

City of Bloomington Arts Feasibility Study

October 31, 2022

Hello...

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RE: City of Bloomington Arts Feasibility Study

Holly Warren
Assistant Director for Arts
holly.warren@bloomington.gov

Dear Ms. Warren,

On behalf of the Study Team, Trahan Architects is pleased to submit the City of Bloomington Arts Feasibility Study report for your review. This report is the result of an intensive collaborative effort by the Study Team, the City of Bloomington, and the local Bloomington community beginning in February 2022.

Bloomington is already well-known for its arts and culture sector. The Study Team explored how Bloomington can amplify its identity as a purpose-built arts community and an arts and culture destination. Bloomington’s history of making artisan goods for trade at a national level is unique to its character. The City can lean into this character to advance its goal of becoming a national and international destination for arts and culture.

This report is the culmination of the Study Team’s findings developed from data collection, analysis, and rigorous stakeholder and public engagement sessions. Careful consideration was given to provide the City of Bloomington with cultural development guidance that will support Bloomington’s continued success.

The Bloomington Arts Feasibility Study report includes an inventory of Bloomington’s current cultural assets; opportunities to address gaps in the inventory; community engagement feedback and metrics; site analyses; a proposal for a new arts and culture incubator tailored to the needs of Bloomington’s artists; including a financial operational pro forma for the proposed new arts and culture incubator.

Respectfully,

Victor F. “Trey” Trahan, III, FAIA
Founder & CEO | Trahan Architects

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Acknowledgements

Trahan Architects would like to thank...

...the entire Study Team, Advisory Committee, stakeholder groups, and residents of Bloomington for generously sharing their time, perspective, expertise, and inspiration throughout the City of Bloomington Arts Feasibility Study report process. Time and energy from these groups were vital to the study's success in crafting a vision to make Bloomington a national and international hub for creativity and cultivate the next generation of cultural leaders.

The information in this report is based on estimates, assumptions, and information developed from market research, knowledge of the arts and culture industry, and additional factors, including specific information provided by other parties. All information provided has not been audited and verified, and is assumed to be correct.

Due to limited procedures, the Study Team expresses no opinion or assurances to achieve any projected information contained herein. Consequently, this report should not be relied upon for that purpose. Furthermore, there will be differences between projected and actual results. This is because events and circumstances frequently do not occur as expected, and those differences may be material. The Study Team has no responsibility to update this report for events and circumstances occurring after the date this report is submitted and received.

Advisory Committee

Members of the Advisory Committee met twice, (March 24 and July 12, 2022) to share insight Bloomington's arts community and to provide feedback on the Study Team's initial suite of recommendations.

