



# CORNERSTONE

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# CONVERSATIONS

## **Qualitative Analysis**

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*The* UNIVERSITY *of* OKLAHOMA  
Hope Research Center

# Qualitative Analysis of the Oklahoma Arts Council's Cornerstone Conversations Series

## Introduction

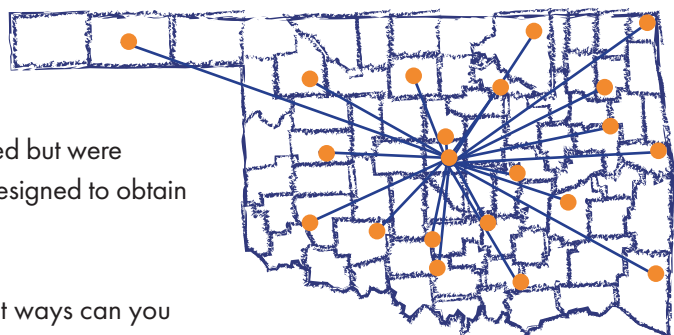
The Oklahoma Arts Council's mission is to lead the advancement of Oklahoma's thriving arts industry, with a vision that the arts will be a transformative force for Oklahoma by improving education, enhancing quality of life, and boosting economic development. To that end, the Oklahoma Arts Council (OAC) held a series of listening sessions entitled "Cornerstone Conversations" across Oklahoma from late 2019 to early 2020. The tour was designed to give a voice to Oklahomans representing diverse communities and partner with the OAC to share needs and ideas regarding the arts in communities and schools statewide. The "Cornerstone Conversations" will directly inform the Oklahoma Arts Council 2021-2025 strategic plan.

According to Alan Key's article, "Art and Community Development: The Role the Arts Have in Regenerating Communities," art plays a significant role in helping communities discover their own cultures, identities, and traditional art forms (Kay, 2000). Kay points out that art allows individuals to feel connected and more involved in their communities. In addition, the article suggests that the arts provide social and economic growth in communities. Research indicates that the inclusion of art in communities is impactful not only on the individual, but on community connectedness as a whole.

The OAC's "Cornerstone Conversations" were specifically designed as an inclusive process that connected the OAC with geographically and culturally diverse communities. The sessions were co-facilitated by members of each local community. Attendees participated in small group discussions and provided written feedback. Through Cornerstone Conversations, the OAC was able to listen and learn from Oklahomans, rural and urban, native and immigrant. Together, a culturally valid and socioeconomically beneficial pathway towards the future for arts in Oklahoma will be forged.

## Qualitative Method

The Cornerstone Conversations were held in the following nine Oklahoma communities: Ardmore, Enid, Guymon, Idabel, Miami, Shawnee, Tulsa, Weatherford, and Woodward. More were scheduled but were canceled due to COVID-19. These meetings were designed to obtain data from various community focus groups.



The meetings began with a focus question: "In what ways can you and the Oklahoma Arts Council encourage greater participation in cultural activities in your community?" The entire group was asked to write personal responses to the question, without discussion. Then everyone was divided into smaller groups to discuss the individual responses. A scribe in each small group captured the individual responses on sticky notes, boiled them down to three-to-five

words, and wrote one idea per card. Then the facilitator moved the cards onto the wall, gradually organizing them under the guidance of the larger group, until all the cards are organized into like-groupings and each group had a descriptive title. With this, the group identified and organized their responses to the question. These were the responses from which the constituents' key issues were identified. Finally, the facilitator asked the group for their insights and observations from the process and its results. The results will be sent back out to these participants.

## Qualitative Analysis

The University of Oklahoma's Hope Research Center was asked to compile the data collected at the Cornerstone Conversations. A qualitative content analysis was conducted to categorize and identify the main themes that developed across all focus groups.

The data collected was organized and summarized so that key statements and general ideas could be identified and then recurrent themes could be coded and analyzed. The major themes across all nine communities are outlined below. Direct quotes or ideas specific to a certain community from focus group participants are included to highlight individualized perspectives.

The analysis concludes with a brief summary of some salient differences that arose in meetings in urban versus rural communities. These concerns centered on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

## Themes

After analyzing the Cornerstone Conversations, five themes emerged as being the most prevalent amongst all the communities. The themes include: Education and Artist Development, Accessibility and Inclusion, Advocacy and Partnerships, Marketing and Funding, and Building Community. Another point of consideration is Urban versus Rural Community Concerns. Community feedback on this topic is presented. Appendix A summarizes the key findings from each community, and includes word clouds to illustrate the main points.

