

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## NWCT ARTS COUNCIL

# 2023 - 2027

---

APPROVED APRIL 3, 2023



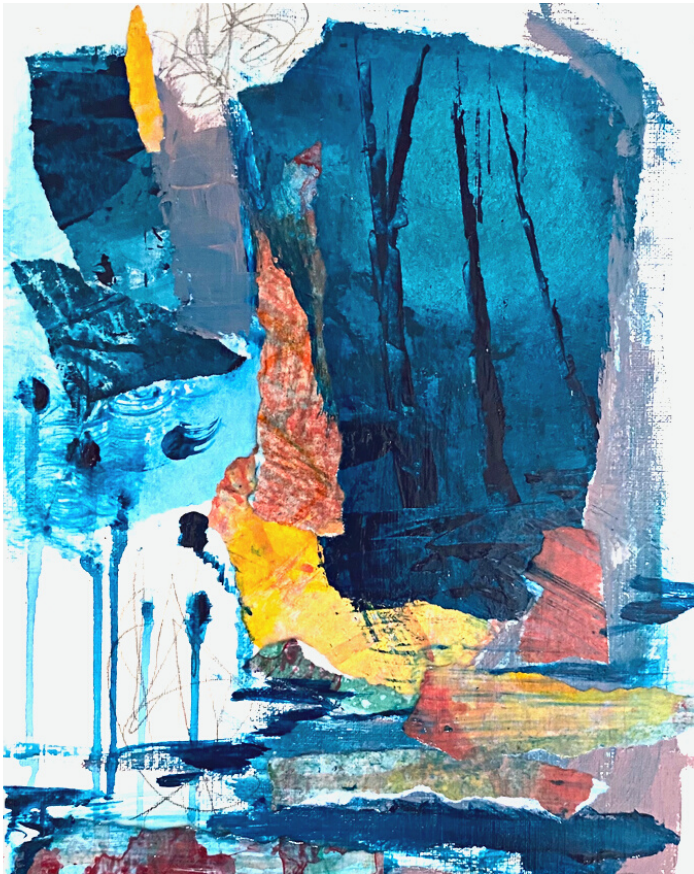
Artists Magaly Ohika and Jessica Jane Russell  
2022 Litchfield Hills Creative Festival

Approved By  
**NWCT Arts Council Board of Directors**  
April 3, 2023

# Table of Contents

3	Introduction	7	Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
4	Mission, Vision, & Values	8	Regional Overview
5	Planning Process	10	Strategic Goals
6	Strategic Imperatives	27	Proposed Timeline

---





# Introduction

---

Over the past 20 years, the Arts Council has served as the advocacy voice for artists and the creative process in the Northwest Connecticut (NWCT) region. **Through our efforts, we have empowered the work of arts organizations, facilitated networking and collaboration, and secured funding to fortify local arts initiatives.**

I stepped into a leadership role at the Arts Council in March of 2020, a transformative time for the organization (and the world at large). Over the past 3 years, we learned that there is still so much work that needs to be done to ensure arts and culture are stewarded and protected as an important part of life in the Northwest Hills.

**That is why we have developed this strategic plan, which outlines our priorities and goals for the next 5 years.** Our plan is grounded in the belief that the arts have the power to transform lives and communities, and that by supporting artists and the creative process, we can create a more vibrant and prosperous region.

I am so grateful for the support of our board, staff, and stakeholders. I am confident that together we can achieve our vision of a region where artists can thrive and everyone has the opportunity to experience the arts.



**Steph Burr**  
Artist/Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Steph Burr".

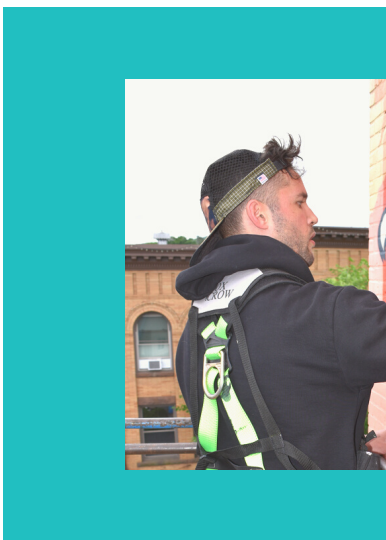


# Our Mission

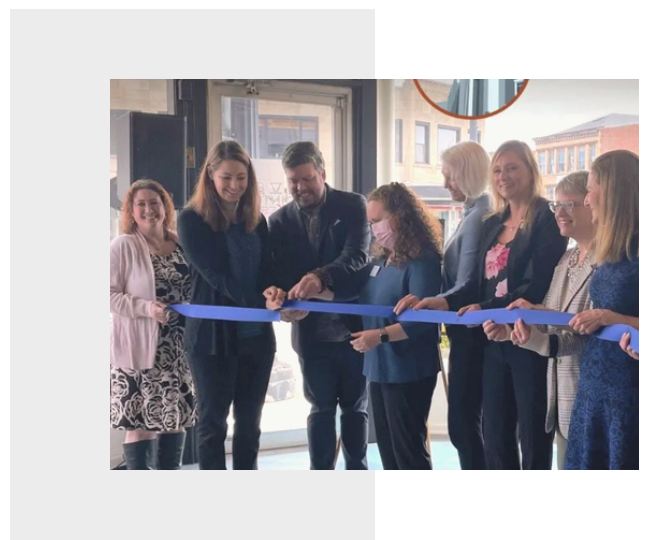
## TO ELEVATE THE ROLE OF THE ARTS TO BUILD COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC VITALITY

### Our Vision:

We envision being the central regional resource to empower, facilitate, and fortify the arts in Northwest Connecticut.