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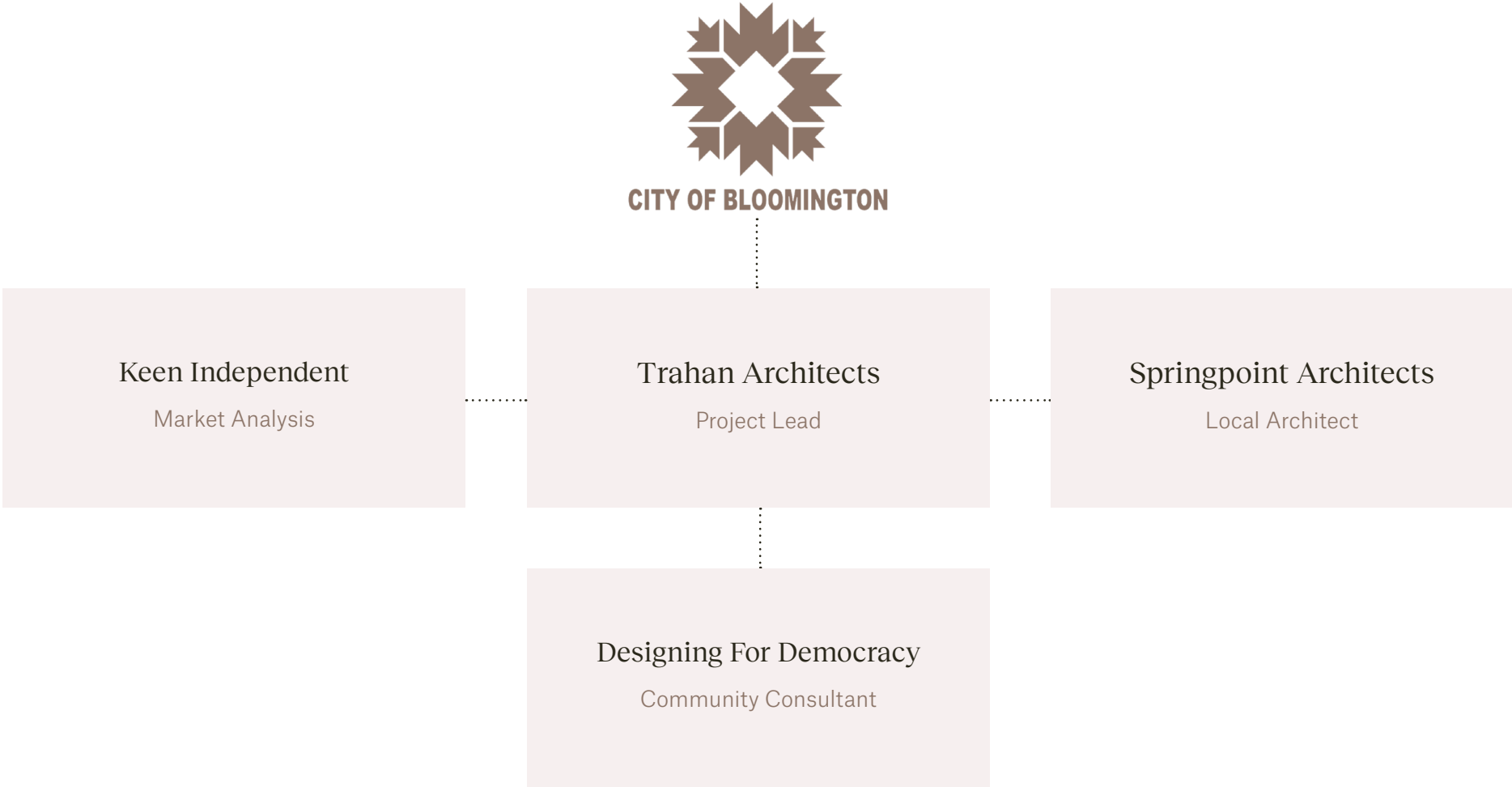
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Study Team

The City of Bloomington retained **Trahan Architects** to conduct an Arts Feasibility Study to investigate the need for a new arts facility; an expanded convention center in Bloomington; and potential programming initiatives to develop Bloomington as a purpose-built arts community. A significant component of the feasibility study consisted of stakeholder and community engagement sessions. Trahan Architects teamed with Bloomington-based **Springpoint Architects** as part of a world-class consulting team to deliver this project, as outlined on this page.

Keen Independent specializes in arts, disparity, and equity studies for public, private, nonprofit, state, and city agencies. With offices in Phoenix, Arizona, and Denver, Colorado, as well as staff throughout the country, Keen Independent combines economic and market research experience with specialized expertise in performing arts feasibility studies.

Designing For Democracy (DFD) is an interdisciplinary consortium of practitioners investigating the implicit relationship between systems of the built environment and society’s most pressing challenges. The team’s diverse upbringings, skill sets, and lived experiences empower DFD to connect how the nodes of inequity, cultural hierarchy, and dehumanization become spatialized and proliferated—all facets of a growing existential threat to the full potential of democracy.



Overview

Study Background

In November 2020, the Waldron Recommendation Task Force was established ahead of the imminent management reversion of the Waldron Arts Center building from Ivy Tech to the City of Bloomington. The task force’s mandate was to determine what Bloomington should do with the Waldron Arts Center. Ultimately, the task force recommended that the City of Bloomington maintain ownership and allow management by an independent entity (Constellation Stage & Screen). While the Waldron Arts Center remains open to the public as an arts facility, art opportunities are more limited than they were under Ivy Tech’s management—including workshops, classes, gallery exhibitions, and community groups who use the theater for performances. With this change in community access, the City of Bloomington is seeking to cultivate additional measures to foster arts and culture.

