

Executive Summary: The Arts in Northfield, Minnesota

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This report summarizes findings on the current state of the arts sector in Northfield, Minnesota. Specifically, it details the assets and needs of the arts community, the effects of the current economic downturn, and research project ideas for how Carleton students and faculty could partner with community individuals and organizations in the future.

"Home to a number of institutions, galleries, venues and studios for a wide range of artistic mediums, Northfield is poised on the brink of regional recognition as one of Minnesota's most vibrant 'Art Towns.'"

Ross Currier, Executive Director of the Northfield Downtown Development Corporation

Research included interviews with eight Northfield individuals who are involved in the arts sector in a variety of ways, including as working artists and representatives from various arts-related organizations. In addition, one focus group was conducted with five Northfield artists and two other individuals involved in the arts community. Background research on the economic downturn's effects on the arts at the state and national levels, as well as previous Northfield arts community research, supplemented the original research carried out for this study.

Currently, Northfield has an extremely active and vibrant arts community. A wealth of both professional and hobby artists working and often living in Northfield create and perform art in all disciplines including theater, visual arts, music, dance and literary arts. In addition, numerous arts-related organizations exist, including both non-profit endeavors and for-profit businesses. The town's two colleges, Carleton and St. Olaf, contribute by providing many resources such as facility space as well as free concerts and exhibitions. Finally, three different committees are working to organize the arts scene in Northfield: The Arts, Recreation and Culture Committee of the Northfield Downtown Development Corporation; the Riverwalk Arts Quarter Initiative committee; and the city Arts and Culture Commission.

Assets of the Northfield Arts Sector

- Many organizations including the Northfield Arts Guild, ArtOrg, and multiple galleries
- Scores of talented artists in all disciplines
- Supportive community
- Diversity of arts activities
 - Annual festivals such as ArtSwirl and Shakespeare in the Park
 - Classes and programs for people of all ages and abilities
 - Various performances and exhibitions
- Recent increased collaboration
 - New committees facilitating cooperation
 - Partnerships among organizations and individuals
- Colleges bring in professional artists and offer a variety of arts events
- Cultural publications and websites such as the Northfield Entertainment Guide
- Northfield's proximity to the Twin Cities

Needs in the Northfield Arts Sector

- Reach a broader audience within Northfield
 - Currently only reaching small portion of population
- Reach audience beyond Northfield
 - More consumers are needed to support all the art that goes on
- Create more adequate facilities
 - Need more and better working and performance spaces for all kinds of artists
- More collaboration
 - Hard to know who all artists are and how to find them
- Resources for individual artists
 - Information about affordable healthcare and living arrangements
 - Business and technical training
- Funding
 - Difficult to charge due to expectation that art should be free in Northfield

In light of the economic downturn in the country, the arts are facing some new challenges. In Northfield, people expressed a variety of perspectives about how the economic situation will affect the arts sector. Several individuals and organizations reported that they are already feeling some impact in the form of increased scholarship demands or decreased grant funding. Most agreed that economic effects will likely increase in the future, especially over the next one to three years.

However, a number of people predicted that the economic situation will not be as significant for the arts as for other sectors in Northfield. Since it is already difficult for artists and arts organizations to support themselves in a town where most arts events are offered for free, the effects may not be as severe. Several individuals indicated that the recession could actually benefit the arts. Because there is substantial research demonstrating that the arts positively impact the overall economy of an area, they may receive increased funding.

“The contemporary art market...is a vulnerable organism, traditionally hit early and hard by economic malaise. That’s what’s happening now.... The boom that was is no more.”

“The Boom Is Over. Long Live the Art”
The New York Times
 February 12, 2009

Northfield artists and arts organizations have already begun to respond to the economic situation. In order to weather tighter budgets, some people plan to increase collaboration and share resources. Individual artists and organizations also discussed changing their business models to work more efficiently and cater to a more frugal consumer base. Some artists are taking advantage of this time to strategically position themselves for when the market is better again, for example by working on publicity by making artists’ books.

There were numerous ideas shared about how Carleton could partner with individuals and organizations in the community to address some of these economic issues as well as general needs of the arts sector. Students and faculty at Carleton will have access to a complete listing of potential projects that community partners will be able to update to reflect their changing needs. Hopefully this will facilitate increased collaboration between the arts sector in Northfield and the Carleton community for mutual benefit.

Project Ideas		
<u><i>With Individual Artists</i></u>	<u><i>With Organizations</i></u>	<u><i>For the Northfield Arts Sector</i></u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student interns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Business assistance ○ Art students doing collaborative projects ● Research projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Affordable living ○ Health insurance ○ Group supply purchasing ○ How to manage a working studio ○ Leasing or renting artwork ○ Grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student interns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Marketing strategy improvement ○ Website development ● Comparative organizational research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific guidelines and policies ○ Strategic planning ○ Fundraising techniques ○ Grants ● Projects tailored to specific organizations’ needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clarify vision for the arts ● Market Northfield as an “Arts Town” ● Investigate funding options at different levels ● Effects of state level changes (state arts board, future tax) ● Research impact of the arts on local economy ● Create community resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aggregate calendar ○ Artist directory ○ Hub of resources for artists ○ Map of the arts sector