### I. Education and Artist Development

Across all nine communities, education was a common theme, both in the sense of educating artists across generations, but also educating the public on the importance and appreciation of the arts. Improving arts education from pre-k to senior citizens was a key topic. In public K-12 schools, inequity in funding for arts education exists due to widespread education

cuts made over the past few years. Slashing arts programming has deepened pre-existing inequalities that divide wealthy and poor schools and widened gaps between rural and urban schools. Increasing the focus on funding fine arts in schools in a more equitable manner, or "bridging the gap" as a Guymon participant stated, is a shared need. Locating or incentivizing art instructors to teach in rural areas was another idea.

*Once they realize it's accessible and fun and enjoyable, they start to seek out more art. There is a hunger for art in the younger ages.*

**-Nathan, Shawnee Music Teacher**

Several focus groups, including Tulsa and Weatherford, mentioned the idea to adopt science teachers' proven methods of successfully funding STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) projects in recent years to STEAM projects that include the arts. Using an interdisciplinary approach to arts programming in schools by blending art with history, technology, literature and science may aid in funding efforts. It was suggested that the OAC could strengthen relationships with public school systems and the Department of Education to offer educational opportunities and promote events/activities.

More education for adult artists was mentioned at many meetings, particularly increasing professional development opportunities. This includes opportunities for older adults as well and intergenerational activities/events. The question was posed in the Tulsa meeting of what are the needs of up and coming artists or artists emerging from poverty? The concern is that artists are sometimes left out of the conversation in favor of arts organizers and their concerns need to be heard. It is also important to teach artists how to have agency, read contracts, self-promote, etc. Educating the public, community business leaders, and local and state officials on the importance of the arts and creativity was also a common theme. Art enjoyment and appreciation should be taught to all ages as well.

## II. Accessibility and Inclusion

Every community mentioned the need for arts to be more accessible to all individuals and groups. "Using art as a bridge", "bringing art to the people," "reaching out" to those who are not usually involved in the arts were common themes. Addressing barriers to access and including the arts in public spaces such as the parks, libraries, crosswalks, on buildings, etc. are ideas that many participants suggested. Not everyone has the financial means, physical access, transportation options, etc. to participate in the arts. Every community saw art as a unifier, a way to bring diverse groups together.

*We have an idea of what art is and what it isn't. It's very exclusionary. We need to change that.*  
-Erica, Shawnee

The OAC can help create more accessible and inclusive opportunities. This includes ensuring that access and inclusion practices are integrated at all levels of the arts. It also means ensuring that rural and geographically underserved areas are reached.

*"I am seeing an opportunity for how to learn from each other: OAC, Arts Organizations, Communities, etc. There is a lot that people don't necessarily know about. There are a lot of gaps."*  
-Tulsa Community Member

## III. Advocacy and Partnerships

Partnerships and collaborative relationships that position arts and culture as integral to developing creative communities are important themes. Partnering with businesses for funding purposes as well as for venues and art spaces were key ideas. A particularly salient idea was encouraging businesses to partner with local schools to help fund instructors, field trips, and supplies.

Advocating for arts with local city councils and state government was important to most community participants. Advocacy for increased funding in education with state legislators could help restore arts programs statewide.

Partnerships between communities to share resources would be beneficial, either regionally for rural areas or urban/rural collaborations. The OAC could play an important role in connecting communities to local and state government support and facilitating regional collaborations.

## IV. Marketing and Funding

Each community stressed the importance of having OAC's assistance with publicity and the promotion of events and advertising, particularly online and through social media. Communities would like to see a shared digital community calendar, shared app, an artist database and other technological marketing strategies. Advertising and promoting minority and marginalized community events and projects is also a shared interest.

*"Funding is essential, but funding without a system to distribute equitably is an issue. Shift the system of how money is circulating and how we reward with tax structures, policy, etc. More money is always good but not enough."*

**-Tulsa Community Member**

The OAC can help tell the story of each community by featuring and recognizing artists. They can magnify rural artists by holding regional meetings and events.

Another main theme was creating or cultivating funding mechanisms that will provide for a secure and stable funding base for artists, arts organizations and arts educators.

Maximizing grant matching opportunities, spreading awareness of classroom grants and finding non-grant sources of funding from multiple sources are important ideas. The OAC could provide more training for grant writing and arts funding to communities.

Many rural communities would like to see designated funding streams for arts in rural areas. Tulsa supported general operating funds to help diversity and equity efforts as well as more funds for up and coming artists. Also, participants saw a need for non-profit art groups to start implementing for-profit business models.