Several questions arose: What is needed to propel arts in Bloomington? Does Bloomington need a new arts facility to support its increasing number of artists, and artists who are outgrowing the current facilities? Can an expanded convention center use the existing cultural capital of Bloomington to create a competitive advantage over other venues in the region? What community programming initiatives can Bloomington provide to increase access to the arts?

Participation

The feasibility study required broad involvement from the Bloomington community. The Study Team engaged the following groups:

- Residents
- Advisory Committee
- Indiana University faculty, administrators, and students
- Arts and culture community members
- Local business community leaders
- Local venue operators
- Other key stakeholders

Overview

This report provides an overview of the study process and presents conclusions and recommendations.

Key Questions

The Study Team identified key questions relevant to the feasibility of new community programming initiatives; a new arts facility; and an expanded convention center in Bloomington. The following key questions are addressed throughout this summary report and supporting documentation:

- What areas of the arts do Bloomington residents and artists perceive as the best areas for investment?
- How would a new arts and culture incubator fit within the Bloomington arts marketplace?
- How would an expanded convention center fit within the Bloomington arts marketplace and incorporate arts and culture in the programming?
- How does the Bloomington community feel about arts and culture investment including community arts initiatives?
- Who would utilize a new arts and culture incubator in downtown Bloomington?
- What are the ideal components of a new arts and culture incubator in Bloomington?
- How would an operational pro forma for a new arts and culture incubator in Bloomington be funded?
- How would a new arts and culture incubator be operated?

These questions are followed by implementation recommendations.

Process

The City of Bloomington commissioned an arts feasibility study to examine the prospects of bringing a new arts facility; an expanded convention center; and community programming initiatives to Bloomington. The feasibility study ascertained the potential for Bloomington to strengthen its presence as a cultural destination and to provide a new economic generator within the city and region.

The feasibility process included the following three deliverable tasks with several opportunities for community collaboration and feedback:

- Task I | Inventory & Market Analysis | February '22 - March '22
- Task II | Needs Assessment | March '22 - June '22
- Task III | Operational Pro Forma Budget & Business Plan | June '22 - Aug '22

As a basis of evaluation, the Study Team assessed existing cultural assets and whether they meet the current needs of the Bloomington community. The Study Team evaluated the Waldron Arts Center and the Buskirk-Chumley Theater as touchstones.

The Study Team conducted a comprehensive inventory and market analysis of the existing cultural assets in Bloomington. This analysis included neighborhoods, environmental considerations, demographics, accessibility, planning, and zoning regulations, which provided a thorough understanding of economic, environmental, ecological, and cultural contexts.

The second task was a needs assessment, which included community engagement sessions with stakeholders, residents, and Bloomington's Advisory Committee, among other groups. The Study Team implemented an online public survey that ensured accessibility for a diverse representation of the Bloomington community. The aggregated feedback was essential to build a holistic understanding of the community's desires and needs for a new arts facility and new community programming initiatives. These sessions also led to recommendations for specific community programs.

In the third component of the study, the Study Team considered initiatives that the City of Bloomington could implement to increase access to arts and culture in the near term. The Study Team suggests Bloomington enhance programming by promoting existing events and specific community programs. New programming should focus on neighborhood activation, especially in underserved areas of Bloomington, where few arts and cultural spaces exist.

The fourth task determined whether a new arts facility was advisable for the City of Bloomington. The Study Team identified facility benchmarks, which analyzed four comparable multipurpose arts facilities in similar communities. These benchmarks formed the basis for developing an operational pro forma budget and business plan. The first part of the analysis included a business plan and a detailed operating pro forma budget that identified sources of revenue. The second part of the analysis consisted of potential organizational structures, staffing, operations, and building expenses.

In the final component, the Study Team investigated the feasibility of leveraging and fusing arts and culture within an expanded convention center. Interlacing the expanded convention center with culture could give Bloomington a competitive advantage amongst other regional centers while becoming a catalyst for continued economic growth.

Goals

“A thriving arts community is essential to the quality of life and our local economy”

-Mayor John Hamilton

GOALS

Gain a better understanding of the City of Bloomington: its history, current infrastructure, sense of place, and culture.

