

AGENCY SUMMARY AND MISSION

One of 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies across the United States, the Arizona Commission on the Arts is a 55-year-old agency of the State of Arizona and a dedicated champion of the arts and culture sector, powered by artists, makers, leaders, and lifelong learners living and working across Arizona. Through robust programs, research, and grantmaking, the Arts Commission invests in arts-based partnerships that strengthen Arizona communities.

The Arts Commission is governed by a 15-member [Governor-appointed Commission](#) and [professional staff](#), each grounded in an arts discipline or creative practice. Through the Arts Commission, the State of Arizona and the National Endowment for the Arts make strategic investments of public dollars in support of the agency's mission:

To imagine an Arizona where everyone can participate in and experience the arts.

WHO WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO

The Arts Commission is accountable to Arizona residents, their experiences and aspirations. We work alongside artists, makers, leaders, and lifelong learners in service of the public trust.

PLAN TIMELINE AND CONCEPT

For nearly a decade, the majority of state funding received by the Arts Commission has been positioned as one-time, fiscal-year-limited allocations. Without certainty in funding or scope from year to year, the agency has shifted its focus to versatile approaches, relationships built on trust, and intra- and cross-sector partnerships as opposed to traditional strategic plan methodologies.

The NextAZ plan covers six years, FY2018 through FY2023.

The plan is meant to be adaptive, shaped by Arizonans' participation and contributions, and leading to service implementation that can expand, deepen, or contract depending on resource realities in a given year.

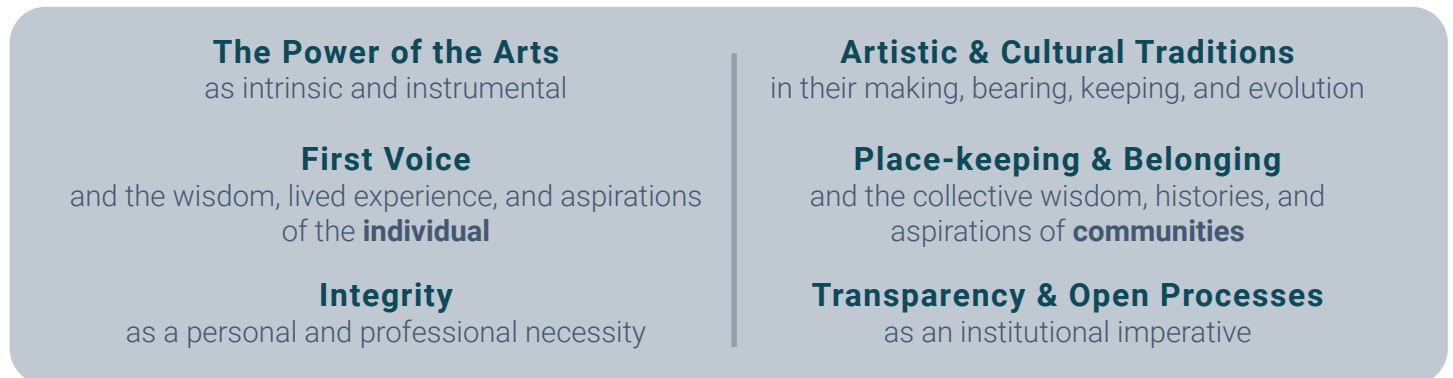
The Values Framework and Priority Goals form the nucleus of the NextAZ plan. Secondary goals and specific strategies are detailed in annual program budgets and agency workplans.

