

“ A PLACE TO ARRIVE... ”



Creating a Vision for
the Chandler Center for the Arts



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∞ Executive Summary

Since the Chandler Center for the Arts opened its doors in 1989, it has been a reliable provider of high-quality arts and entertainment, a national example of successful public-private partnership, and a cultural beacon for a city that has experienced tremendous growth. It has successfully addressed many challenges and can look back on its history with pride and accomplishment.

But now it is time to look to the future.

While CCA historically has enjoyed an enviable economic stability, architectural flexibility, and strong community support, questions being raised by the high-speed, complex changes happening today demand a thoughtful response. Community, partnerships, economic models and an aging building must be re-examined through a lens of opportunity to allow Chandler Center of the Arts to build on its foundational success.

This report, based on several hours of interviews from more than 50 focus group participants, begins the process of creating a new vision. Facilitated conversations revealed a menu of issues and challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that CCA has a sustainable future.

Chandler is trending toward a diverse, affluent and young population. The economic climate is uncertain, many businesses are struggling and a slow deceleration of growth has begun. Development and the emphasis on infrastructure are giving way to reinvestment, renovation and redevelopment. In this transitional time, the arts have an important role to play in maintaining a strong, thriving community. It is a key contributor to a high-quality lifestyle, which provides an incentive to attract new businesses and residents, as well as a retaining those who have already invested in Chandler.

The educational component of both the building itself and CCA's programming is imperative to cultivating the next generation of arts lovers and supporters. On the flip side, the demands of the school system on the venue have created challenges in scheduling and allowing for entertainment options that might attract larger audiences or more frequent attendance. In a similar way, the partnership that gave CCA a springboard to success also has a dual edge, as it can create limits in flexibility and self-determination.

Deliberations on a vision for CCA also must take into account the many facets of technology. It plays an increasingly essential role not only in how programming gets delivered, but how it is marketed as well. Technology provides new capabilities, allows CCA to expand its audience and can be employed to inspire a more innovative experience. It also represents a competitor, as it creates a cacophonous array of choices for time-starved consumers. It is a resource that will demand resources to remain up-to-date.

A deeper look at demographics, trends, partnerships and opportunities identified by the focus group participants follows. As a vision for CCA materializes through leaders' future deliberations and decisions, the hope is that attending to these key issues will provide a useful conversational framework.

∞ Introduction

“Chandler Center for the Arts is a place to go, and should also be a place to arrive.”

This report is based on data gathered from six focus groups comprised of Chandler Center of the Arts stakeholders. Information contained here is intended to assist CCA in the development of a long-range vision that aligns with the organization’s strategic and long-range facilities plan developed in 2010. Once a vision for the Center’s future and its role in the community is established, it can inform the work of the CCA organization, its board and other key stakeholders as they develop the goals and objectives necessary to achieve it.

Roundtable discussions reflect conversations with 54 participants and were conducted by Maren and Jamie Showkeir, of *henning-showkeir & associates, inc.* (The exception is the business leaders group, which was facilitated by foundation board member Lorah Neville.) Every attempt was made to ensure that participants reflected Chandler’s demographic diversity. Group members ranged in age from the mid-teens to the 80s, and represented the business community, the CCA Foundation board and staff, donors, patrons, youth, volunteers, and local organizations that use the facilities for performances and ceremonies.

Information from the focus group conversations, which ran about 90 minutes, have been collated in to the following themes:

- ➔ Chandler Community
- ➔ Demographic Issues
- ➔ Business/Lifestyle Trends
- ➔ Role of the Arts and Culture in Chandler
- ➔ Successes to Build on
- ➔ Recommendations for Planning the Future
 - Innovation
 - Technology
 - Education
 - Financial
 - Programming
 - Venue
 - Scene

∞ Chandler Community

“Chandler is a community that has stayed true to itself.”

Most of the focus group participants were Chandler residents as well as CCA stakeholders, and their remarks reflected a deep sense of community identity and pride. Long-time residents remember the “cow town” days, when the population was tight-knit and the community was known for its agriculture, dairy industry and the U.S. Air Force base. Chandler has evolved into a thriving community where people can “live, work and play.” Several participants from the Sun Lakes retirement community, which has provided a solid subscriber and audience base for the Center since its opening, touted the city’s lifestyle, convenience and cultural amenities. Quality schools, safe neighborhoods and progressive leadership also were highlighted as strengths to preserve and build on.

“There is the small town, and the big town, and I am not sure they’ve reconciled yet.”

Participants also reflected on their concerns about Chandler’s ability to maintain its “small-town” feel in light of the city’s rapid growth. Several people emphasized the need to maintain and redevelop institutions and infrastructure as the rapid population growth of the 1980s and 1990s inevitably slows and stabilizes.

There was strong consensus about the important role that arts and culture play in supporting a first-class quality of life. Cultivating the next generation of arts supporters should get focused attention, with an emphasis on integrating arts education in the schools and community programs.