*"I have a dream of using Shawnee's old First National Building and creating a place where artists can come to live, work and give back to the community. A place where artists can live and work together."*

**-Nathan, Shawnee**

## V. Building Community

Public art can be a catalyst for creative community development. Building community through the arts was important to participants. They suggested having more plein-air gatherings, public events, art classes, cultural exhibits, heritage activities and community arts centers or public arts spaces in rural areas. The OAC could help advise on organizing public events, particularly in rural communities.

Another common theme was developing artist residences, or a “safe space for creative people.” These would be spaces where artists could live and work together to build connections and create.

Most communities in this study were rural. Tulsa was the primary urban area, and the participants in Tulsa’s Cornerstone Conversations focused on the same themes as the other communities such as Education, Accessibility, Funding, and Collaborations. But of note, Tulsa participants were intensely interested in issues around diversity and equity as well as capacity building related to planning, succession, board development, and facilities.

Due to Tulsa’s long history of racial injustice, including the Tulsa Race Massacre, participants want to broaden community conversations about diversity, and question historical ways of doing things as well work to end white supremacy. They wish to adopt a more collective commitment to diversity and ensure that the arts remain focused on ensuring equity.

In Woodward and a few other rural communities, concerns were raised over the equitable distribution of funding between rural and urban areas and a sense of elitism apparent in the larger communities. Participants would like to see an expansion of outreach to rural artists and to have more resources distributed beyond metro areas. Some mentioned that a designated funding stream for the arts in rural communities would be beneficial.

According to the definition from “Americans for the Arts,” “Equity” is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. “Cultural equity” “embodies the values, policies, and practices that ensure all people... are represented in the development of arts policy; the support of artists; the nurturing of accessible, thriving venues for expression; and the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources.” Focusing on an inclusive and equitable mindset for arts in the community is important in order to encourage involvement from all people in the community.

*“I like to count the people of color in the room during these meetings. If we want to achieve diversity, it requires asking people of color to be at these meetings. I am here because I was invited, but I don’t see any other of my peers, people of color, here.”*

**-Lydia, Tulsa**

## Conclusion

After analyzing the “Cornerstone Conversations” and summarizing the main points from each conversation, it was interesting to see the similar themes from each community. Incorporating arts into education, as well as funding artists in schools and in the community was one of the main themes. Ensuring accessibility and inclusion of the arts for members of the community was another important theme. The “Cornerstone Conversations” highlighted creating partnerships amongst the communities to share resources and ideas. Finally, advocacy and funding for the arts as well as building community were highly encouraged in the conversations. The analysis ended with a brief overview of the differences between concerns in rural versus urban communities. This qualitative analysis of the “Cornerstone Conversation” series paves the road for the development of the OAC’s next strategic plan for the arts across Oklahoma.



# CORNERSTONE

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# CONVERSATIONS

## **Appendix A**

## **Community Summaries**





## Enid Cornerstone Conversation Summary Leonardo’s Children’s Museum

On December 5, 2019, community members from Enid, Oklahoma, and members from the Oklahoma Arts Council joined for a “Cornerstone Conversation.” Special guests, Senator Pederson and Mayor Pankonin, were in attendance for the meeting. One of the speakers lead the conversation with a powerful statement, “Art is not a scientific project, it’s not like building a house where you have your plans, It’s a blank canvas. Leading edge of something that’s never been done.” Following introductions, attendees broke off into group sessions to discuss the guiding questions that were asked. After coming back together as a large group, the attendees brainstormed the main themes from the smaller group sessions.



“Marketing” was one of the main points. Some of their ideas included: a photo op contest, an art scavenger hunt, a barn quilt map, strengthening communication amongst artists in the area, and selfie contest promotions.

“Venues” was another main point. The ideas under this heading were: utilization of parts for art activities, original music/listening venues, NOC-NWOSU traveling exhibits, an affordable pottery lab, and an arts center or museum of traveling exhibits.

The group discussed the importance of “Planning.” Some of these aspects for planning include: Needs/interest assessment, citywide arts plan, arts visioning, and ensuring accessibility and affordability for community members.

“Education” was a main theme amongst group members. Their goals are to have more middle and high school art activities, taking students to the Gilcrease and Philbrook museums.

Lastly, “Activities” was discussed as a main idea. Some of the subheadings under “Activities” were: architectural/group tours, art tours, art career day, a symphony rap battle, an art exhibit poker run, a day of working together, and newby nights/buddy system.

The community members at the meeting discussed a wide variety of important themes to implement into Enid’s strategic plan for the arts. Many were in agreement that ensuring more art into the education system is highly valuable, as well as strengthening art appreciation by ensuring the arts are easily accessible to the people in their community.

