

## **Community Observations: Sustaining Cultural Organizations**

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*The following is a synthesis of a group process at a community meeting held at the Hayti Heritage Center on June 17, 2003 as part of the Durham Cultural Master Planning process. It was attended by over 110 people. Participants were able to comment on a series of seven issue areas that had been identified by the DCMP Steering Committee. We are eager to hear your reactions to these observations. In particular:*

- 1. Do you agree with these observations?*
- 2. Do you feel that there are any inaccuracies?*
- 3. Is there anything missing that should be added?*

*Please review this document and send any comments you may have to [mdemott@durhamarts.org](mailto:mdemott@durhamarts.org)*

*Thank you.*

- Current conditions of cultural organizations are challenging at best and potentially disastrous at worst. While cultural groups always struggle for funding, that struggle is harder now than ever. Corporate funding has dried up in Durham.
- The organizations' funding mix – public or private – doesn't matter: all sectors present difficulties right now. Cultural groups are facing overwhelming risk management costs. Capital projects are especially hard to fund.
- Community-based groups are in worse condition. These groups and Hispanic and African-American groups are the most fragile but also opera, literary organizations, crafts, those that focus on teen programming, and productions that require intense use of facilities are all struggling.
- Indeed all types of organizations are struggling, including small budget organizations in general and those that utilize costly recording studios, those that rely on government funding programs, organizations that rely on ticket sales those that are too dependent upon a few individuals, and those that question the system in the arts.
- Marketing is problem. People often don't know about events until the "day of" or, worse, the "day after." Organizations need help getting the word out. We need some coordinated way to schedule events so that we avoid conflicts on the calendar.

- Facilities are also a problem. Often they are neglected through lack of resources to properly maintain them, even though the organizations put on good programs. Organizations don't have sufficient access to facilities - we need more facilities with 400-and-under seats.
- Cultural groups need additional personnel and the personnel need training in how to do key tasks.
- Some strong signature events exist in Durham. ADF needs to be more integrated into community. We have great film festivals although they are expensive. We need more, including fun films/family films.
- Collaboration among cultural organizations is a key approach in weathering this difficult time. Cross-promotion and joint programming must be developed. Such initiatives as shared space, cooperative scheduling, joint fund raising, shared administrative staff all should be explored seriously.
- During this time, organizations need to develop business plans and also to build trust among organizations. This will require identifying and empowering leaders.
- We must build on strong organizations and events to keep our basic foundation sound.