



# Phase II: Learning Phase

## Leadership Interviews

From August to October 2019, Create Today conducted in-depth interviews with a variety of leaders who live and/or work in Salt Lake County. Participants work in business, government, K-12 and higher education, philanthropy and on behalf of arts institutions large and small. Some have personal and professional associations with the County going back decades, others have arrived more recently.

We fanned out amongst professional arts organizations who are developing, producing and presenting in dance, literary arts, digital media, filmmaking, music, theater, visual arts, and multi-disciplinary art forms. We also spent a great deal of time with volunteers whose passion for the arts is no less genuine than the professionals. Leaders who work in service of the sector, in whole or in part, locally and regionally, provided an even broader perspective to our study. The common denominators between all the interview subjects is their mutual investment in the County's arts and cultural sector, pride for what has been achieved, enthusiasm for current efforts and hopes for sustainability and future growth.

Interview subjects were identified by Salt Lake County staff and additional names were introduced during the process. A complete list of those interviewed and the questions posed is included as an appendix to this report. We met in-person with representatives from 19 Salt Lake County municipalities. Those meetings often included some combination of mayors, city council members, city managers/administrators and arts council employees or volunteers. We also held two community-wide focus groups sessions – one in Taylorsville and one in Salt Lake City. We followed these on-site meetings with over 60 individual interviews conducted by phone during the months of September and October.

Captured here are the largest themes expressed by the greatest number of people. Every artist, arts administrator, arts advocate and/or municipal representative shared with us the specific needs of their constituents which have been recorded separately from this report.

*"We have a vibrant, high-quality, accessibly-priced arts scene that unites the east and west communities. We are a center for arts, culture and diversity. We're a place people love to call home. We foster unique community arts projects that reflects the neighborhoods. People feel like the arts are accessible to them."*

*– Vision for success, as defined by a Salt Lake County resident*



## The Current Arts and Cultural Sector in Salt Lake County

“Vibrant” was the word most heard as a descriptor for the Salt Lake County arts scene. Nearly all interviewed said **the arts scene in Salt Lake County is strong** and an aspect of life in the County in which a resident can take great pride. The many offerings in dance, music, theater and other disciplines make for “an embarrassment of riches” for arts lovers.

*“...there is [so] much art and culture that happens in the County and the City, and when we have other artists visit, they are blown away by how much is here... I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else...”*  
– Arts leader

Respondents are pleased with the investment made in the downtown with world-class venues, and smaller companies being able to do their work alongside the largest. Several resident arts groups such as the symphony and the ballet were called out repeatedly. Specific mention was made of the Eccles Theater as a positive addition to downtown in the last decade.

## Commitment to Arts and Culture

The **commitment and devotion to arts and culture was universal** regardless of whether the respondents were in the downtown urban location of Salt Lake City, a more suburban area such as Draper, or a rural area such as Bluffdale.

Respondents communicated the deep commitment to arts and culture in Salt Lake County that is both supported and encouraged by the strong cultural history. From mentions of the statistic that Utah has the highest number of pianos per capita to the international reputation of the Tabernacle Choir, there was discussion about the secular and non-secular role the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints plays across the County.

*“Art reminds us we are human and provides emotional experiences that connects us to people in different ways. Success would be seeing, feeling, recognizing more of that. To make that more prevalent for more people.”*  
– Salt Lake County municipal leader

There is a deep sense of pride that the arts are grassroots – from the smallest community theater productions to the largest festivals taking place in and around Salt Lake County.

## Opportunities

Some felt that a **broader or more liberal definition of “art”** would serve the County in the future; with a bigger embrace of newer, less traditional forms. They say that an expansion of how Salt Lake thinks about arts and culture will help it become more contemporary and attract more cutting-edge and diverse artists.

All visual artists, educators, and **visual art advocates felt that their discipline was dwarfed** by the attention and support given to the performing arts companies. Respondents feel that there are fewer resources available for visual artists – both for creating and showing work. Some would like to see exhibition spaces for visual art that are not tied to a church, government office building, or library. There is a strong desire for free-standing buildings that show works of art for both local and



touring artists. There is also a need for affordable, safe artist studios for visual artists. There are only a handful of spaces now and they are either too expensive or have a long waitlist.

Many mentioned film as being a prominent art form embraced by Salt Lake County residents. It was suggested that the County should be **making a greater investment in film artists, film venues and filmmaking.**

*“How we define culture is nebulous. If we want to be an important part of the conversation, we need to broaden our definition of culture.”*  
– Arts advocate

Some mentioned that the County could also focus on supports to the arts that no other entity can accomplish as well or at all. Such as **involving itself in transportation, marketing, planning and development** and bringing interested parties together to discuss how their projects could be in service of a larger goal that involves the arts.

### Arts Councils Across the County

Many communities stressed **that having a full-time, paid employee devoted to arts planning** would make all the difference in terms of what could get accomplished with programming, marketing, cross-collaboration and fundraising. Most of the arts councils throughout the County are staffed by volunteers. The volunteers we met with are dedicated to the programming they oversee and feel a strong sense of responsibility to provide meaningful experiences for the residents in their community.