Themes

- Good place to raise a family
- Good place to retire
- Progressive leadership
- Existing infrastructure
- Business-friendly environment
- Caring community, neighborly, “familial feeling”
- Strong sense of identity, “small town” feeling, city amenities
- Arts, cultural and education among top five things people/business look for in a community
- Good quality of life
 - Healthy environment
 - Livability (cost of housing, jobs etc.)
 - Cultural access
 - Strong schools / quality education
 - Safe

∞ Demographics

“Different expectations come with a population that is getting younger, affluent and more diverse. How do we give them a chance to belong? How do we keep them here?”

Focus group members’ perceptions of the community’s population seemed to be fairly consistent with trends that emerged from the 2010 census data. It shows that Chandler still is predominantly white but becoming more diverse (73 percent of the population identified as non-Hispanic white, down from 77 percent in 2000). The population also is affluent (census reveals a median household income of \$70,413), and trending younger (25.2 percent under age 18 years, and only 7.8 percent over age 65). The city also boasts a highly educated population — more than 90 percent of its residents graduated from high school, and nearly 40 percent are college graduates.

“Older people came from a place where they had access to arts, so they had that when they arrived. That’s why we have to get going on the young people.”

With an influx of large employers, racial and ethnic diversity is increasing, with Hispanic and Asian populations being the fastest growing. Focus group participants recognized this trend and spoke to the opportunities and challenges this presents for CCA. For example, although the community is affluent, several mentioned the widening gap between the “haves” and the “have nots.” The senior community, which has provided a strong and stable base of support, is dwindling. Those in middle age are raising families and have less time/discretionary income to devote to the arts. And the young generation has come into a world with myriad entertainment options, including many that never require them to leave their residence.

Themes

- Geographically large (80 square miles) — a dispersed population
- Increasing gap in wealth distribution
- Population growth trending younger
- More diversity
- Ethnic communities have not “gelled”
- Average household income in Chandler is higher than people realize
- The main zip code for CCA demographic is 85248 (Sun Lakes) — this audience is aging
- Population churn

∞ Business and Lifestyle Trends

“People think we are competing against our neighbors (i.e. Scottsdale, Tempe, Phoenix), but our neighbor could be China.”

Like all communities, Chandler has been affected by the economic downturn that began in 2008, which has distressed the housing market, diminished accumulated wealth, and made consumers more cautious about spending. Consequently, there are fewer available resources at a time the community needs to turn its attention to redevelopment and re-investment.

The economy, technology, and a slowdown of the rapid growth Chandler has experienced in the last couple of decades will all influence how business decisions are made, focus group participants said. Businesses operate in a global environment, and the challenge is to find ways to help them think and act locally.

“If the work force is engaged in a community, it is less likely to leave.”

In addition, technology has forever altered the way people can connect with each other at work, at home and during leisure hours. People have less incentive to leave home with television, cable programming, computers, tablets and mobile devices allowing people to gain access to almost any location in the world. With a wide variety of low-cost or free entertainment options available, the race for entertainment dollars gets ever more competitive. Businesses, including CCA, will need to finely hone their marketing messages, and have the ability to customize for the various delivery portals: traditional media, multi-media and social media. Young consumers make spontaneous entertainment decisions, and they have come to expect interactivity. In such a high-tech world, developing an environment where people feel connected and engaged in the local community becomes a challenge.

Themes

- Uncertain economy, erratic housing market
- Maturing community requires maintenance, re-investment and redevelopment
- Global workplaces and workforces
- Telecommuting – working shifts are 24/7
- Cost-conscious multi-generational households want things to do together
- Youth are less brand loyal, more cost conscious
- New generation expects interactivity, mobility and sustainability
- 5.3 million mobile phone subscribers, E-learning, use of tablets, mobile apps

∞ Role of the Arts/Culture

“Culture is fundamental to place making, and that is a key to building a community.”

Strong consensus emerged from the focus groups about the essential role of the arts in creating a thriving culture and community. Donors in particular said that even if they weren't frequent users of the venue, they felt it was important to support CCA as a means of maintaining the community's amenities and quality of life. Participants also stressed the role of CCA in supporting arts education, as well as continuing to provide high-quality sources of entertainment. Many patrons and volunteers emphasized the importance of CCA to their social lives as well.

“The arts cause us to take a step back, challenge assumptions, and see a different world. They inspire us to think about something in a different way.”

In addition, many focus group members cited the need for art to inspire people in the community, and help them broaden their horizons, appreciate diversity and foster innovation. Keeping the arts vital and alive is a role that CCA fills well, participants said, and many suggested it should be a key player in the city's cultural experience by seeing itself as an institution and connector, not just a venue.

Themes

- Culture and strong arts institutions are foundational for a strong community
 - People are wired to dream large
 - Inspires people
 - Shows people endless possibility
 - Seeing the beauty of other creations, inspires you to want more
 - Conducive to creating tolerance
 - Supports “wild ideas” that lead to innovation
 - Helps us embrace the different and the uncomfortable
- An attraction for companies/businesses
- Helps retain local talent
- Educates

∞ Building On a Strong Foundation

“[CCA] has fostered a national conversation for how to run an arts center without relying solely on government.”

