Art, Culture, Science, and the Future in Flagstaff

Engagement and Survey Results + Peer City Research

Executive Summary Report

Introduction & Background

Flagstaff, Arizona, is a culturally rich and creative mountain town known for its artistic expression, festivals, and scientific innovation, attracting nearly **6 million visitors** annually and generating over **$930 million** in annual earnings from arts, retail, and tourism-related activities. The city supports a thriving arts, culture, and science community with significant financial backing through the Bed, Board, and Beverage (BBB) City of Flagstaff tax fund. This tax helps finance initiatives like the "Beautification, Arts, and Sciences" program, public art, and provides substantial annual grants to the sector through Creative Flagstaff, the current contracted sector leader, supporting various projects and activities that enrich the city's cultural landscape. Currently, Flagstaff has over **40 diverse nonprofits** in the art, culture, and science sectors who receive grant funding. Creative Flagstaff distributes between **$400,000 and $600,000 annually** (depending on budget availability) to nonprofits in the sectors. This level of giving to local nonprofits is a higher percentage of the City's funding for arts, culture and sciences than most of the peer cities we looked at, and higher than any other cities in Arizona that were assessed.

Flagstaff is at a pivotal moment, emerging from the pandemic with new opportunities for growth in the arts, culture and sciences. This includes innovative projects like artists collaborating on City infrastructure projects and the rotating sculpture exhibit at **Liz C. Archuleta County Park**. Public art and initiatives like the **ARTx Festival** and **Beautification in Action** grants have become more integrated into the community's fabric, reflecting a shift toward richer, more collaborative cultural offerings. This report addresses core questions about how well current programs serve the community, the effectiveness of BBB tax funding use, resource needs, and the community's vision for the future. Key overarching questions included:

- How are recent programs, projects, and offerings serving the community?
- How is current funding supporting the sectors?
- What resources are needed for the sectors to thrive?
- How does the community want future funding used?
- What is the vision for Flagstaff's future in arts, culture, and science?

Key Findings

The study highlighted several successes within Flagstaff's arts, culture, and science sectors, alongside areas requiring improvement and strategic focus. The findings reflect community pride in existing achievements and a powerful desire to support sustainable growth in these sectors.

Key Findings

1. Successful Programs and Initiatives

The report identified a number of standout projects that exemplify the creative energy in Flagstaff, as well as the community's desire for continued innovation. Specific examples of projects and programs that are seen as successful by multiple respondents include:

- **ARTx Festival:** This new festival was mentioned as a recent success by many respondents, celebrated for fostering new collaborations and showcasing diverse art forms. It also drew strong community engagement, providing a platform for local artists. Interestingly this festival was also mentioned often as needing improvement (some felt it duplicates existing efforts and needs to be more clearly advertised, for example), illustrating that it is soliciting strong feedback from the community as a new initiative.
- **Flagstaff Festival of Science:** This event is celebrated for its ability to bring together the local community, schools, and scientific institutions in a shared celebration of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). Participants lauded the festival for its engaging programming, which spans both arts and sciences, and for its capacity to reach broad audiences and youth.
- **Public Art Projects:** Flagstaff's commitment to public art is visible in projects like the art-wrapped traffic signal cabinets. These installations have added "unexpected moments of joy" and color throughout the city, making art a part of everyday experiences. The project was noted for its accessibility and for highlighting local artists. Similarly, the new Multicultural County Park Sculpture Exhibition at Liz C. Archuleta County Park was praised for its inclusive approach and emotional resonance, offering space for diverse narratives. The Coconino Scroll art fence at the airport was also highlighted for being engaging and beautiful while telling little-known stories of Flagstaff.

Key Findings

Successful Programs and Initiatives (continued)

- **The Coconino Center for the Arts** (CCA) was lauded for its exhibitions and events, such as a recent photography show about immigration, the Parched show about water, and for its unique role as a venue in Flagstaff
- **The Beautification in Action** community micro grants that fund public improvements such as gardens and art, provided by the City of Flagstaff, were mentioned as enabling "communities to do things they themselves envision."
- **The Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra** was applauded for their collaborative programming, and for being well-organized and inclusive of youth.
- **Other projects and programs** with multiple mentions for success include: the Cheshire Slow Street Asphalt Art, the Library Entry Project (at the Aspen Street library) that includes public art and inclusive design, the recent production of a Midsummer Night's Dream at NAU, Culture Connection for being so well advertised, Art Walks, Flagstaff Sings for its outreach to local choirs, the Flower Project in the Historic Core, the Flagstaff STEM celebration, Hullaballoo, Museum of Northern Arizona events, the Northern Arizona Book Festival, Octoberfest, Pride Parade, the use of "Art Boxes" for creative input for the Regional Plan, and the heavily-attended Star Party.
- **Murals:** Many respondents also expressed appreciation for the many murals across Flagstaff.

