



Get Creative, Mankato!

A Framework for Artistic, Cultural and Economic Vitality
City of Mankato



2027 Vision

In 2027, Mankato identifies as a creative community, having developed an atmosphere where arts, culture, heritage and creativity are integral to the fabric of everyday life. A multitude of arts, cultural and historical organizations and events enhance the quality of life for residents and attract visitors, and the public is strongly supportive of these creative initiatives and institutions. Residents have equal opportunities to learn and create, finding inspiration from the talent and inventiveness that surrounds them. Drawn and nurtured by our community's appreciation for creativity and the energy it creates, a number of creative entrepreneurial businesses thrive. The richness of our cultural assets and the strength of the creative economy heighten community pride and benefit the economic vitality of the region.



Community Design

Community Design Goal: Spaces will be created throughout the community that encourage creativity and innovation, enhance livability and aesthetics, serve the needs of creative businesses, individuals and nonprofits, highlight the unique history and identity of Mankato, and demonstrate high standards of design and accessibility in public spaces.

Recommendation 1: Develop a public art ordinance and policies to encourage and support diverse offerings of public art and creative placemaking projects throughout Mankato.

Short Term

A public art ordinance and specific policies will guide the Public Art Advisory Committee, City, other organizations and individual artists in growing the public art collection in a thoughtful, effective way. Written policies will outline desired locations for public art, a process for acquiring or commissioning art, and a clear plan for the maintenance of public art assets.

First Steps:

1. Adopt a public art ordinance and create public art policy to that includes clear and simple processes for creatives wishing to do public art projects and events.
2. Clearly communicate public art processes to the creative community and general public, including via public meetings and City of Mankato and Twin Rivers Council for the Arts websites.
3. Provide training to creatives on how to implement public art and creative placemaking projects.

Recommendation 2: Recognize and support naturally occurring creative districts within Mankato.

Medium Term

Creative districts will enhance and encourage the creative economy and draw visitors to Mankato while creating a sense of place for residents. Creative districts should include performance venues, cultural establishments, unique retail and hospitality establishments, offices, studio and residential space. Identification and support of creative districts as they naturally occur will assist with marketing areas by highlighting their unique characteristics to draw interest and facilitate vibrancy.

First Steps:

1. Research creative district models to determine the characteristics and activities of successful districts.
2. Develop criteria to recognize naturally occurring creative and cultural districts; provide formal recognition of current and potential creative districts in Mankato.
3. Identify and recognize key leaders in each district; build support around collaboration efforts.
4. Establish parameters of support the City can provide within these districts.
5. In partnership with the **Tourism and Economic Vitality** goals, create a branding, marketing and communication plan for each unique creative district.

Recommendation 3: Identify, enhance and create cultural facilities for creatives, residents and visitors.

Medium Term

Creative use of underused existing spaces can provide artists with affordable space for rehearsals, performances, creation and displays. In addition to providing a needed resource for creatives, this also benefits the greater community by allowing residents to experience additional arts and culture opportunities.

First Steps:

1. Create a master list of current venues/facilities; include types of activities spaces can support (i.e. performance, studio space, maker space, etc.), costs, and contact.
2. Determine the space/facility needs of the creative community of Greater Mankato.
3. Identify partners willing to collaborate with creatives on additional facilities.
4. Follow up with donors and developers that have shown interest in the Post Office; utilize 2007 performing arts center research, costs and possible build out options.
5. Research the feasibility of a designated Cultural Center that includes space for creative businesses and services, arts and cultural displays and activities, and rehearsals and performances.
6. Research and develop funding strategies for building owners who donate a portion of their space for noncommercial use (i.e. art installations; rehearsal; etc.).

Recommendation 4: Tell the story of Greater Mankato's heritage and historical significance.

Short Term

Community education and outreach on the City's history, heritage and historically significant properties will build support for preservation efforts, instill community pride and increase historic tourism

opportunities. Historic designation of properties, landmarks and districts may encourage preservation and restoration.

First Steps:

1. Designate Heritage landmarks and districts.
2. Complete the river history walk and the history wall within Mankato Place Mall.
3. Identify project recommendations within the Mankato Historic Context Study.
4. Explore programming to communicate the city's heritage, including interpretive plaques, gateway signage, historic designation markers, mapping of historic resources, historic walking tours and brochures, audio tours, historical performances, and mobile apps.
5. In partnership with the **Tourism and Economic Vitality** goals, develop new, interactive modes of communicating historically significant places, people and experiences to residents and visitors.

Recommendation 5: Use art to reconnect to the Minnesota River.

