



Imagine Iowa is a statewide cultural planning process for the arts, history, sciences and human

**Imagine Iowa 2010: A Cultural Vision
A New Strategy for the New Economy**

by Anita Walker, Director, Department of Cultural Affairs
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Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs
600 E Locust, Des Moines, IA 50319
Ph (515) 281-5700
<http://www.culturalaffairs.org>

Anita Walker, Director
Sandy Boyd, Chair, Imagine Iowa

It was a bold vision. Invest \$200 million in cultural and community attractions and change the face of Iowa. With nearly all of the Vision Iowa funds committed, Iowa will soon be home to a world class Mississippi River discovery center in Dubuque, a riverside development with a theater and arts center in Davenport, new events centers in Sioux City and Des Moines, along with Science Center, library and downtown learning center.

Cont
[Anita](#)
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This aggressive investment anticipates a renaissance around Iowa's new cultural showpieces. It recognizes that our cultural institutions play a high-impact role in economic development, a role clearly articulated in a just-released National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices Issue Brief, and spelled out in specific strategies identified in Imagine Iowa 2010: A Cultural Vision. Imagine Iowa is the work of hundreds of Iowans, unveiled in June at the statewide Cultural Caucus in Des Moines.

[Tam](#)
(515)
[Julie](#)
(515)

States are now embracing cultural strategies to give them a competitive edge in the New Economy. Iowa must now take the next steps to capitalize on its bold cultural vision.

[Patri](#)
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Culture is no longer a frill. It is fuel. It generates billions of dollars in economic activity, attracts people and business, revitalizes communities and is at the core of a quality education.

The non-profit arts industry produces \$36.8 billion a year in the national economy, a figure that does not include the for-profit cultural industry. In Iowa, the for-profit sector represents large industries, from publishing to advertising.

Culture attracts people and companies to communities. A 1998 KMPG survey of more than 1,200 high-technology workers found that "community quality of life" was the second most important factor -- right below salary--in the attractiveness of a new job. In fact, it scored higher than benefits, stock options or company stability.

Iowa must increase its population to be prosperous. Our economic future is tied to the location preferences of workers who can choose to live anywhere they'd like. These workers value "quality of place" above nearly all other factors. "Quality of place," according to Professor Richard Florida of Carnegie Melon University, is determined by lifestyle, environmental quality, a vibrant music and arts scene and natural outdoor amenities.

Beyond pure preference of place, there are perhaps more powerful reasons that innovative workers need to live in an enriching cultural environment. This is the fuel for their creativity, which is the raw material of their work. "People cannot create when they work and live in a culturally sterile environment," says John D. Ong, Chairman Emeritus of The B.F. Goodrich Company.

These creative workers are themselves the raw materials for the new economy. They produce ideas, and without them, communities, states and nations will have to depend on ideas produced elsewhere for their economic capital, according to American University Professor Shalini Venturelli. Cultural institutions are not only essential fuel for creative workers, they are ground zero for arts education and the development of creative thinking skills. Venturelli considers this the most important public policy issue facing our country. "As nations begin to grasp the critical importance of educational quality to an economy based on creative capital, there will be an international race to ... re-incorporate the linkages between the arts, humanities and the sciences."

Arts and culture are a vital force in the revitalization of decaying downtowns and dying Main Streets. Beyond their role in attracting New Economy workers and businesses, they are the stuff that transforms local history into tourist attractions and entrepreneurial enterprise zones.

Arts districts are breathing new life into the second stories of Main Street retail businesses with live/work spaces for potters and painters. Adaptive reuse is turning urban white elephants into essential downtown housing or cultural centers. This in turn enhances property values and tax resources for both rural and urban communities.

As communities and cities capitalize on their heritage and historic buildings, they create a magnet for cultural tourism, the number one draw of the giant baby boomer population, which stays longer and spends more money at cultural attractions than the average tourist spends at other attractions.

And baby boomers are not the only target audience with packed pocketbooks. The June 4, 2001 issue of U.S. News and World Report says "While retirees continue to flock to the sunny climes of Florida and the Southwest, small culturally vibrant towns outside the Sun Belt are also getting a wave of seniors, the most avid arts patrons of any age group." These seniors have disposable income, and they are inclined to invest in communities that support their interests.

The arts are now beating sports in the race for the disposable dollar. In fact, the performing arts now outdraw sporting events and movie houses. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, consumers spent \$9.4 billion on admissions to performing arts events in 1998, \$2.6 billion more than admissions to motion pictures and \$1.8 billion more than total spending on spectator sports.

Iowa has launched a major cultural volley by putting \$200 million in the bricks and mortar that house cultural programming. Now Iowa must secure that investment by bringing those facilities to life. We must invest in the programming that makes these new institutions relevant and assure that our existing cultural organizations that continue to enrich our communities everyday are not left behind.

We must launch an aggressive cultural tourism program that invites people of all ages to enjoy the rich heritage we have in cities and towns across Iowa. And we must invest in our cultural workers, the idea people, who will generate the raw materials for the businesses and jobs we have not yet dreamed of.

Imagine Iowa teams are right now working on strategies to achieve these goals. These teams are made up of volunteers from across Iowa. Their work could be one of the most important things happening now to shape Iowa's future.