

## **PART 1: THEMES AND OBSERVATIONS FROM KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS**

The Cultural Assessment began with a qualitative information-gathering effort comprised of personal interviews with a cross-section of key informants. This section of the report conveys key themes and observations from the interviews, which were conducted by the consultants on February 21 through February 23, 2007 in Scottsdale. Specifically, our goal was to identify the issues, concerns, hopes, and aspirations that will shape the cultural development of Scottsdale over the next 20 years. This section is organized in six parts, as follows:

- Summary Points
- Historical Perspective
- Building a Vision
- Key Civic Issues
- Key Cultural Development Issues
- Future Roles for Scottsdale Cultural Council (SCC)

We are indebted to the numerous individuals who gave freely of their time and wisdom in meeting with us. A list of interviewees is provided at the end of the section. A wide range of opinions and diverse perspectives were offered, the sum of which provides a nuanced view of Scottsdale's cultural landscape.

### **Summary Points**

A wide variety of opinions were expressed about Scottsdale's past and future cultural development. A distillation of the key points includes:

- Scottsdale's primary cultural assets are its history, its story and its originality. However, these assets are invisible to many residents who are new to the area, and must be kept alive.
- Almost everyone agrees that arts and culture are a critical part of Scottsdale's quality of life and, thus, its future.
- It will be important to articulate an imaginative and compelling vision of what kind of city Scottsdale wants to be, and how arts and culture play a critical role in achieving that vision.
- Arts and culture can serve as a bridge between old and new, north and south, young and old, and real and virtual. In an increasingly disconnected community, arts and culture is among the most viable strategies for a more cohesive community.



- Cultural programs can play an important role in bringing diverse voices and new creative energy to Scottsdale life.
- There is a view that cultural facilities must provide a significant economic impact; without that, their support will be problematic.
- The SCPA/SMoCA facility complex does not have the connection with the downtown streetscape that would make it more symbiotic with the other cultural assets of the downtown.
- While many people in the business sector understand the importance of arts and culture, there are few formal opportunities for on-going dialogue about how to stimulate even greater levels of activity and how to foster creativity.
- Tourism stakeholders want to see a broader view of culture by expanding the portfolio of high profile events and attractions that attract visitors.
- Positioning cultural facilities to fulfill the role of “third spaces” (i.e., not home, not work, but spaces where the lives of Scottsdale residents converge and interconnect) would be a significant departure from past practice and might be an important way to address future community cultural priorities.

## Historical Perspective

Scottsdale has a rich history that is unique and quite lost on its current residents, the majority of whom are new to the area. Scottsdale’s ties to the desert and to Native American history run deep. The high quality of life and the vitality of artistic and cultural expression embodied by the native population for thousands of years might very well serve as a metaphor for the future: balance of commerce, community and family, sacrifice for the collective good, communion with nature, etc. These values are as relevant today as they were a thousand years ago, perhaps even more so.

In the more recent past, history has been generous to Scottsdale. The City has what most other suburban areas lack – a wonderful story to tell. It is an intriguing, uniquely American story about art, crafts, fashion, and the proliferation of creative expression in a remote desert town. According to interviewees, the present day gallery scene is one manifestation of this legacy. Some feel, however, that the real power of the post-World War II Scottsdale story has not been harnessed as a potential driver of both cultural and economic development.

*If I could beam myself back to one period in Scottsdale’s history, I would go back to 1946. We had fabulous demonstration studios, Native American crafts... The craft shops on Fifth Ave. were doing wearable art, some of which was being sold in Bergdorf’s. Fashion was a big deal... There’s such a resurgence of interest in mid-century art. We [Scottsdale] could own that – mid-century modern.”*

This legacy of creativity can propel Scottsdale forward. It needs to be protected and animated, some say. In this sense, perhaps the key to the future of Scottsdale’s cultural development can be found in its roots, especially given the challenges of place-making in a fast-growing community. As several interviewees pointed out,



Scottsdale cannot afford to lose its history, its story, or its originality. These are Scottsdale's fundamental cultural assets.