PLAN: VALUES FRAMEWORK

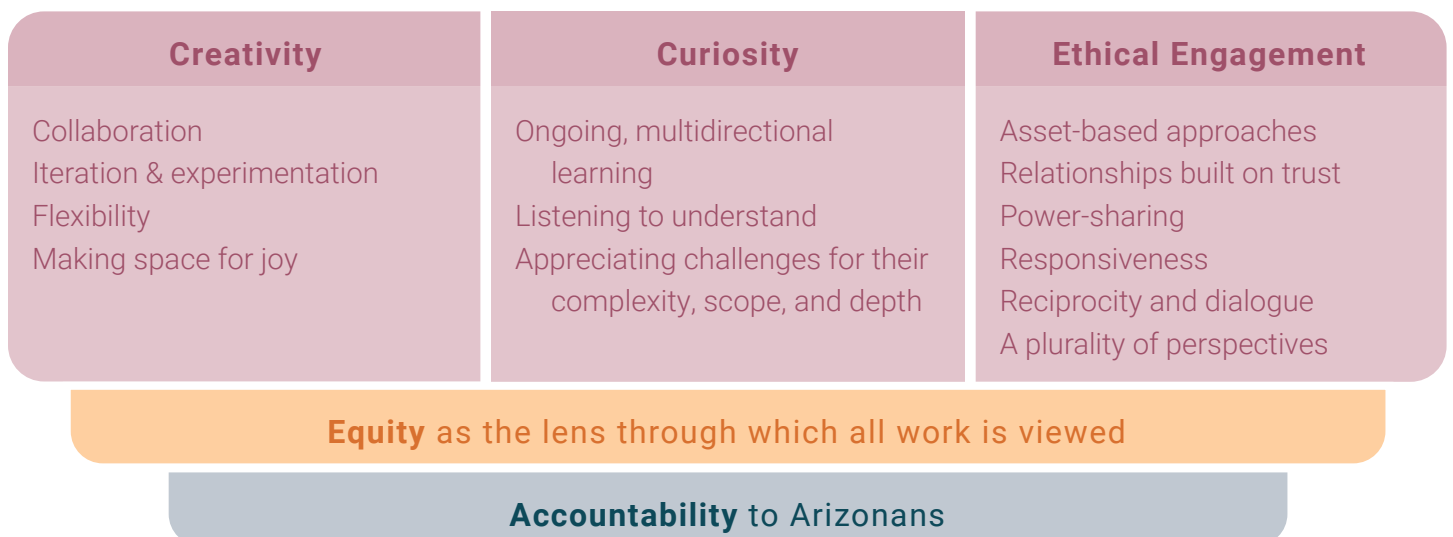
WE VALUE AND ADVOCATE FOR



WE UPHOLD AND RESPECT



WE PRACTICE



PLAN: PRIORITY GOALS

Internal goals for the plan period

Internal Goals are designed for the Arts Commission's staff and board and focus on culture change within the agency.

1. Understand and work to undo inequities across agency services.
2. Redefine and revise partnerships, programs, services, and grants through asset-based frameworks.
3. Examine how decision-making power can be shared within transparent processes, while not tolerating bureaucracy as a barrier to equity and access.
4. Build individual and collective capacity for collaboration, power-sharing, transparency, generosity, and reflection.

Field/sector goals for the plan period

Field/Sector Goals are a direct reflection of our articulated values, designed for the Arts Commission's partnerships, programs, services, and investments.

1. Arts and culture as essential:
Demonstrate and lift up the vital role of arts and culture in myriad contexts.
2. Artists as vital contributors:
Honor and support artists, makers, and tradition-bearers of all experience levels, living and working across Arizona, to enhance their craft and extend their valuable contributions.
3. Quality arts learning opportunities in a variety of locations and across the age spectrum:
Amplify and support student access to quality, robust arts education in Arizona schools, as well as meaningful opportunities in out-of-school and community settings. Encourage and support quality creative engagement opportunities for lifelong learners of all experience levels.
4. Creativity as a living natural resource within each Arizona resident and community:
Respect resident voices. Co-create services that nurture and celebrate the creative potential of individual Arizonans, as well as the creative assets and promise of every Arizona city, town, and neighborhood.
5. A just and equitable distribution of arts-based resources and opportunities:
Reimagine agency programs alongside community partners and those most affected by Arts Commission services, as part of a comprehensive commitment to distributing resources and opportunities in better alignment with Arizona demographics and the geographic location of residents.
6. Public policy and practices advancing all of the above:
Support the development and implementation of policy and practices supporting these goals across the authorizing spectrum.