Evaluate the inventory of performing and visual arts facilities and facilities that could potentially accommodate the growing arts community in Bloomington and the surrounding areas.

Investigate how to invest in and enhance the health and equity of Bloomington’s arts community, such as emerging artists, audiences, and other stakeholders.

Discover areas where Bloomington’s cultural resources can enrich the economic and cultural vitality of the community.

Conclude on the necessity and feasibility of a new arts and culture incubator.

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Executive Summary

Inventory and Market Analysis

Inventory and Market Analysis

The first step in the feasibility study process was to conduct an in-depth cultural asset inventory of Bloomington and the surrounding area. The inventory gave the Study Team an understanding of the existing facilities and their capacities. It also provided insight into the area's history, economic, ecological, environmental, and social drivers.

The inventory investigated zoning and permitted uses, significant cultural space inventory; a market analysis; demographic analysis; demand projections; and environmental considerations. The Study Team reviewed the following:

- Neighborhood Analysis
- Zoning & Permitted Uses
- Transportation Flows - Bike Lanes
- Transportation Flows - Bus Routes
- Transportation Flows - Parking
- Environmental Considerations
- Climate Action Plan
- Sustainability Action Plan
- Cultural Inventory
- Gallery Walk
- BEAD District
- Historical Context - Waldron Arts Center
- Historical Context - Buskirk-Chumley Theater
- Market Analysis
- Catchment Area
- Population Projections
- Demand Projections

Summary of Key Findings (Market Analysis)

The Study Team performed a comprehensive market analysis to codify Bloomington's cultural arts' economic opportunities and barriers. This analysis included the following study scopes:

- Catchment Area
- Population Projections
- Demand Projections

New Performing Arts Center. Based on the extensive inventory identified in Bloomington and surrounding areas, the Study Team does not recommend a new standalone performing arts center. Bloomington has venues of varying sizes to accommodate most activities and audience capacities. Bloomington does not have the population size or expected growth to support adding another standalone performing arts center at this time. However, the inventory review identifies a need for a small arts facility with 100 seating to 200 standing capacity. A venue of this size is ideal for supporting smaller performances and would also be suitable for rehearsing and recording studio uses. At the time of this report, the cost for a new performing arts center ranges from \$850 sf to \$1,200 sf and does not address any future needs in the Bloomington area.

Waldron Arts Center. The City of Bloomington recently reopened the Waldron Arts Center in 2022. The community dialogue provided by the stakeholder and advisory committee engagement sessions indicates that the Waldron Arts Center does not offer the flexibility or capacity to support Bloomington's burgeoning arts community. Due to the size of the theater, the Waldron Arts Center provides a niche for the Bloomington market. Supporting gallery spaces should remain open and operated by Constellation Stage & Screen as long as it remains of value to the community.

Buskirk-Chumley Theater. The Study Team recommends further assessment of the Buskirk-Chumley Theater to investigate the potential of incorporating flexible seating configurations; enhancing the backstage area and support spaces; and generating additional sources of revenue.

Indiana University Collaboration. Bloomington has a wealth of venues for cultural events and performances. Although plentiful for the size of Bloomington, many of these venues are part of Indiana University and, therefore, not readily available to the local Bloomington community. The Study Team recommends deeper collaboration between the City of Bloomington and Indiana University to find a mutually beneficial arrangement to expand arts and culture in the region.

Lack of Accessible, Flexible, and Affordable Space. Stakeholder and advisory committee engagement sessions revealed that the public believes there is a lack of accessible, flexible, and affordable space available to the local arts community.

Resources. Despite large venues for art displays and performances, Bloomington does not provide many resources for artists to create work or music. I Fell Bloomington is an artist and co-maker facility where artists and makers can rent space. At the time of this study, I Fell Bloomington and Artisan Alley remain the only artists-focused maker spaces of their kind in Bloomington; I Fell Bloomington's and Artisan Alley's rooms are currently fully leased.

Executive Summary

Community Engagement

Community Engagement

The Study Team facilitated eight community engagement sessions to learn about the array of stories, concerns, and aspirations of the Bloomington community. These sessions sparked meaningful conversations about the successes and improvement opportunities in Bloomington's existing arts and culture inventory. The focus of these community engagement sessions was to gain a complete picture of arts and culture in Bloomington. The sessions included presentations, discussions, mapping, written responses, and a virtual online survey.