*“Realness” is Scottsdale’s future. It’s what makes people feel connected to a place. We have a mass exodus of talented, creative people. We need to stop it.”*

Arts and culture has always been at the core of Scottsdale's identity, and is one of the key reasons why people come to Scottsdale, both residents and visitors. Although there are many views on how resources should be deployed, almost everyone agrees that arts and culture are a critical part of Scottsdale's quality of life, and thus its future.

## **Building a Vision**

In crafting a vision for arts and culture in Scottsdale, some people think about the future in terms of solving existing problems. Others look past the present and consider a vision that leapfrogs over current issues and anticipates opportunities that are not yet clearly understood. While both approaches have merit, we feel that it is important to articulate an imaginative and compelling vision that goes well beyond solving today's problems and addresses a more fundamental question of what kind of city Scottsdale wants to be.

Some people define the cultural future of Scottsdale in terms of capital investments in facilities, while others define the future in terms of the artistic and creative aspirations of Scottsdale citizens, which are not necessarily tied to facilities. But facilities are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. What are the ends that residents want for Scottsdale? It is difficult to see past the present, but we must.

*“Culture, in my opinion, used to be something that you paid to attend. Today, it’s something that people seek out as an experience.”*

During the interviews, several interviewees spoke of the need for more “third spaces” in Scottsdale – spaces where communities gather to build shared memory. Starbucks, for example, has positioned itself as a “third space.” Interviewees pointed out that cultural facilities, not restaurants and coffee shops, could more effectively fulfill this role in the community. Re-thinking cultural facilities and programs on a metaphorical level as a community's “third spaces” would be a significant departure from past practice and might be an important way to address future community cultural priorities.

It should be noted, however, that many civic and community leaders have a much more pragmatic view of the role of cultural facilities. They see these as spaces for performance that can serve to enhance the economic vitality of the community. While they understand the importance of “quality of life” in Scottsdale's image, there is a strong sense that cultural facilities must provide a significant economic impact; without that, their support will be problematic.



*“We need to ask ourselves if we want to put many millions of dollars into a [performing arts] facility that will cost us money every year... We talk about being an arts leader but we need to define that term before we spend money on a major new facility.”*

More and more, we see Scottsdale as being at a crossroads in terms of cultural development. There are many options that might be considered. For example, should Scottsdale build more and larger facilities that will accommodate more expensive programs and compete with other Valley cultural centers? Alternatively, should Scottsdale invest in building a cultural identity of its own, in the form of a community of indigenous creativity that relies less and less on imported talent? Would it serve Scottsdale to develop new and innovative spaces for individual artists, emerging art forms, spontaneous performances, and community conversations about arts and ideas – as well as traditional spaces for performances and exhibition? By the end of the cultural assessment, we hope to approach consensus around answers to these and other questions.

## Key Civic Issues

***Continued growth and development in Scottsdale.*** Almost everyone mentioned the extraordinary impact of the rapid growth of Scottsdale and the Valley as an over-riding force to contend with in all aspects of community development. It was pointed out that half of Scottsdale residents have been here for five years or less. One implication of the growth phenomenon is a need to introduce and involve new residents in the cultural system.

That said, however, several interviewees pointed out that the days of expansion and major development in Scottsdale are limited and that the future will see a greater focus on issues of redevelopment, density, and in-fill. This shift in focus also fuels some of the urgency around cultural facility development. As one interviewee said:

*“Downtown is running out of land, and if we fiddle around, there won’t be a site for the new theatre and that will be a disaster.”*

***Civic disconnectedness/lack of civic engagement.*** One of the overarching issues for Scottsdale is lack of engagement in civic issues. Some say that many Scottsdale residents are unlikely to get involved in civic affairs, leading to a sense of disconnectedness and isolation, and a lack of civic identity and memory. Others comment that civic leadership in Scottsdale is weak:

*“We are dealing with serious urban issues here – building density and height, transportation, Scottsdale’s urban-ness, sprawl, involvement in light rail. We are lacking leadership in almost all areas around these issues...”*

A countervailing force, as new residents start to sink roots here, is a desire to create community. In our interviews, several people expressed the view that arts and



culture is a bridge between the old and the new Scottsdales, the north and south, the young and old, and the real and virtual. In an increasingly disconnected community, arts and culture is among the most viable strategies for connecting people.

