds in some cases, developed programs at cross-purposes and split the state's cultural leaders into divisive camps. By working jointly, they are maximizing the efficiency of money spent, creating programs that dovetail and support one another, and raising the visibility of Maine arts and culture as a cohesive force for social and economic growth. This coordinated effort is unprecedented in Maine and, as far as we know, anywhere else. It might well serve as a model for future cooperative growth and revitalization across the U.S.



## **Why the emphasis on communities?**

More than most other states, Maine is home to small cities, towns and villages. Four out of five Maine communities have populations under 2,500, and even Maine's larger cities are small compared with others in the U.S. Maine is also home to small arts and cultural organizations. According to the Urban Institute, Maine ranked fourth in the U.S. in 1996 in nonprofit organizations per capita.

So, to reach the greatest number of Mainers and local arts and cultural organizations, the program is designed to work with communities as a whole. By helping them to become conscious of the social and economic value of their resources, leverage their arts and culture, expand their audiences and improve education, the program aims to "raise the water level" so that entire communities will "float" better and more self-reliantly.

## **Why renew the program now?**

- The cultural heritage of Maine communities is one of the most celebrated in America. Yet it is endangered. Crumbling buildings, fragile artifacts, vanishing traditions and decades of "deferred maintenance" have taken their toll. Across Maine, communities are asking for the kind of technical and financial assistance offered by this program to help preserve and enhance their way of life.
- Tourism is Maine's second largest industry. But it is growing only half as fast as tourism in other Northeastern states. Maine stands to lose even more market share if we do not help our communities develop their cultural offerings. Cultural tourists stay longer than other travelers, spend an average of \$62 a day more and are more likely to travel in the off-season. As an industry, cultural tourism is also sustainable, "clean" and profitable: Studies show that a dollar invested in cultural heritage can return more than \$11 in local revenues.
- By the year 2000, the Governor's Retirement Industry Council hoped to attract 14,500 new migrant retiree households to Maine. It cited "access to cultural and arts activities not only in (Maine's) cities but in its villages" as a key attraction and recommended making "opportunities for direct participation in the arts available for seniors in all communities."
- At the start of the new Millennium, now is a good time for Maine to honor its past, assess its present strengths and continue to build its future communities for "The Way Life Should Be." *The New Century Community Program* is a proven way to do this -- so let's renew it now. Don't you want your children to love Maine as much you do?