The Study Team held community engagement sessions with the following groups:

- Arts Community Stakeholders (26 participants)
- Advisory Committee (13 participants)
- Indiana University Stakeholders (15 participants)
- Social Equity Engagement (30 participants)
- Emerging Artist Round Table (15 participants)
- Online Virtual Workshop (471 participants)

The community engagement sessions involved 570 participants, allowing the Study Team to analyze feedback from various perspectives. Due to ongoing COVID-19 and universal accessibility concerns, participants attended in-person and online sessions. Participants represented the public, Indiana University, venue operators, program directors, artists of different media, emerging artists, and more.

Summary of Key Findings

- The need for more collaborative and flexible space was a common concern among the arts community stakeholders, Advisory Committee, and social equity engagement participants.
- Several participants in the arts community stakeholder sessions expressed concerns that existing available facilities were too small and inflexible to accommodate performances of varying sizes.
- Many participants noted that Indiana University's facilities were excellent for attending shows and performances. However, they were primarily unavailable to local artists and performance groups for use.
- Diversity and representation were paramount goals of the arts community stakeholders. Community engagement sessions embraced the richness of Bloomington's history to understand what a new arts and culture incubator would entail. At the core of the social capital discussions stood trust and reciprocity.
- Individuals expressed the need to increase the diversity of artists and patrons. In addition to ethnic diversity, participants wanted arts and culture opportunities in Bloomington to include all ages, income levels, urban and rural communities, political ideologies, and partnerships between Indiana University and other Bloomington residents.
- Many stakeholders and user groups noted a scarcity of availability amongst existing venues.
- Findings from the virtual workshop revealed that the majority of people attend arts and culture events at the following venues:
 - Buskirk-Chumley Theater
 - Ted Jones Playhouse
 - Indiana University Auditorium
 - Waldron Arts Center
 - Eskenazi Museum of Art
 - Switchyard Park
- Most survey participants (55%) reported paying \$25 or less to attend arts and culture events.
- The lack of creative and affordable workspaces for artists is one reason why local artists leave Bloomington.
- With the Waldron Arts Center offering limited art classes, many participants and survey respondents noted the desire to have access to classes again (i.e., in pottery, glass-blowing, painting, sketching, metal smithing).
- Participants expressed interest in arts programming for K-12 students to expose children to the arts at a younger age since all-ages venues, such as The Void and Rhinos, are closed.
- Participants expressed interest in Indiana University, Ivy Tech and the City of Bloomington collaborating to offer spaces, resources, and education.
- Commonly mentioned barriers amongst participants included inaccessible price points and unavailable studio, exhibition, and performance space.
- Some participants were satisfied with Bloomington's arts and culture offerings, while others wanted additional programming. The specific spaces requested were:
 - Makerspace
 - Ceramics studio
 - Cinema
 - Dance studios with sprung floors
 - Aerial and circus arts studio
 - Sound engineering studio
 - Photography dark rooms
 - Open-air outdoor stages at existing parks
- Many individuals requested a centralized calendar of events in Bloomington, unifying Indiana University campus events with non-campus events. Many artists have lost revenue opportunities due to a lack of coordinated scheduling and advertising.
- Participants expressed an interest in wanting artists and arts organizations to have sustainable business models that include viable incomes and financial support from Bloomington's government.

Executive Summary

Programming - Arts and Culture Incubator

Programming

After completing the inventory and community engagement components, the Study Team distilled the findings and feedback to create a cohesive program that satisfied the stated and found needs of the Bloomington community.

The Study Team proposes an arts and culture incubator as a place for convening and community building that reshapes the cultural landscape of Bloomington. The project serves as a platform for experimentation and developing innovative ideas. The space encourages artists to explore new facets of their practice and exploration. It fosters new models for social interaction with the community that transcend the traditional boundaries of art, performance, and social practice. The facility will serve as a center for experimentation, and education opportunities and offering an accessible and innovative exhibition program to Bloomington.