Long Term

Community engagement sessions have shown high interest from the community in finding ways to connect to our water systems, increase recreational activity in and along the riverfront, and create an improved aesthetic in the riverfront areas of the City Center.

As opportunities arise to develop the area along the riverfront, creative spaces should be incorporated, as well as strategies to connect the riverfront with the rest of the community. Reconnection to the river may also be accomplished through public art or repurposing of existing structures, such as retrofitting existing spaces to allow for views of the river. Cultural events also provide opportunities to reconnect to the river, which played a key role in Mankato's development.

First Steps:

1. Research other redeveloped riverfront communities and examine best practices.
2. Create plan for redevelopment of Mankato's riverfront, both inside and outside the floodwall that will attract new business development, increase pedestrian traffic and recreational activity.
3. Develop creative spaces that connect to the Minnesota River and tell the story of its importance in Mankato's history.

Recommendation 6: Utilize the artist perspective at every level of city design planning; increase communication and collaboration between city government and local artists.

Long Term

An artist in residence program, bringing artists to the table to advise on major initiatives and encourage creative collaboration across city divisions, would provide an avenue to support local artists and bring new perspectives into city government. City artists would ensure that art is considered as an integral element across city divisions (parks, planning, public works, special planning studies, ongoing street and sidewalk maintenance, programming of public spaces, etc.). The creation of this program would allow more local artists to participate in enhancing Mankato's livability.

First Steps:

1. Establish a city Artist in Residence program.
2. Explore ways to include local artists in the Mankato Strategic Plan planning and implementation process.

Promotion and Support

Promotion and Support Goal: Mankato will experience a surge in arts and culture participation by creatives and their target audiences as the message and advocacy efforts of the value of arts and culture is strengthened.

Recommendation 1: Recognize and support Twin Rivers Council for the Arts as the umbrella arts and culture council and arts commission for Greater Mankato.

Short Term

Empowering and recognizing Twin Rivers Council for the Arts (TRCA) as the central resource for creatives will improve communication within the creative sector, increase creative opportunities, and expand resources and advocacy efforts. This builds on existing framework and resources.

1. Perform direct outreach to ensure the creative community understands the role of TRCA as Mankato's designated arts commission.
2. Recruit TRCA affiliates to serve at the board and committee level.
3. Involve TRCA affiliates in the organization's strategic planning process.
4. Update website content to expand affiliate presence, profiles and resources.
5. Present clear advantages/benefits for affiliation.

Recommendation 2: Design professional skill-building, team-building and networking programs for the creative economy. Organizations providing these programs should work together to determine offerings to provide expert service and avoid duplication.

Short Term/Ongoing

Artists, creatives and nonprofit leaders benefit from high-quality continuing education and networking programs. Currently several organizations offer these types of programs, but there are gaps and duplication. Strategic partnerships and deliberate planning are necessary to ensure the creative community has access to opportunities and resources.

First Steps:

1. Inventory the current curriculum offered in Mankato. Look for gaps in programming and determine organization(s) best suited to fill the gap.
2. Develop online tools/resources for individuals to complete learning in their own time/at their own pace.
3. Invest in "train the trainer" workshops to increase number of teachers/facilitators in Greater Mankato.
4. Develop a list of teaching artists and facilitators who can provide ongoing training to creatives.

5. Survey area creatives on the types of networking events they are looking for. Develop consistent, relevant programming to build community among creatives.

Recommendation 3: Determine who is seeking to earn a sustainable income from artistic endeavors. Provide coaching on the multi-step process from Hobby Creative to Professional Creative. Build a community that values and supports our local and creative economy.

Short Term

In order to provide education and resources to entrepreneurial creatives, it is important to know who they are and what resources they need to succeed. In order for local artists to succeed financially in Mankato, the community needs to value arts and form the habit of purchasing local artwork and paying for artistic and cultural experiences.

First Steps:

1. Conduct a comprehensive survey to determine who identifies as a “hobby” artist, “emerging” artist and “professional” artist. Determine through the survey the number of artists who want to remain hobby vs those who want to earn a sustainable income from their art.
2. Offer peer learning (panel discussions, videos) from local creatives who transitioned from hobby to professional artist. Encourage hobby artists to see the value of their art medium to the community.
3. Encourage businesses to commission and/or purchase local artwork; provide information on the commissioning process.
4. Establish a youth art fair for K-12 and college artists.
5. Encourage small retail businesses to carry local artists’ artwork.
6. Research an artist co-op gallery and develop a network of artists to manage it.

Recommendation 4: Establish creative profiles according to primary areas of interest (i.e. traditional art forms, emerging art forms, and professional services).