Key Findings

2. Areas for Improvement

The feedback also pointed to several areas where strategic adjustments could help ensure long-term success and sustainability in the arts, culture, and science sectors.

- **Funding and Resource Allocation:** The need for increased funding for the sector was highlighted, including increasing public/private partnerships. The request to change annual grant requirements (those currently administered by Creative Flagstaff) so that individuals can also apply was mentioned as well. Simplifying the grant process, particularly for small groups, and making funding more accessible were frequently mentioned as ways to improve the sector's sustainability. The request for more private/public funding partnerships was also mentioned.
- **Collaboration and Inclusivity:** While creative collaborations were applauded and recognized, there is room for improvement in how the city's arts, culture, and science sectors work together. Feedback called for stronger partnerships between the City, nonprofit organizations, and NAU to create more cohesive programming and for enhanced support of the sectors. Enhancing inclusivity was also seen as critical, with specific calls for increased representation of Indigenous communities, youth, and other underrepresented groups in artistic and scientific initiatives.
- **Venue Improvement and Development:** Many participants pointed out the need for more versatile and affordable venues to support a wide range of cultural activities. The concept of a "constellation of venues" was suggested, envisioning multiple (including non-traditional) spaces across Flagstaff that host events and exhibitions in various neighborhoods. This approach would allow for greater community reach and financial access to space. There is also interest in exploring the development of a central cultural hub or a flagship venue that could serve as a focal point for major events. Support for the proposed Indigenous Cultural Center was also included.

SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Engagement activities included a SWOT analysis to assess the sector's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats:

Strengths: Flagstaff's natural beauty, strong community support for the arts, and unique blend of artistic and scientific institutions, including the Museum of Northern Arizona and Lowell Observatory.

Weaknesses: Limited affordable venues, fragmented collaboration among organizations, and challenges with retaining staff and volunteers.

Opportunities: Creating new venues or improving old ones, leveraging Flagstaff's unique geographic setting for art and science initiatives, and expanding partnerships with Northern Arizona University (NAU).

Threats: Rising living costs, declining volunteerism, and potential loss of funding from sources like the Bed, Board, and Beverage (BBB) tax if not renewed in the future.

Key Findings

3. Community Vision and Strategic Opportunities

The vision articulated through the engagement process reflects a community eager to embrace its creative identity and leverage it for broader economic and social benefits.

- **Art, Culture, and Science as Central to Flagstaff's Identity:** Many community members envision Flagstaff as a regional creative hub, drawing on its natural beauty, Indigenous heritage, and strong scientific presence. Participants see an opportunity to further integrate these elements into the city's identity, using them as a foundation for marketing Flagstaff as a cultural destination. Emphasizing this identity could attract new residents, visitors, and investment, bolstering the local economy. There is also a desire to move toward more contemporary, colorful, and "brave" artistic expressions, such as in public art.
- **Supporting Emerging Artists, Creatives and Entrepreneurs:** There is strong support for initiatives that help local artists and creatives thrive. Suggested actions include mentorship programs, business training, grant writing and project application training, and expanded artist residency opportunities. Participants believe that providing these resources would stimulate innovation, retain local talent, and enhance the overall vibrancy of the arts community.
- **Engagement with Technology:** Participants recognized the importance of embracing digital tools to keep pace with evolving cultural trends. Suggestions included using technology to enhance public art—such as through digital tours or interactive exhibits—and developing online platforms such as apps for promoting local events. These tools could help reach younger audiences and tourists who are accustomed to digital engagement, thereby expanding the impact of Flagstaff's cultural offerings.