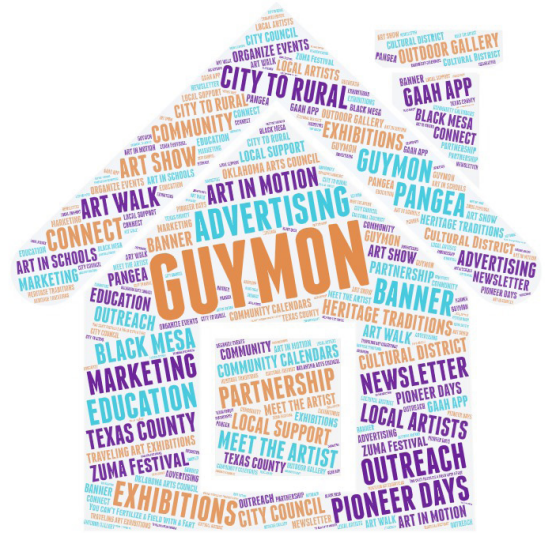
## Guymon Cornerstone Conversation Summary

### Guymon Public Library and Arts Center

On November 19, 2019, Guymon community members and members of the Oklahoma Arts Council met to answer the question: “ In what ways can you and the Oklahoma Arts Council encourage greater participation in cultural activities in your community?” Guymon participants believe their community represents many diverse cultures. Even though there is not a specific tribal affiliation in the panhandle, there are more than 30 languages spoken in the public schools, due to the large population of new immigrants and refugees.

Main themes discussed include marketing, events, programs and outreach. Participants valued expanding the cultural district, working closely with art in schools, advocacy with local government and community partnerships. They would like to see a community calendar and the use of digital and online means to recognize artists and events. Other ideas for programs and events include an art walk (“Art in Motion”), banners painted by local artists, heritage traditions during Pioneer Days, touring art events and an outdoor art gallery.

The community members would like to see the Oklahoma Arts Council help connect with consultants or resources to advise events, champion for art with local council members, and advocate for more local and state government support. Other ideas included the OAC holding workshops on grant writing and marketing as well as helping to advertise festivals and events.





## Miami Cornerstone Conversation Summary Coleman Theatre

On March 10, 2020, community members from Miami, Oklahoma and members from the Oklahoma Arts Council joined for a “Cornerstone Conversation.” During the meeting, attendees discussed the impact of art on a community. Several essential points were highlighted during the exchange, including the following by one of the attendees, “Arts bring a vibrancy to a city, but can be disregarded as something that can’t improve our economy but actually does.” Other points in the conversation include: highlighting the diverse assets that Miami has to offer, “widening umbrella” of arts to include all demographics of people in the area, and ensuring that art education is happening “on a daily basis at every school.”



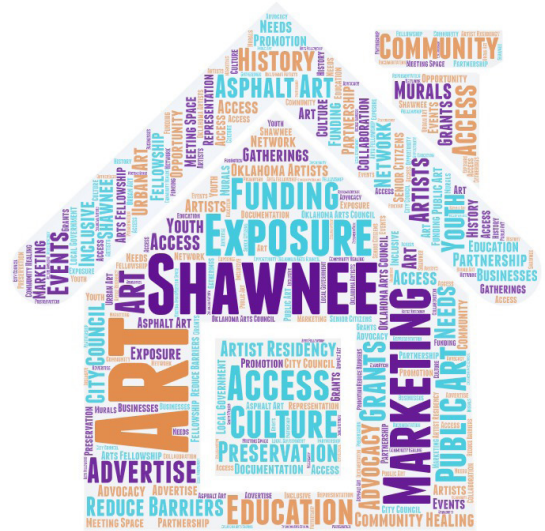
As the conversation continued, one person suggested the idea of community mentorship programs. Another suggested developing a standardized community calendar to inform citizens on art projects happening in the area. In addition, communicating to citizens the importance of arts in the community. With a high population of Native people in Miami, group members talked about the importance of encouraging Native Arts in community art activities. The group agreed that funding was going to be one of the challenges for implementing art education in Miami.

# Shawnee Cornerstone Conversation Summary

## Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art

On December 10, 2019, community members and members of the Oklahoma Arts Council met to answer the question: “In what ways can you and the Oklahoma Arts Council encourage greater participation in cultural activities in your community?”

Education was a primary theme across generations. There is a need for an arts budget in Shawnee Public Schools. Currently there are zero funds allocated for art classes in any of the schools. There should be intensive arts education from K to 12th grade. Nathan, a music teacher, stated that “once children realize it’s accessible and fun and enjoyable, they start to seek out more art. There is a hunger for art in the younger ages. Other suggestions included a yearly art camp with a master class culminating in a concert and art courses for senior citizens.