Short Term

Twin Rivers Council for the Arts (TRCA) should build and strengthen creative directories to increase knowledge, encourage partnership, create connection, and build trust. TRCA should amplify the presence of Mankato arts/culture throughout the region and state.

1. Identify the creative silos found in Greater Mankato and leaders who can bring the individuals/groups together.
2. Create opportunities for creative silos to come together, share what they do and their unique, specific needs.
3. Encourage artists to become TRCA affiliates and listed in the local directory; encourage artists to create a profile on Martists.org; provide assistance as needed.
4. Create a series of sub-brands to market specific local creative silos and use these sub-brands to draw attention to the talents and capabilities of the overall art and culture community (i.e. Mankato Arts, Mankato Music, Mankato Makers, Mankato Theatre, etc.).

Arts and Culture Access

Arts and Culture Access Goal: Everyone, regardless of background, in the Greater Mankato community will have equal access to arts and cultural learning at all stages of life, contributing to a welcoming community with a strong appreciation for the arts.

Recommendation 1: Advocate for and support community recognition of the importance of arts experiences and arts and cultural learning.

Short Term

Arts improves quality of life through shared vision. Research consistently shows the benefits of arts and cultural learning, which provide problem solving and creative thinking skills necessary for a 21st century workforce.

First Steps:

1. Form an advisory board (with lawyer, grant writer, artist, city representative) to develop plans for gathering and sharing information.
2. Research and gather information about how people encounter and experience arts and culture in Greater Mankato.
3. Develop a promotional campaign to share the value of arts and culture experiences and learning, highlighting opportunities available in Mankato.
4. Support and promote collaboration between university and community organizations to share opportunities.
5. Bring performances and events to new spaces in the community, making particular efforts to reach diverse and underserved populations.

Recommendation 2: Develop programs to ensure all citizens of Greater Mankato have access to arts and culture learning and experiences.

Long Term

Real and perceived barriers prevent all residents from equally accessing arts and cultural opportunities. Barriers include cost, childcare, transportation/mobility issues, language, and fear of being unwelcome or out of place. A number of simple actions and partnerships can provide increased access to the community and make arts and culture more inclusive.

First Steps:

1. Create an Arts Access Pass that is checked out at the library to allow residents free access to arts and cultural experiences.
2. Develop an Art Lending Library to allow residents to check out original local artwork for a specific time period.
3. Create an Arts Mobile gallery on wheels; bring multiple art forms to various parts of the community.
4. Build partnerships to offer childcare to families so that they can attend cultural events; publicize cultural events where children are welcome.

5. Build networks for people seeking companions to attend cultural events if they are uncomfortable going alone.
6. Host under 21 nights so that young adults can enjoy performances in a unique and fun setting.
7. Explore how to improve transportation to and from events; especially on weekends. Develop networks to provide affordable, safe transportation options.
8. Work with leaders of immigrant communities to ensure that new Americans feel welcome attending arts and cultural events in our community.

Recommendation 3: Offer diverse arts and culture learning opportunities to the public that include creative offerings relevant to our 21st century global society, retaining old knowledge along with gaining new knowledge and skills. Ensure that creative instructors are adequately compensated.

Long Term

Individuals of all ages and backgrounds would benefit from cultural experiences and/or education that they currently seek outside of Mankato. These offerings and opportunities create community, broaden knowledge and understanding, and encourage critical and creative thinking skills. It is important to ensure that teaching artists and other creative instructors are adequately paid for their work to allow higher quality teachers and opportunities to expand and build curriculum offerings.

First Steps:

1. Survey residents to see what they currently participate in and what they want.
2. Develop comprehensive index of current arts and cultural experiences offered (and who they are offered by), with gaps in offerings identified. Update index to reflect additions and share information with the community.
3. Identify diverse groups who could provide new offerings to supplement existing programs. Additions could include design incubators in schools, businesses, and community organizations
4. Offer opportunities for youth and young adults to be exposed to creative career options: Creative Career Conference; expanded summer programming; and internships and work study programs connected to creative careers.
5. Develop teaching artist roster and research/develop models for paying teachers that encourage retention.

Recommendation 5: Establish arts and culture liaisons for the business, nonprofit and education sectors.

Long Term

A liaison program would strengthen ties between artists, arts/culture organizations and the larger community while increasing participation in arts, culture and creativity.

First Steps:

1. Start a dialogue with school administrators to introduce the concept and discuss available options.
2. Start a dialogue with social service agencies to gauge interest.

3. Discuss interest in an Artist in Residence program with local art centers and other organizations.
4. Partner with university faculty and/or graduate students to develop the liaison models.