The Study Team recommends the following building scope to address the arts community's and audience needs. The new arts and culture incubator would include a flexible, multiuse black box that can accommodate approximately 100 seats (200 standing).

Summary of Key Findings

- The Study Team arrived at a new arts and culture incubator by implementing a space program model (a tool used to calculate a new facility's estimated size and configuration) that synthesized the information from the inventory and community engagement efforts. The Study Team developed a space program for the incubator with administrative, educational, technical, and gallery spaces.
- Multidisciplinary performance spaces are appropriate for events such as live music, concerts, dance performances, lectures, film screenings, live-streaming, and other live performances.
- The space program yields a new arts and culture incubator of approximately 52,410 gross square feet.
- The Study Team prepared a case study as part of the Hopewell Redevelopment site and is one example of how a new arts and culture incubator could be realized. The City of Bloomington proposed the location of 714. S Rogers Street, which holds an existing brutalist-style building, for the building case study.
- An adaptive reuse strategy could transform the existing structure into the Hopewell Redevelopment Arts and Culture Incubator (Case Study). Adaptive reuse is a sustainable strategy for construction. In many cases, adaptive reuse reduces the amount of construction necessary and diverts building waste from landfills. The Study Team recommends repurposing the existing structure to accommodate the proposed maker spaces for this case study.
- The Study Team proposes an addition north of the existing building that will include a 100-200 seat black box theater, and education and multipurpose rooms.
- The City of Bloomington and the Study Team investigated the potential of the Hopewell Redevelopment site due to the site's capacity to be a cultural anchor in an otherwise underserved area. At the core of this vision, culture and accessibility drive collaboration in Bloomington. As the cultural heart of the Hopewell Redevelopment District, the project would create a focal point in the neighborhood and the city. The project's sphere of influence could extend beyond the Hopewell Redevelopment to the rest of Bloomington by curating with programmatic diversity.
- The project aims to provide a facility that showcases contemporary creative and cultural experiences, acting as a connective bridge linking downtown Bloomington to neighborhood communities and Indiana University, among other areas. The project makes it possible for Bloomington to create a more meaningful connection with the local artist community and continue to offer diverse cultural programming.

Executive Summary

New Arts Facility - Arts and Culture Incubator

Benchmarking, Business Plan, and Pro Forma

To determine whether a new arts and culture incubator is advisable for the City of Bloomington, the Study Team developed a business plan and a detailed operating pro forma budget. The business plan and pro forma identify sources of revenue and potential organizational structures, staffing, operations, and building expenses.

Understanding ongoing operational costs is a crucial step in assessing the feasibility of a new arts and culture incubator. A new arts and culture incubator is a dynamic entity connected with the community by facilitating many different types of events. The Study Team evaluated and recommended creative opportunities for facility utilization that offer additional revenue streams and community engagement. The evaluation combined the assessment of similar facilities around the United States with community outreach in workshops and a review of industry best practices.

The Study Team examined four comparable arts facilities in similar communities to help guide the pro forma and business plan; ascertain best practices and partnerships; and guide recommendations. The Study Team reviewed the funding and management structures of the benchmark facilities and ongoing maintenance and operations such as annual attendance, budget, earned and contributed revenues, and other items as available.

Summary of Key Findings

As part of the facility benchmarking exercise, the Study Team developed a list of lessons learned from conversations with leaders of the benchmark venues. These lessons should be considered best practices for a new arts and culture incubator :

- Ensure affordability
 - Foster partnerships
 - Simplify the model
 - Establish anchor tenants
 - Maintain financial stability
- **Ensure affordability.** Affordability is always a concern, particularly when neighborhoods are developed. Gentrification often pushes local artists out of their communities. A new arts and culture incubator should ensure that its rentable studios remain affordable.
 - **Foster partnerships.** Partnerships between organizations ensure diverse artists have access to the incubator. A new arts and culture incubator could partner with organizations to serve vulnerable populations.
 - **Simplify the model.** Maintaining a simple operating structure of the new arts and culture incubator is essential to streamlining processes. Benchmark representatives cautioned against having multiple owners and operators, stating that it confuses tenants.