***Atomization of the city/isolation/building walls instead of bridges.*** Several interviewees pointed out that the gated community phenomenon in Scottsdale contributes to this sense of isolation and civic disconnectedness. Based on our interviews, it seems likely that as Scottsdale continues to develop, more and more people will seek social and cultural activities closer to their homes. Increasingly, neighborhoods in north, central and south Scottsdale will seek their own identities. This is a natural part of the growth process. It raises an important question about centralization vs. decentralization of future programs and facilities in Scottsdale.

***Lack of diversity.*** Some interviewees expressed the view that the lack of ethnic and cultural diversity is a liability for Scottsdale, with the implication that cultural programs can play an important role in bringing diverse voices to Scottsdale life.

*“It’s becoming too narrow a cross-section in terms of demographics. It’s very white, wealthy... not a lot of diversity. People are here for the affluent lifestyle, but don’t engage with the community.”*

Others feel that diversification and generational shifts are key trends that will shape future demand for leisure activities.

*“If you look at another trend that we’re witnessing from my point of view, if you look at the “new old people” – they are not the ones embedded in the traditional arts... I don’t see my generation as the ones who are sitting on their porches playing bridge.”*

## Key Cultural Development Issues

***The accessibility of centrally-located facilities is compromised.*** Scottsdale’s unusual geography and the increasing diversity of its population base present significant challenges with respect to cultural development. Increasingly, the traffic congestion and uncertainty about travel time make centrally-located facilities more problematic for residents. Indeed, many interviewees identified traffic congestion as one of the major problems facing Scottsdale. Especially in north Scottsdale, residents want nearby cultural activities. Many of the gated communities sponsor their own art fairs.

***Maximizing the use of existing and planned facilities.*** There is a general sense that existing and planned facilities could be better coordinated and better utilized for community benefit. Significant new facilities that could greatly enhance cultural opportunities for Scottsdale residents and visitors are in various stages of planning. These include the Desert Discovery Center, the Museum of the West, and the proposed Sonoran Desert Center for the Arts (envisioned as a multi-venue “village of the arts”), as well as places of worship (e.g., Pinnacle Peak Presbyterian Church),



new performance facilities attached to high schools and possibly libraries. Several interviewees mentioned the need for a new outdoor performance facility that would serve to integrate two value systems at the core of Scottsdale's identity – nature and art. There are also new cultural facilities opening in other parts of the Valley that will serve Scottsdale residents. One interviewee suggested that a decentralized program strategy might be a more appropriate moving forward:

*“So, one strategy is to use existing venues and bring more programming to the neighborhoods. People's tastes are so divergent now; it might make sense to have smaller, flexible spaces.”*

At the same time, several elected officials expressed concern about investments in major new performance facilities, especially if those venues were outside the downtown, where they felt the critical mass of cultural venues and other urban amenities need to be concentrated.

*We need a bigger venue, that's key. Our venue only seats 800, and that affects who they can bring in. I would like to see it downtown, it's important to place it there, given what else is in that area. I can't see sticking it out north. It needs to be downtown.*

Most interviewees feel good about the mix of programming offered by SCPA and SMOCA, although some would like to see SCPA take on a more aggressive presenting role and also be open to the public more regularly with low-cost events.

*“Why not open the SCPA for low-cost things, like a \$10 ticket to a classic movie or something. It's about programming to animate the larger area.”*

From another perspective, some elected officials expressed concern that both SCPA and SMOCA are “elitist” and not interested in catering to the cultural and entertainment priorities of most Scottsdale residents. One interviewee expressed a strongly held opinion that SMOCA doesn't serve a broad enough constituency given the investment of public dollars.

There is a general feeling that the SCPA/SMOCA facility complex does not have the connection with the downtown streetscape that would make it more symbiotic with the other cultural assets of the downtown area.

*“We need to infuse the performing arts into the gallery district.”*

Many of our interviewees, including Valley arts groups such as the Phoenix Symphony and Arizona Ballet, expressed support for a larger performance venue that would accommodate artists and attractions of a larger scale, as well as renovations to the existing facility.