Public Survey Results: "The nonprofit annual grants from Creative Flagstaff are critical to my professional or my organization's future." Do you agree or disagree?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NA/Unknown
31% (14)	**13%** (6)	**11%** (5)	**11%** (5)	**11%** (5)	**22%** (10)

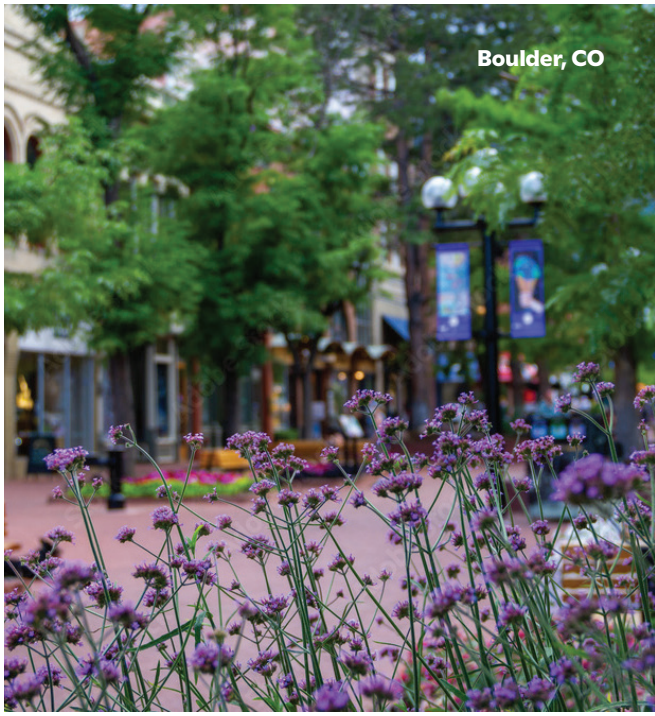
Figure X. Feedback on Annual Grants to Nonprofits. Public survey participants were asked to share their experience with utilizing the nonprofit annual grants currently administered by Creative Flagstaff.

Key Findings

4. Insights from Peer Cities

The report also included research into peer cities with similar characteristics to Flagstaff such as their population size, presence of a university, and emphasis on natural surroundings. These insights offer valuable lessons for Flagstaff's future development.

- **Asheville, North Carolina:** The concept of "creative placemaking" rather than "public art" is emphasized, which integrates art into community endeavors and planning. Asheville's use of temporary art installations provides flexibility to adapt to changing community needs, a model that could benefit Flagstaff as it seeks to balance heritage preservation with new artistic expressions.
- **Bellingham, Washington:** An activated community space on an undeveloped parcel in Bellingham, featuring temporary murals, live music, and other events, has become a local gem. The use of non-traditional space for temporarily activated "hubs" could benefit local artists and the sectors while also strengthening the community in Flagstaff.
- **Bentonville, Arkansas:** The Crystal Bridges Museum serves as a cultural anchor in Bentonville, demonstrating how a major institution can catalyze broader (and more diverse) community engagement. Flagstaff could consider similar models for leveraging its existing cultural institutions to create deeper community ties and attract regional visitors.
- **Boulder, Colorado:** Sector leadership highlights the importance of professional development for artists and maintaining strong partnerships with local government. Boulder's focus on capacity-building through workshops and networking events has helped create a resilient arts sector, suggesting a path for Flagstaff to enhance support for its own creative community.



Key Findings

Insights from Peer Cities (continued)

- **Bozeman, Montana:** Capacity-building and education for local artists is prioritized through a scholarship fund available to residents of the state of Montana interested in pursuing artistic endeavors, including (but not limited to) camps, lessons, workshops, higher education, residencies, and community art projects. Flagstaff may look to this model to support and uplift local talent through education.
- **Durango, Colorado:** Maintaining a large, dynamic community space for the benefit of over 50 businesses, individuals, and organizations is key to Durango's successful collaboration across the sectors. This model may be considered as Flagstaff's venues may shift over time.
- **Montpelier, Vermont:** Sector leadership collects data on a variety of sector metrics to visibly showcase successes with state legislators and funders. Flagstaff may invest in data tracking more intentionally as it seeks to acquire more external funding sources for the sectors and continues to grow a culture of philanthropy.

Montpelier, VT

Public Survey Results: Overall, how do you think Flagstaff is doing in the following areas?

	% Very Well	% Somewhat Well	% Neutral	% Somewhat Poorly	% Poorly	% NA/Unknown
Venues and space for art and cultural activities (existing)	15	44	13	16	3	8
Supporting local science and environmental education organizations	19	24	22	5	2	27
Supporting local entrepreneurs in the art/culture/science sector	10	16	26	10	5	33
Supporting local artists	9	49	19	5	3	14
Public art program	19	30	20	4	4	24
Providing affordable and accessible venues for groups	6	16	29	16	8	27
Planning for new art/culture/science venues	3	13	28	15	8	32
Inclusion of and listening to diverse people and audiences	15	25	22	16	9	14
Funding to art/culture/science nonprofit organizations	14	40	15	4	3	23
Festivals and events (art/culture/science)	28	43	16	7	1	5

Figure X. Public Survey Participants Analyze the Success of Several Existing Projects and Programs. Participants provided feedback on how well they thought a provided list of projects and programs were going on a scale from "Poorly" to "Very Well."