CCA has an important role to play in the community, and many referred to its status as a national role model for a couple of reasons. First, the strong partnership of city government, school district, and CCA Foundation provides a more stable economic base, and has been instrumental for building and maintaining the success enjoyed so far. (Many in the focus groups also talked about some of the drawbacks of the partnership, which will be addressed in the following sections.) In addition, the building’s unique architecture, which adapts to accommodate a small, medium or large audience and allows up to three events to run simultaneously, gives CCA an enviable flexibility.

“When you make [arts camps] available to my daughter, then you have my heart.”

Its relationship with the school district also gives CCA an important avenue for educating the next generation of arts lovers and provides a source of revenue through youth camps. Students bring additional exposure to the center through their parents and other family members.

“No matter what the request, they always find a way to make it work.”

Users and vendors gave the staff high accolades for top-quality customer service. Although the staff is about one-third of what other venues of similar size have, participants said every person who works at CCA, no matter what their role, is dedicated to creating an excellent customer experience from start to finish.

Themes

- Architectural uniqueness allows for flexibility in audience size, programming
- Unique partnership eases financial strain
- School district partnership – more than 40,000 students – engage more with students/ families
- Strong role in educating youth about arts
- Arts-related youth activities raise money, develop next generation
- Dedicated, customer-service oriented staff

∞ Preparing for the Future

There is no question the focus group participants see CCA as a vital element of the Chandler community. CCA has provided top-quality access to arts and entertainment and is valued for its contributions. One of the questions focus groups were asked to explore were things that could be improved, or suggest changes that would help the center prepare for the future.

The following are reoccurring themes from the groups worthy of consideration for continued viability and for extending the reach of CCA into the hearts and minds of the Chandler community.

INNOVATION

- Develop an organization characterized by innovation in thinking and action
 - Emphasize flexibility, diversity, and ability to quickly adapt to changing trends

TECHNOLOGY

- Upgrade and stay on top of rapidly changing technology advances
 - Connectivity is no longer negotiable
 - Tap into social media for marketing (FaceBook, YouTube, Twitter, mobile apps)
 - Leverage technology to broaden audience, both live and remote
 - Invest in equipment for facility – technically capable vs. swank – broadcast in real time
 - Tap into social media to attract a different market, ads/mailers are not enough
 - Integrate technology (CCA + community) pay-per-view allowing people to watch from home, create global audience
 - Partnerships that leverage technology, (i.e. transmitting shows remotely to reach the military or other remote stakeholders/audiences)
 - Remote viewing (graduations, recitals, memorials, etc.)

EDUCATION

- Help teachers develop curriculum around learning and the arts
- Connect students to the arts at an early age, allowing them to participate and see what it takes — developing programming, fundraising, community outreach, etc.
- Partner with schools to do programming “previews”

FINANCIAL

- Develop younger audiences/smaller donors
- More emphasis on fund-raising, financial development
- Create staff position to leverage volunteers, fund-raising
- Find ways to make money on riskier shows
- Alternative funding sources (parking, food, gift shop, etc.)

AS A VENUE

- Attend to aging building and infrastructure
- Find ways to deal with rising costs
- More prominent street presence
- More people need to know the “personal” feeling that CCA provides

PROGRAMMING

- More/varied programming to all demographics — show off CCA versatility
- Interactive, relevant and more frequent programming (i.e. weeknight events)
- Book and promote up-and-coming artists and bands
- Allow for multiple showings
- Balance between attracting younger audiences/retaining older audiences
- More “spontaneity” for youth who make last-minute decisions

CREATE A “SCENE,” SENSE OF PLACE

- Lively atmosphere, “something is always happening at the Center”
- Open mikes, local bands, allow local people to come and be expressed
- More free events
- Social media to alert people about what is happening in the moment
- More public display, places where people can be exposed to CCA non-traditional ways
- Create a full experience
 - Sell bundles – car hotel meal entertainment
 - Experiences bundled / one-stop shopping
 - Travel/cultural tourism
 - Create a meeting space: coffeehouse atmosphere / gift shop

∞ Managing Dynamic Tensions

When developing a vision for the future, several focus group participants emphasized that as improvements and changes are made, it is important not to “throw out the baby with the bathwater.”

Change always has a ripple effect, and as leaders plan and prepare for the future it will be important to attend to polarities — goals or characteristics that both have value, but create a dynamic tension because they are at opposite poles.

While not always easy to do, the goal is to attend to both sides of the polarity and strike a balance.

| POTENTIAL POLARITIES | |
|---|--|
| | |
| Retaining older audience | Attracting youth/young professional audience |
| Traditional three-way partnership | Renegotiated partnership |
| Programming high-cost “Big Names” | Programming edgier, less known acts |
| Live performances | Integrating technology for remote audience |
| Face-to-face service | Using technology for consumer convenience |
| Traditional revenue generation (ticket sales) | Fundraising, sponsorships, etc. |

Thank You to Our Focus Group Participants!

We deeply appreciate the time and good work of those who contributed:

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|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
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