***Need and opportunity for increased private investment in cultural infrastructure.*** Several interviewees expressed the belief that private resources are “left on the table” because of lack of coherent fund development plans for cultural

facilities and programs. Increasing private support is seen as a key issue, especially among civic leaders. As one interviewee said:

*“My vision would be that arts [organizations] and SCC would have developed a business plan and collected more donations, more of their own money raised.”*

***The “balkanization” of the Valley into more self-contained cultural centers.*** This is an outcome of past cultural development efforts, and also a key factor influencing future cultural development strategies. As one interviewee said:

*“At some point, we have to stop trying to duplicate the big city experience and recognize that our citizens benefit from cultural programs in other communities, and then focus our resources on what makes Scottsdale unique.”*

This suggests a key issue with respect to cultural development in Scottsdale: How can Scottsdale capitalize on the current and future cultural assets of its neighboring communities?

***Lack of criticism and critical dialogue about art and culture.*** Several interviewees commented on the difficulty in stimulating meaningful dialogue about art in Scottsdale. Serious criticism is, according to them, virtually nonexistent. For example:

*“There is no arts coverage locally - no serious discourse or reviews. Also, reporting here is awful. Without good, accurate coverage, you can’t get people to come [to events or galleries]. It’s hard to build interest.”*

*“The kind of reporting that actually happens is really lame and very critical by uninformed reporters. They need to focus less on the ‘society’ aspect and more on content.”*

What cultural policies and programs will get more people talking about art, developing tastes for new kinds of art and integrating art and culture into their life experience?

**Cultural experiences, broadly defined, are a key factor driving tourism to Scottsdale, both leisure and business.** Some of the hotels have integrated cultural activities into their visitor experiences (e.g., trips to art galleries). The hospitality sector is a huge beneficiary of Scottsdale’s overall reputation as a cultural destination. The types of cultural programs that put heads in beds are high profile special events and destination attractions, according to CVB leaders. Generally, the tourism stakeholders want SCC to take a broader view of culture and partner with the CVB on expanding the portfolio of high profile events and attractions that attract visitors.

The hospitality industry is seeing more demand for educational, interactive and cause-related experiences (e.g., conservation, the environment), where people can enjoy themselves and also feel like they are learning something and making a positive contribution to society. This parallels national trends in cultural participation (i.e.,

more active and curatorial forms of participation), and may have implications for cultural development in Scottsdale.

***The ambitious Skysong development is envisioned as a nexus between technology, business and art.*** But there are serious questions about how the Scottsdale arts community can play a real role in this concept. Interviewees suggest that there is a major opportunity here for injecting new artistic energy into the Scottsdale arts system and for building bridges between the creative assets of the artistic community and the research and technology capital of ASU and the business community's need for a more creative workforce. This raises a larger issue about the need for an honest discussion between artists and business people about how to foster creativity and have a stronger impact on the economic development agenda.

## Future Roles for SCC

It is useful to review the original charge given to SCC when it was founded. According to one interviewee:

*“The charge that we gave the group was to be the umbrella for encouraging, nurturing, fostering arts in all of Scottsdale, not just in the SCPA. The charge was to have SCC, without blinders, look at the whole perspective of the arts in Scottsdale. SCC was supposed to increase private support. The reality is that public funds are going to get more scarce.”*

There is a sense that SCC has not been completely successful in being more responsive to a larger cross-section of Scottsdale citizens. As another interviewee noted:

*“SCC is too interested in building a name for itself across the county, as opposed to serving the people of Scottsdale. If there are 200,000 people in this city, how many of them have been to a performance or exhibit? I don't think that building a huge new theatre is going to impact the community.”*

Analysis of interview data suggests a number of considerations for potential directions for SCC in the future, which are described briefly below. This list is not intended to be complete, but rather forms the starting point for discussion about the role of SCC in the future.

***1. Breaking down the walls between commercial and nonprofit cultural offerings in order to fulfill a larger cultural development agenda.*** The view was expressed that SCC should concern itself more with supporting and enhancing the gallery scene, and advocating for policies that maintain the authentic, creative, funky, independent aspect of the downtown area. Some expressed the view that Scottsdale's greatest enemies are commercialization and rising real estate prices, which could eventually lead to the sale of key properties downtown and unwanted development that would drive out small businesses and compromise the identity of the area.