- **Establish anchor tenants.** Developers of a new arts and culture incubator might consider having one or more “anchor tenants” to attract community interest. These anchor tenants can include established artists or other arts organizations that may benefit from having space in the building.
- **Maintain financial sustainability.** Carefully consider the economic sustainability of the business model to protect future organizational success. As part of the pro forma, the Study Team suggests the following potential revenue sources and cost-saving measures in addition to the standard space rentals:
 - A membership program offers a list of benefits for a monthly price at various tiers. It can simplify the rental process to be more all-inclusive. Memberships could include entry to several artistic spaces, free or reduced-fee equipment rentals, and after-hours access.
 - If maintaining the affordability of space rentals remains a high priority, renting equipment separately from spaces could help deliver additional revenue sources.
 - For gallery and retail items sold on-site, the incubator could take a portion of the sales percentage as a commission.

- A new arts and culture incubator could offer classroom space for free or discounted for a certain number of hours by users every month. These measures could incentivize volunteers and reduce operating costs.

The pro forma in this study does not account for the economic impacts a new arts and culture incubator could have on the surrounding community. In general, art facilities raise capital flows and spending in the surrounding areas. The Study Team recommends performing an economic impact study to gain better insight and to verify the positive economic impacts a new facility would have on the surrounding businesses and neighborhood.

To fulfill the operational obligations of the proposed new arts and culture incubator, the Study Team developed an organizational chart with the following positions:

- Director (full-time position)
- Studio Manager (full-time position)
- Program and Event Manager (full-time position)
- Facilities Manager (full-time position)
- AV/Production (overseen by Program and Event Manager)
- Volunteer Support (3 positions)
- Security (Contracted)
- Custodial Services (Contracted)

Executive Summary

Community Programming (non-facility)

Community Programming (non-facility)

In addition to a new arts and culture incubator, the Study Team recommends implementing initiatives that immediately expand the arts offerings in Bloomington. The Team suggests that the City of Bloomington enhance programming by promoting existing events and developing new programming. New programming should focus on neighborhood activation, especially in underserved locations in Bloomington where few arts and culture spaces exist.

The Study Team recommends that the City of Bloomington consider the following:

- Youth K-12 programs
- Neighborhood specific programs
- Funding programs
- Community arts programs
- Partnerships between Indiana University and the City of Bloomington
- Creating a unified communications platform
- Creating more arts spaces around town

Summary of Key Findings

- The Bloomington community desires arts education with a focus on youth programs for children and teens with activities, classes, and mentorship opportunities. Programming could be similar to The Void (now closed), Rhino's Youth Center (now closed), The Banneker Center, or the Waldron Arts Center (limited). The City of Bloomington could engage with Indiana University during the summer for potential teaching facilities and use of spaces. Indiana University faculty members have expressed an interest in working together to facilitate these programs. Youth programs can include opportunities for mentorship and internships for teens interested in pursuing the arts.
- Expanding public art programs and grants for concerts, public art commissions, and murals would increase financial access for artists.
- With support from Bloomington Arts Commission, neighborhood festivals would foster relationships between local artists and their immediate community and allow neighborhood space to enhance their identity.
- A muralist program where local artists are paired with interested neighborhoods would facilitate artist commissions and community vibrancy.
- An artist exchange component would increase artist exposure and cross-pollination across neighborhoods, and also include cultural districts of Indiana, the larger Midwest and the nation, including sibling city Palo Alto.
- Accessibility for emerging and next-generation (K-12) artists would expose younger residents to the arts earlier.
- With increased funding, a transit/shuttle program would bolster accessibility to local arts programs and events.
- An Arts Pass program with discounted rates would increase access to arts and culture events for individuals and artists who may not otherwise be able to attend.
- Launching a 2023 Artist Focus Group series on developing collaborations with artists and arts group leaders in neighborhood venues would increase local partnerships.
- A centralized communication platform for Bloomington artists would bring awareness of what is happening around the city. There is potential for collaboration or partnerships on artist and space directories with organizations like the Arts Alliance of Greater Bloomington and Arts Forward Bloomington. The platform could allow artists to show and sell work and teach classes.
- Internship pipeline programs developed in collaboration between the City of Bloomington and Indiana University would give students tangible opportunities to pursue a career in the arts and facilitate mentorships and internships. These opportunities could manifest in programs like a storefront curatorial program across Indiana University's humanities or Indiana University students teaching within the community.
- Use existing spaces. Creating more public art displays and spaces would simultaneously enhance Bloomington's cultural vibrancy and increase artists' exposure. Bloomington could use areas such as storefronts, Fountain Square, and the southern B-Line as opportunities for art installations.
- Amplify Bloomington's long history of making. Bloomington is already well-known for its arts and culture sector. How can Bloomington amplify its branding as an arts and culture destination? Bloomington's history of making artisan goods for trade at a national level is unique to its character. The City of Bloomington could lean into this character to advance its goal of becoming a national and international destination for arts and culture. Bloomington should continue to market itself as a cultural hub by facilitating artistic installations and events, including murals, festivals, and live music.