Guided by Arizonans' voices and aspirations, NextAZ articulates a set of values, approaches, and practices. Agency goals and investments are scaled each year based on resource outcomes, with tactics and strategies detailed in annual program budgets and agency workplans.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Arts Commission launched the *Next50* initiative in its 50th anniversary year (FY2017). *Next50* was conceived as “a series of engagements designed to empower communities to activate creative assets and co-create ideas to fuel Arizona’s next 50 years.” Predicated on a desire to make the process itself valuable to Arizonans, *Next50* engaged a broad array of stakeholders in “actively imagining and devising ways for the arts and culture sector to position arts, culture, and creative practice at the center of a new, more productive narrative about the future of Arizona.” Internally, the Arts Commission staff also framed *Next50* as a one-year period of listening, learning, story-gathering, and research, which ultimately led to the *NextAZ* plan.

Two sample strategies from this period include:

- [Creative Spark](#) is now posted to the Arts Commission’s website and served as one of several engagement efforts that generated broad participation via stories and shared work. These community voices and contributions were considered by staff, board, and partners as plan drafts were developed, and contributors were invited to participate in other agency programs and services.
- [First50 Research](#) was a comprehensive scan and analysis of extant research/literature and engagement that resulted in 50 individual interviews. First50 explored goals articulated by the Governor, State Legislature, and arts, education, and business leaders at the time of the Arts Commission’s establishment, against sector outcomes achieved in the subsequent 50-year period. Analysis and interviews were featured within a *Next50* Arizona interactive map.

NEXTAZ PLAN INFLUENCES

In addition to the vital voices of Arizonans, the Arts Commission took inspiration from:

Agile development methodologies from the technology and software development sectors, particularly the Agile Movement’s focus on iterative, incremental development and release, continuous improvement, and the primacy of flexibility.

Learning and exploration around the nimble and responsive nature of **community-led and place-based practices** in our state, particularly as related to a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

Staff and board engagement with research and training around **issues of justice and equity in arts-based investments and opportunities**, informed by notable publications like Helicon Collaborative’s “Not Just Money”; individual staff training with Race Forward, artEquity, the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures, and the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond (to name only a few); staff and board training on “Cultural Competency in Agency Services”; and ongoing analyses of grantmaking and engagement practices.

Within *Next50* engagements, the Arts Commission heard from arts sector representatives that standalone planning methods were not viable or desired after long periods of financial uncertainty. The agency therefore endeavored a) to build out relevant planning strategies *as part of service delivery*, alongside representatives of underserved communities within existing initiatives (such as [AZ Creative Aging](#) and the [JAEC](#)), and b) to center planning and relationship-building with artists, educators, public officials and agencies, community groups, and businesses in new initiatives (such as [AZ Creative Communities](#)).

Specific planning strategies included but were not limited to: community-facilitated feedback sessions, documentation and podcast series, paid constituent consultation in program renovation, phased survey instruments, collaborative research efforts (such as Arizona funders’ ongoing engagement with [DataArts and the Cultural Data Project](#)), and multi-partner initiatives that position “horizontal decision-making” and planning as core elements of the work (such as [AZ ArtWorker](#)). All included public meeting components, where emergent *NextAZ* plan language was assembled, contemplated, and refined.

The *NextAZ* plan is a direct response to feedback and engagement driven by participation in the initiatives and planning strategies listed above. Arizonans were clear in their call for the Arts Commission to adjust its approaches, provide more assertive leadership on behalf of a complex, multidimensional sector, and to actively undo hierarchical practices and barriers to access. The plan therefore includes Internal Goals (IG) for the agency and Field/Sector Goals (FSG) designed for the Arts Commission’s partnerships, programs, services, and investments. Language and approaches were workshopped at biannual staff retreats and quarterly board meetings, the latter open to the public, as well as within various public-facing activities.

STRATEGIES & IMPLEMENTATION

The *NextAZ* plan is meant to be adaptive, an extension of articulated values, and iterative in terms of precise tactics—shaped by Arizonans’ participation and contributions, and leading to service implementation that can expand, deepen, or contract depending on funding realities and labor capacity in a given year.

Once the Arts Commission’s next-year budget results are known, agency staff and board analyze data, review feedback aggregated through various programs and initiatives, and engage community partners in deliberation over near-term objectives. In alignment with the *NextAZ* Values Framework and Priority Goals, resultant secondary goals and specific strategies are detailed in annual program budgets and agency workplans. Examples and metrics [can be viewed here](#).



Imagine an Arizona where everyone can participate in and experience the arts.
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