*“The quirkiness is going. It’s becoming homogenized, commercialized.”*

*“It all starts with preserving old town.”*

**2. Stimulating artistic creation and building artistic capacity locally.** Several people discussed the importance of fostering creative expression broadly among Scottsdale residents. This was posed as counter to the “importing” of culture that most local presenters engage in. Programs and facilities that might foster this approach are worthy of consideration as SCC moves forward.

*“We don’t necessarily need new facilities, but SCC can be a catalyst for programs.”*

**3. Bringing the business community and the arts community together.** While many people in the business sector (including developers and those in the hospitality-related industries) understand the importance of arts and culture, there are few formal opportunities for on-going dialogue about *how to stimulate even greater levels of activity and how to foster creativity.*

**4. Coordinating cultural resources with the public schools.** School board members expressed the view that greater coordination is needed with respect to utilization and planning of school-based arts facilities and with respect to curriculum-based arts programming. They also say that there’s a shortage of qualified art teachers.

*“We want a dialogue with the SCC. There’s a lack of knowledge in the schools about what the SCPA is doing. We have to sit down and find out what’s going on together. We need to correlate our visions around arts learning.”*

## List of Participants

The list of interviewees was developed by SCC staff in consultation with the Advisory Committee. Affiliations are listed for information purposes only and were accurate at the time of the interview or meeting.

Debbie Abele	Historic preservation
Richard Bibee	General Manager, Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau
Bob Booker	Arizona Commission on the Arts
Deanne Boynton	Vice President, Tourism, Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau
Jim Bruner	Chair, Museum of the West board, former chair, SCC board
Chris Camberlango	Principal, Vanguard CityHome
Fran Cohen	Wolftrap Early Learning and Center Dance Ensemble
Shelley Cohn	staff, Scottsdale Cultural Council
Nancy Dallett	ASU History Dept.
Leslie Dashew	board member, Scottsdale Cultural Council
Brent DeRaad	Executive Vice President, Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau
David Dodge	Taliesin
Betty Drake	Member, Scottsdale City Council
Wayne Ecton	Member, Scottsdale City Council
Nan Ellin	Director, xxx Center, Arizona State University
Janie Ellis	Dancer
Joan Fadulla	Scottsdale historian
Irv Fleming	Scottsdale Symphony
Maryellen Gleason	Phoenix Symphony
Jay Good	Phoenix Symphony
Ilene Gordon	Women's Theatre
Lisa Grieve	Bentley Gallery
John Holdsworth	President & Chief Executive Officer, TLX, Inc.
Kathy Hotchner	staff, Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts
Michelle Korf	City of Scottsdale
Pam Krewson	Former School Board member
Kimber Lanning	Modified Arts
Matt Lehrman	Alliance for Audience
Robert Littlefield	Member, Scottsdale City Council
Bill Lykins	Chiaroscuro Gallery
Christine Loots	Principal, Aztec Elementary School
Meah Martin	Women's Theatre
Steve Martin	Childsplay
Mary Manross	Mayor, City of Scottsdale
Ron McCullagh	Member, Scottsdale City Council
Laura McMurchie	Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau
Eric Meyer	Scottsdale School Board
Judy Mohraz	Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust



Kevin Myers	Ballet Arizona
Carla Patridge	Arts in Education Council
Arch Rambeau	Sonoran Desert Center for the Arts
Marilyn Reinstein	board member, Scottsdale Cultural Council
Patti Reiter	ASU Foundation
Dieter Schaefer	Scottsdale School Board
Rachel Sacco	President & CEO, Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau
Randy Schilling	Five Arts Circle
Lisa Sette	Lisa Sette Gallery
Tom Silverman	CEO, Chaparral Suites
Lauren Simons	Vice President, Marketing, Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau
Jack Sisley	Board member, Phoenix Theatre
Sue Sisley	Founder, Desert Stages theatre
Stephanie Small	Free Arts of Arizona
Bonnie Sneed	Interim Director, Arizona Alliance for Arts Education
Mark Stanton	Public relations manager, Scottsdale Charros
Phyllis Stern	board member, Scottsdale Cultural Council
Fred Unger	Developer
Joan Weil	Sonoran Desert Center for the Arts
Matthew Weiner	Actors Theatre
Nancy Welch	Morrison Institute
Karen Wittmer	Publisher, The Tribune

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