Recommendation 6: Provide cultural education to the community about Greater Mankato's rich heritage and changing cultural community.

Short – Long Term, Ongoing

Mankato has a rich heritage that has been influenced by a number of cultural communities, from the native Dakota through waves of migrants to the recent new Americans. In order to develop pride in the community and understanding of our heritage and culture, programs should offer historic and civic education and stimulate creative engagement in future community participation and planning. Programs should work to remove barriers and encourage diverse participation.

First Steps:

1. Gather information from the community, cultural and historic organizations about important elements of Mankato's heritage and community identity.
2. Hold workshops with the larger community to identify diverse key groups, leader and resources that could foster cultural partnerships.
3. Develop (a) festival(s) that highlight Mankato's history, heritage and rich cultural diversity.
4. Include Dakota language as a companion to Dakota interpretive signage. Commission and install public art that tells the story of Mankato's diverse populations, from the native Dakota through immigrants from European countries to the newest Americans from Latin America, Somalia and Sudan.

Financial Resources

Financial Resources Goal: Develop new funding resources for creative and cultural programs, individuals, businesses, and organizations while sustaining and maximizing current resources. Ensure that resources are made available to underserved populations, including people whose first language is not English and people of all abilities.

Recommendation 1: Incorporate public art into new City construction.

Mid to Long-Term

Some communities use a Percent for Art program where a predetermined percentage of budget for public facilities is used to incorporate public art into the project (in some cases, only public improvements over a certain cost threshold are required to participate). Other communities extend the Percent for Art program to all construction over the cost threshold.

First Steps:

1. Research best practices to identify the best model for Mankato.
2. Communicate current status of public art programming and what public art is planned for the future to help build community interest and enthusiasm for the program.
3. Develop draft recommendation for the consideration by the Council after public engagement with stakeholders including community members, developers, artists, city officials, Twin Rivers Council for the Arts.

Recommendation 2: Diversify support to encourage investment in arts and culture activities.

Short Term

A variety of arts funding mechanisms and programs are necessary to ensure adequate support for creative activities and projects in Mankato. It is important to educate residents on the importance of donating to arts and culture and to provide easy mechanisms to do so. In addition, current funding support for investment in the creative economy should be publicized, new support should be considered. When considering establishment of new support strategies, the City should focus on whether the strategy will encourage and support the goals of this plan and the recommendations and outcomes supported by the community.

Support strategies should encourage installation of public art, installation of heritage plaques, heritage tourism, building rehabilitation, historic preservation, and the establishment and retention of creative businesses.

1. Establish a Community Arts Fund that supports local arts and culture initiatives, including a “wish list” of public art projects; publicize to the community and encourage donations. Develop criteria for use and dispersal of Community Arts Fund donations; these criteria should incorporate means to support diverse and underserved artists and organizations.
2. Investigate a Round-Up for the Arts program, which provides residents the option of rounding up their utility bill for arts/culture activities/programming. Direct donations to Community Arts Fund.
3. Investigate establishment of a Business Improvement District that supports the arts through property/business owner petition.
4. Publicize existing funding to developers and property owners; investigate if additional funding strategies would benefit the goals of this plan.

Recommendation 3: Explore a centralized sponsorship opportunity for the arts.

Mid-Term

By pooling efforts together, nonprofits may broaden their outreach and audience. An organized approach to fundraising efforts among nonprofit arts and culture organizations would limit the amount of daily requests to individuals and businesses, and would support small nonprofits administratively.

First Steps:

1. Identify nonprofit arts and culture organizations willing to combine fundraising efforts.
2. Identify eligible activities for utilization of funds and structure of options to donate to specific activities and/or organizations.

3. Create a comprehensive marketing sell sheet on annual arts/culture sponsorship needs and target to individuals and businesses who are interested in sponsoring arts and culture events, programming and projects.

Recommendation 4: Provide resources and education to creatives on opportunities for grants, funding, scholarships, and crowd funding, as well as freelance/employment opportunities.

Short Term

A centralized source of information on funding opportunities will make it easier for individual artists and small organizations to find resources vital for operations and growth. Continued education and skill development is important in our rapidly changing landscape.

First Steps:

1. Consolidate all funding information in one place on the Twin Rivers Council for the Arts website.
2. Provide financial workshops (i.e. grant writing, business plan development, independent contractor proposals, fundraising/development skills, information sharing for creative entrepreneurs and nonprofits) on a regular basis according to the needs and interests of the creative community.
3. Create a freelance job board on Twin Rivers Council for the Arts website.