Accessibility was the next major theme. This included providing easier access to the arts by reducing barriers for both artists and the public. Advocating for the arts at both the local and state level of government is imperative. Erica stated, “We have an idea what art is and what it isn’t. It’s very exclusionary. We need to change that.”

Developing artists is an important theme. There also needs to be a community space where artists can gather. Nathan stated, “I have a dream of using Shawnee’s old First National Building and creating a place where artists can come to live, work and give back to the community. A place where artists can live and work together.” A need exists to build connections between artists, even develop a mentorship program. They need more opportunities for networking and promotion.

Art is seen as a unifier of Shawnee culture. Erica stated that there are “large divides in Shawnee culture. Lots of people didn’t choose to be here. Art can be a place to understand and appreciate differences in Shawnee and what that means.” Art can facilitate “community healing.” Stacy added that Oklahomans need to respect each others’ paths used to come to Oklahoma, and look at cultural development and how we can celebrate and come together for the future.”

The theme of community building continues with ideas such as supporting mural projects, more plein-air events and gatherings, artist-painted crosswalks, chalk art, live art and drip art space. This would include more promotion of gatherings and public art displays such as participation in 3rd Fridays. A community arts center is another idea.

Finally, more grant opportunities are important. This includes the creation of a local government challenge grant, greater use and awareness of the classroom grants for teachers, community grants training and maximizing grant matching opportunities.



# Tulsa Cornerstone Conversation Summary

## ahha Tulsa

On December 16, 2019, community members and members of the Oklahoma Arts Council met to answer the question: “ In what ways can you and the Oklahoma Arts Council encourage greater participation in cultural activities in your community?”

The main categories discussed were the following: education, infrastructure, discourse, diversity, equity, access, collaboration, collective impact, funding, and public policy. Participants would like to see artists on boards and artists included in these conversations. Artists need agency and respect, and the OAC should address the needs of up-and-coming artists and artists emerging from poverty. Education efforts should include interdisciplinary and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) projects.



Focusing on capacity building was mentioned. In regards to infrastructure in Tulsa, important ideas were to clarify the role of the Arts Alliance, establish a pass that would work across arts organizations and establish a city cultural office.

Regarding funding, suggestions were made for more general operational support funding, or unrestricted funds for the arts. They are interested in looking beyond grants. They would like to see successful business models applied to the arts in areas of funding and marketing. An important quote is “Funding is essential, but funding without a system to distribute equitably is an issue. Shift the system to how money is circulating and how we reward with tax structures, policy, etc. More money is always good but not enough.”

Collaborations between urban and rural areas are important, or bridging the “city/rural divide.” In fact, participants would like to see results from other communities’ Cornerstone Conversations. They had ideas for rural areas like residency programs in rural areas. There are a lot of opportunities to learn from each other. Oklahoma Arts Council could conduct a benchmark survey, and then provide arts education and resources to meet communities where they are.

A large part of the conversation was dedicated to discussions of equity, diversity and accessibility. Participants want to broaden community conversations about diversity and question historical ways of doing things, as well as work to end white supremacy. Sponsoring an arts minority group was mentioned. Participants wish to adopt a more collective commitment to diversity and ensure that the arts remain focused on ensuring cultural equity.

## Weatherford Cornerstone Conversation Summary Weatherford Public Library

On February 13, 2020, members from the Weatherford community met to address the needs. At the start of the meeting, the guiding question asked, “In what ways can you and the Oklahoma Arts Council encourage greater participation in cultural activities in your community?”

The first theme mentioned was accessibility and “art for everyone.” This included multi-generational and multicultural art events and programs to support a sense of community for everyone. It also addresses arts in education, including building art appreciation in the younger generations and supporting interdisciplinary and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) projects in schools.



To increase public awareness of art events, ideas included committing to one art event per month, celebrating a local artist of the month, and live streaming programs. Suggestions were made for the Oklahoma Arts Council to help with publicity and promotion, including online and digital formats, and a shared calendar of events. A question was raised on whether the OAC has a relationship with tourism to provide connections to “Discover OK” or “Oklahoma Today.” Participants would also like to use OAC branding in local marketing. They would like more validation from the OAC including providing an arts council or ambassador to feature artists, hold regional gatherings, and help with publicity.

Funding ideas involved increasing legislative support, partnering artists with fundraising efforts and having more large events and fewer small and scattered ones. A public maker space was mentioned as well as partnering with local businesses for venues. Since Weatherford serves a large region that doesn’t have an art museum, funding is important in producing events.

Community members would like to partner with Clinton, Carnegie and Elk City for more regional events and to share resources. The library would also like to provide a room for gallery space.





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