*“Would love to have a paid position where this is really someone’s job and not have to worry about balancing political climate – it’s very sensitive to be a volunteer but if it was a permanent position, I could be a stronger advocate.”*  
– Salt Lake County municipal leader

The County could have a role in **creating a greater sense of community and collaboration between the various arts councils.** This could be accomplished through roundtables and mentorship with each other and with other companies in the County who could offer advice and expertise.

### The County’s Role

ZAP funding was viewed as the single biggest boon for the arts in the County over the last 20 years. Although, many felt that the program’s impact on smaller companies is limited by the two-tier structure and that there should be more information available about how to get first-time funding.



Those companies housed in County-owned and operated facilities are **pleased with the spaces and services they receive** and with the collaborations afforded to them with their neighbors. They describe the County staff as being responsive to their requests and helpful especially with marketing and scheduling school trips.

Universal praise and gratitude were expressed for how the County-owned spaces are managed. “[They’re] more service-oriented, more open-minded. They’re organizers, advocates and listeners.” Companies recognize that County Arts and Culture staff and resources are thinly stretched.

*“Salt Lake County is very, very good at supporting the arts through grants (TRCC and ZAP). The County is playing just the role they should play – grants subsidies for capital projects and general operating support. There’s always grumbles but overall the role is right – to enable and empower the arts that are happening. Plus, the county has these facilities that they support.”*

– Salt Lake County municipal leader

### Public Art Programs

The public art that exists is appreciated, but many were unaware of who is responsible for its creation and funding. Artists feel the public art lacks boldness and sophistication and might be served by a stronger curatorial process.

**The County’s art collection** holds fascination for many who wish that more information was readily available about the pieces for interest and scholarship. While much of the collection is on rotating display at the County Center, there was interest in having more of the collection appear throughout the County.

*“The challenge for us are the resources – funding and staffing. Not sure if the County could help us with this – we need to identify what public art means and would love to see more temporary public art and space activation and we have some real barriers to doing that kind of thing. “*

– Salt Lake County municipal leader

Every community, artist, government representative, and donor we spoke with was **interested in more public art**. They were engaged in learning more about what the County has to offer and were excited to consider ways to utilize the resources at the County level in their communities.

### Changing Demographics

When reflecting on the last ten years, nearly all noted **an increase in cultural, racial and socio-economic diversity in their communities**. This shift is being addressed through arts education in the schools, local, culturally specific festivals and arts events or other increased audience development efforts. Some arts organizations are succeeding with well-articulated plans and

*“There is a great spirit of collaboration and an increasing conversation about diversity and equity and the changing demographics of our communities.”*

– Arts administrator



activities in place and others struggle with how to create programming that is attractive to newer County residents without the means or inclination to travel downtown. Issues of equity, diversity and inclusion are top of mind as the County’s population increases and respondents communicated that *“the arts are integral to health, wellness, social justice, [and] equity issues.”*

### What’s Next

Those living and/or working in the outer regions expressed the need **for venues closer to home** that would host work by local arts councils and groups. They see the downtown scene as being more for art “presentations,” and they want their residents to involve themselves as participants in the creation of art. However, many say there isn’t enough space to rehearse productions or store supplies and that their current venues can’t accommodate visits by professional companies.

*“Want folks to come to us – we don’t want to go to “it” in downtown. We all want our own – ponds for fishing, arts and culture, ball fields, etc. Want to leave the house at 10 of and be there at the top of the hour and on time.”*

*– Salt Lake County municipal leader*

Renting the middle or high schools is often cost and scheduling prohibitive. Several resident companies in downtown Salt Lake expressed a desire for appropriately scaled venues throughout the County where they could perform to reach audiences not inclined to see them in their home space.

How the County decides where a new facility should be built/renovated outside of downtown is not readily understood by many, fueling the thinking that it’s more a political process than a need-based one. There was interest to watch how the Mid Valley Performing Arts Center would roll out to see if there was collaboration with the new regional facility concept, if local organizations could afford to use it, and if there was an ability to attract audiences beyond Taylorsville.

### Developmental Needs

Many of the municipal leaders from deeper in the County expressed a strong desire for arts and culture facilities that could be used year-round, as opposed to amphitheater spaces that are only feasible for a handful of months per year. The challenge is the real need for basic infrastructure – sewers, highways, grocery stores, restaurants, etc. – that is demanding the most immediate attention from leadership.



Municipal leadership struggles with how they can adapt and understand the residents and their wants and needs and continue to serve them. As the cities across the County grow and change, leadership recognized that policies and infrastructure need to change and grow with them.

Some donors said that several arts organizations, despite infusions of cash, space and services, continued to struggle financially. Arts organizations expressed a need to boost marketing, fundraising and increase staff size. As in 2008, operational needs weighed heavily on most companies.

*“The biggest change here is the rapid growth – the difficulty of this is that all your fiscal resources are going to core services and infrastructure improvements. Trying to keep up with the demand that is moving so quickly, and the arts take a lower priority and that is a bit more challenging, yet we know our residents appreciate the art from our surveys. They want more active resources (trails, parks, etc.) and more art-related venues and types of activities including art instruction.”*  
– Salt Lake County municipal leader