Tourism and Economic Vitality

Tourism and Economic Vitality Goal: Mankato will be a regional hub for creative and innovative businesses. The rich arts and culture found throughout Mankato will attract business, organizations, entrepreneurs, artists, residents and visitors.

Recommendation 1: Work toward positioning Mankato as an innovative and creative regional hub.

Short Term/Ongoing

Mankato is facing a workforce shortage projected to last until 2030. As business and community leaders actively pursue ways to attract and retain talent, livability and community vitality are key. Strategic attention to the community's vitality will help attract and retain needed workforce. Workplaces and the community as a whole must adapt to the talent shortage by becoming places talented workers clamor to be part of and where entrepreneurial students see a future for themselves. Enhanced partnerships between businesses and arts organizations will positively differentiate Mankato from other communities and provide revenue opportunities for creative organizations.

First Steps:

1. Identify barriers for creative/innovation entrepreneurs (i.e. affordable housing, codes, talent needs).

2. Educate the business community on opportunities to use local arts and culture assets to enhance professional development and adapt to the changing workplace.
3. Develop branding support for current and emerging creative districts.

Recommendation 2: Develop partnerships between the corporate and nonprofit arts sector to show support for local arts and culture and encourage innovative thinking about business and community issues.

Long-Term

Businesses can use the arts to inspire employees, stimulate innovation and foster creative collaboration. The creative sector benefits by accessing the expertise, resources and leadership of business sector.

1. Create a partnership program between for-profits and non-profits where businesses donate time, expertise, and/or services, providing opportunities for businesses to get involved in the creative community and give back. In return, creatives and arts/culture groups offer creative solutions, ideas, and/or experiences to the business.
2. Connect business leaders to nonprofit art/culture boards.
3. Incentivize employees to volunteer for arts related activities.
4. Develop Artist in Residence model for businesses (related to Arts and Culture Access Section).
5. Create a toolkit with information and resources on displaying art in a workspace.
6. Create a digital catalog of work available for loaned or purchased display at area businesses (may be combined with Art Lending Library included in the Arts and Culture Access section of this plan) which includes samples of local artists' work and resources for commissioning original work.
7. Create tours of businesses that display art in their public and semi-public spaces to showcase the creative atmosphere that inspires innovation in Mankato's businesses.

Recommendation 3: As a community, develop programs, strategies and collateral to market Mankato arts and culture.

Short Term/Ongoing

The Mankato tourism brand, adopted and promoted by Visit Mankato, is built on outdoor recreation and arts and culture. While larger cultural events, like major concerts, Kiwanis Holiday Lights and the Mahkato Wacipi Pow Wow, draw visitors on their own, smaller events and organizations – especially unexpected delightful opportunities - enhance the overall experience of those who come to Mankato for conventions, sporting events, healthcare, shopping, recreation and university visits.

First Steps:

1. Convene a gathering of tourism, arts and culture professionals to discuss best means of communication between arts and culture organizations, Twin Rivers Council for the Arts and Visit Mankato.
2. Create guidelines for what types of collateral artists and organizations should provide that would be of most interest to visitors.

3. Ensure Visit Mankato's iKnow Mankato program, which provides information to frontline staff on the area's attractions and activities, includes arts and cultural locations and events.
4. Create a plan for cultural and artistic venues to be concierges for the greater community, providing information about Mankato highlights and attractions to visitors and residents.
5. Create a plan to empower Mankato's residents to be ambassadors for the artistic and cultural economy.

Recommendation 4: Enhance Mankato's land and cityscapes through artistic elements.

Short to Medium Term

Creative elements in the community create conversation, lead to organic promotion of community, enhance visitor and resident experience and promote pride in residents.

First Steps:

1. Develop priority listing of creative elements to enhance the visitor and resident experience throughout Mankato (i.e. decorative lighting, artistic alleyway enhancements, and art in parking lots and ramps). Identify frequently used key areas where these elements should be placed.
2. Enhance gateways into the city and into the trail system with public art.
3. Create a large-scale, unique piece of public art, as a tourism draw.

What's Next?

1. An implementation team will be created to guide and document progress on this plan. This team should include representatives from Twin Rivers Council for the Arts, City of Mankato, City Center Partnership, Greater Mankato Growth, Visit Mankato, arts and culture organizations, and other stakeholders. This group will report annually on progress and recommend updates to the plan.
2. Twin River Council for the Arts, as the City's designated arts commission, will take the leadership role in the implementation of this plan. The responsibilities of City leadership and staff should also be defined. Creative and cultural leaders should also commit to furthering the goals of this plan by identifying the areas where they and their organizations can make an impact.
3. This plan should be publicized to the Mankato community and community members encouraged to join the implementation efforts.