Pathways Forward

Based on the findings from engagement activities and peer city research, the report outlines several potential strategic pathways to guide the future of Flagstaff's arts, culture, and science sectors.

Pathways Forward (continued)

- **Enhance Funding Mechanisms:** To address resource gaps, the report recommends increasing "the pie" of available funding for local non-profits, artists, and creative entrepreneurs. Developing a culture of philanthropy in Flagstaff is also suggested to attract large donors and build long-term funding streams, including corporate donors.
- **Develop a Centralized Hub and/or Satellite Venues:** A venue study can help assess the needs of existing spaces and the feasibility of developing new venues or cultural hubs. A centralized arts and culture center, complemented by smaller satellite venues in various neighborhoods, would provide a range of options for diverse types of events and audiences, creating a more accessible and dynamic cultural ecosystem. Focusing on just a constellation of venues may provide a less expensive and more dynamic path forward, however. Consider developing more central satellite venues for existing institutions such as the CCA, Lowell, and MNA to increase visibility and accessibility to

Public Survey Results: "Flagstaff can and should be known as one of the Southwest's most creative cities." Do you agree or disagree?

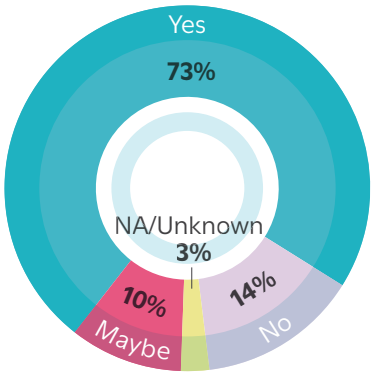


Figure X. All responses (120) from the online public survey and sector leadership interviews were compiled, showing the majority of respondents agree with Creative Flagstaff's vision for Flagstaff as "one of the Southwest's most creative cities."

Pathways Forward (continued)

programming. If a venue study is pursued, however, do so with caution – as one respondent mentioned, "every place they lived has wanted more venues." Supporting existing venues more is also an alternative.

- **Strengthen Marketing and Outreach:** Flagstaff's cultural sector can benefit from improved promotion of local events through digital tools and coordinated efforts with groups such as Discover Flagstaff. A more strategic marketing approach can elevate Flagstaff's profile as a creative destination, drawing attention to its unique blend of art, culture, and science. Participants also asked for greater visibility and promotion of the City's Beautification, Art and Sciences program activities.
- **Foster Inclusivity and Community Engagement:** The findings emphasize the importance of prioritizing outreach to underserved communities, including Indigenous populations, to ensure that Flagstaff's cultural sector is truly reflective of its diversity. Offering youth-focused programs and creating platforms for new voices in the arts could help build a more inclusive and interconnected community.
- **Increased Training and Support for Artists, Entrepreneurs, and Nonprofits:** Find specific ways to support people and groups getting started and succeeding in the sectors. Increase trainings in topics such as grant writing, nonprofit best practices, navigating City processes, and artist trainings focused on business practices and public art. Provide training on how to work with diverse people (such as Indigenous populations) for all City staff as well as groups in the sector. Also provide more mentorship opportunities.

Conclusion

This report highlights a community eager to build on its strengths and address its challenges, working towards a shared vision of a more vibrant, inclusive, and creative city. With strategic investment, increased collaboration, and a commitment to inclusivity, Flagstaff can continue to be a place where creativity thrives, enriching the lives of residents and visitors alike while contributing to the city's economic and cultural vitality.

This report was prepared for the City of Flagstaff Beautification, Arts and Sciences program by Eliza Kretzmann Consulting in 2024. Special thanks to City staff David McIntire (Community Investment Director) and Jana Weldon (Manager of Beautification, Arts and Sciences) for work on this project, and to Cristin Crujido (Beautification, Arts & Sciences Coordinator) and Creag Znetko (Administrative Specialist) for their assistance with these activities. Thank you also to Erin Kaczmarowski for working on this effort with the consultant. Eliza Kretzmann consulting works throughout the Southwest focusing on connecting communities to crucial resources & creating spaces and places that uplift and inspire people.

For a full report of more detailed findings, please contact the City of Flagstaff's Beautification, Arts and Sciences Program.