Executive Summary

Expanded Convention Center

Expanded Convention Center

As part of the study, the City of Bloomington requested the Study Team investigate the opportunity to expand arts and culture into an expanded convention center project. A downtown convention center could showcase local artists to a broader audience visiting Bloomington and could expand the reach and influence of the city. The City also asked the Study Team to consider how including arts assets in an expanded convention center might bolster Bloomington's reputation as an arts destination. The Study Team recommends that future development of the expanded convention center project should investigate opportunities to maximize performance, flexibility, and display of local arts and culture.

The Study Team recommends that the expanded convention center be considered as another asset to showcase local artists. Murals, sculptures, performance venues, and galleries could easily be incorporated into the program to showcase Bloomington artists' talent to a broader audience. The expanded convention center could catalyze experimentation within and across artistic disciplines and foster cross-cultural collaborations among artists. A series of flexible spaces formed by interlocking and expandable volumes could accommodate various projects, commissions, performances, and events. The expanded convention center would act as a polyphonic space to connect the experimental with the popular and allow for a range of voices and visions to take form and, in turn, inform new dialogues within Bloomington.

Summary of Key Findings

- The potential of an expanded convention center located adjacent to the existing convention center offers a unique opportunity to capitalize on tourism and guide tourists to Bloomington's various arts and culture offerings.
- An expanded convention center could be an economic catalyst for Bloomington to attract more regional and national events and conferences. It would bolster revenues across Bloomington and provide an infusion of tourism spending.
- Given the proximity of the convention center site to many of Bloomington's galleries and theaters, there is a prolific opportunity to integrate an art component into the expanded convention center program to facilitate tourism foot traffic to Bloomington's local arts community. An arts program in the convention center could expand the market for local artists and raise the profile of individual artists and Bloomington's arts community.
- The art component of the expanded convention center could take many forms as a display space, informational area, an indoor or outdoor curated experience, or a combination of programming and spaces to convey and elevate Bloomington's artistic narrative that may be unfamiliar to tourists.

The expanded convention center provides and opportunity to highlight Bloomington's wealth of arts and culture offerings. If the facility includes arts and culture offerings, the result could be a uniquely dynamic building. Providing opportunities in public zones of the building and flexible infrastructure would allow the traditional convention center program to integrate the arts. There is significant potential for a facility of this caliber to create a competitive advantage within the larger Midwest region.

- Performance spaces should be integrated into the public zones of the building. Locations of performance spaces can be strategically used for breakout spaces from the exhibition rooms and ballrooms. This type of dynamic programming can help Bloomington distinguish its expanded convention center from other national competitors.

Flexibility is an essential consideration for a future expanded convention center's ability to accommodate events and performances of varying scales, allowing for more dynamic and indoor/outdoor programming. The exhibition halls or ballrooms can include technology, lighting, and AV infrastructure to support performances. The use of movable wall systems can adjust the size and acoustics of space allowing a variety of performances to take place.

- By creating integrated art displays, the expanded convention center can provide an immersive experience for conference attendees to engage with Bloomington's local craftspeople and artisans.
- It will be important that the expanded convention center be accessible and inclusive. The City of Bloomington has the opportunity to create a portion of the program dedicated to showcasing work by local artists to a broader national audience. To maximize this opportunity, the City of Bloomington should consider additional staffing or dedicated sections of the building should be staffed to allow art to be publicly accessible at all times and not reliant on convention center booking schedules.