

Part IV

Next Steps

Refining the Plan

This document represents the culmination of a planning process that has engaged all sectors of Greater Birmingham and hundreds of people in meetings over the course of the past year. The goals and strategies have been informed by that process as well as by the research.

It is important that the vision, goals, and strategies of this report are consistent with the views of the members of the Steering Committee. In order to make sure this is the case, a retreat of the entire Steering Committee was held on February 24, 2003.

At that time, they also received a “consent calendar” on which were listed all the goals and strategies. After reviewing the report, members indicated whether they “agreed” with, “disagreed” with, or wished to “discuss” each one. Those goals and strategies that receive a majority of “agrees” were moved to the consent calendar; those which did not were added to the agenda for discussion during the retreat. This allowed the session to be structured so that the greatest time was devoted to those issues where there was the least consensus.

Once discussion at the retreat was completed, the body voted to “accept” the report (as revised during the session and subject to a review of the revisions). In this instance, acceptance did not necessarily mean that everyone agreed with every single strategy; rather it suggests that this document, as revised, will serve as a valuable road map for planning the future of cultural development in the region.

The consultants have made necessary revisions which were approved by Steering Committee leadership. In this situation there is no entity to which to hand over long-term responsibility for the plan. While Region 2020 has agreed to serve in

that role for the time being, the Regional Cultural Alliance will bear ultimate responsibility for that task. Thus, the Steering Committee accepted the report with the understanding that RCA will consider planning options and priorities once established.

Promoting the Plan

Now that the plan has been reviewed, revised, and accepted by the Steering Committee, an important shift occurs – the move from planning to implementation. The first task of this phase is to develop the necessary materials so that the plan can be disseminated throughout the region. The consultants will prepare a short slide presentation summarizing the process, findings, and goals of the cultural plan. This presentation – with the final version of the planning document – will be unveiled at the annual meeting of the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham on March 13, 2003. As one of the co-sponsors of this project, its annual meeting is an excellent platform from which to begin to inform the public about this important initiative. For this session, in order to emphasize the transition from a consultant-led to a community-led process, it will be helpful to have senior leaders from the Steering Committee playing a role in the presentation, rather than relying solely on the consultants.

Most people will not read the entire planning report, however. Thus it will be important to create a short, easily scannable and enticing pamphlet or booklet summarizing the highlights of the cultural plan. An entertaining and informative piece can make a significant difference in the level of understanding and support for the plan. It will be useful as an introduction and “calling card” to the many people and institutions that must be brought more fully into this process of implementation. While this will not be completed by the unveiling of the plan, it should be developed as soon thereafter as possible.

Moving to Implementation

There are two related and critically important steps that must occur soon in order to set the stage for the programmatic implementation of the cultural plan. The first is to begin the process of establishing the Regional Cultural Alliance. This entity plays such an important role in the implementation of the cultural plan that it must be the very highest priority to develop its structure.

Recommendations for members of the Blue Ribbon Committee have been solicited from members of the Steering Committee and the community. Its initial make-up will be determined by the Steering Committee co-chairs. Negotiations with the City about transferring its designation as the official arts agency for Birmingham from MAC to the new entity should be conducted early on. Ultimately,

this agency should take over the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the cultural plan.

Designating RCA as the agency to oversee implementation is not to suggest that it will work on it own – far from it. It must be the convener and facilitator, the “holder of the vision” of the cultural plan. That is why it will be important to shift responsibility from Region 2020 to this group, with its stronger connections to the cultural sector, as quickly as possible.

Once it is established, it would convene a committee with broad community representation (as well as representation from its own board), which would meet quarterly to track and coordinate implementation.

Once the initial task of establishing RCA has been accomplished, another important body must be created. A Funding Task Force of civic and business leaders must analyze funding requirements and sources and develop a multi-year strategy for fund development. It is vital to establish this group, since without a clear roadmap about funding, nothing else will happen. Yet this group must await the details that will emerge with the establishment of RCA since in large part those details will provide the confidence needed to obtain funding.. This group has a very focused task and should work closely with RCA.

Conclusion

This planning process has gained momentum as it moved forward. People who were initially quite skeptical of its likely effectiveness have become more optimistic. The reason for the shift may well be the on-going commitment and willingness of participants to listen to what the research suggests and to be open in addressing long-standing problems in new and forthright ways.

Yet there are still likely to be skeptics and not even supporters will agree with everything in this document. Nevertheless, based on initial reactions, most participants will find some components that have the stamp of their input. That is what makes this plan both unique and powerful. There is an opportunity for residents of Greater Birmingham to embrace the future and to use arts and culture to better the lives of all citizens. This plan is one preliminary aspect of that journey.