Ben Keller  
Torrington Civil Rights Mural, 2021



Ribbon cutting to celebrate Downtown Torrington's designation at the State's second Cultural District, 2022.

### Our Values:

We believe that access to arts and culture is a universal human right, meeting both a social and psychological need.



# PLANNING PROCESS

## January 2022: Strategy Committee Formed

Our Board of Directors formed a Strategy Committee in early 2022 with the goal of creating a new 5-year Strategic Plan. This work was made possible thanks to funding from the **Connecticut Community Foundation**.

## February - June 2022: Adaptive Leadership Cohort

In 2022, the NWCT Arts Council was one of 15 nonprofits selected to participate in a cohort program called "**Adaptive Leadership for Small Nonprofits**".

Our board and staff underwent a full organizational assessment, attended 5 learning sessions, as well as monthly coaching sessions with Fio Partners (a nonprofit leadership consulting firm).



**Through this process,  
we created a roadmap  
for strategic thinking.**

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS WHO MADE THIS POSSIBLE



Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation  
Connecticut Community Foundation  
Foundation for Community Health  
Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation

# Strategic IMPERATIVES

These goals are the guiding priorities behind all of our efforts.

**Our plan is grounded in the belief that the arts have the power to transform lives and communities.**

## To Empower

We provide guidance and support services that empower artists and cultural leaders.

## To Facilitate

We work to build strong networks and infrastructure by facilitating community development, communication, and resource sharing.

## To Fortify

We are laying a foundation for the arts that is accessible, consistent, and sustainable.



Arts Council Staff & Community Leaders  
Diversity Celebration, New Opportunities, Torrington, 2021

## Who we serve:

- Artists / Arts Advocates
- Cultural Nonprofit Leaders
- Regional & Municipal Leaders
- Arts & Culture Businesses & Industry Workers



## OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

We believe that supporting our community through the arts means standing up for marginalized, oppressed, and subjugated people and amplifying their voices. We do not condone violence, discrimination, prejudice, or bias against any marginalized person.

**We actively work to put the voices that are most unheard at the forefront to empower the movement toward creative justice.**

We are dedicated to serving the needs of everyone inclusive of race, ethnicity, age, physical or mental ability, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and economic status.



## OUR FOCUS ON ETHICAL GENTRIFICATION

It is no secret that interest in the Litchfield Hills has grown in recent years. In 2021, the New York Times listed Torrington as the #3 municipality for increase in net migration from the NYC metro area.

From an arts perspective, we define **ethical gentrification** as the practice of actively examining the cultural impacts of rising income levels and taking steps to preserve access to the arts. We believe that facilitating cultural convergence through shared community experiences is a powerful tool that will help prevent income stratification.

**We are dedicated to ensuring that the cultural diversity of our region is preserved and celebrated, and that artists from all income backgrounds have the opportunity to live and thrive in the Northwest Hills.**



# WHAT IS A **DRSO** ?



## **DRSO stands for Designated Regional Service Organization**

The **NWCT Arts Council** is one of 8 regional Arts Councils designated by the **CT Office of the Arts**, which is branch of the **Department of Economic and Community Development**.

As the State designated regional arts council for the Litchfield Hills, we bridge the gap between state and local arts and humanities initiatives, while advocating and strategizing on the regional level.

## **Our State Partners**

Department of Economic and  
Community Development  
Office Of The Arts

Connecticut<sup>®</sup>

**CT ARTS ALLIANCE**

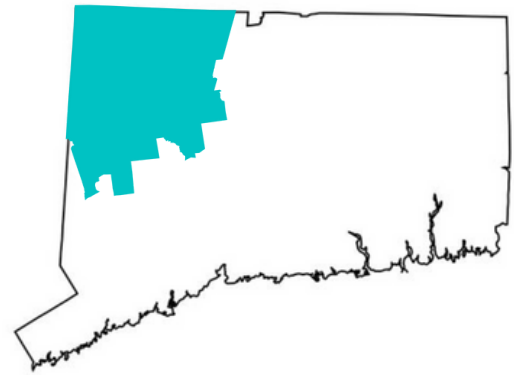
**CThumanities**





# Regional OVERVIEW

## The Northwest Hills



### Our Service Area Includes 25 Towns:

Barkhamsted, Bethlehem, Burlington, Colebrook, Cornwall, Falls Village/Canaan, Goshen, Hartland, Harwinton, Kent, Litchfield, Morris, New Hartford, New Milford, Norfolk, North Canaan, Plymouth, Roxbury, Salisbury/Lakeville, Sharon, Thomaston, Torrington, Warren, Washington, and Winchester/Winsted.

## The Secret Center of the Art World

Litchfield County is a rural region in northwestern Connecticut with a rich history of attracting and inspiring artists. The area continues to draw artists with its picturesque scenery, charming towns, and abundant cultural events.

In fact, according to a 2022 article from ARTnews, ["A Sparse Connecticut County Has Become The Secret Center of the Art World"](#).

## A Regional Strategy

The Northwest Hills are rich in history and culture. Our goal is to empower the arts community so that our region can become widely known as an arts destination.

The arts are a powerful driving force for economic development and greatly improve quality of life for residents.

**We work with leaders across all industries to ensure the arts are a part of the regional plan for strategic development.**

## Our Regional Partners



We work with regional and municipal government leaders to incorporate the arts into local economic development plans.



We partner with regional and state tourism initiatives to spread the word about arts and culture in the Litchfield Hills.



We work with business leaders to promote economic vitality and partnership with artists.



We are actively building the regional communications network so that everyone can be seen and heard.





**GOALS**



**1. ADVOCATE FOR ARTISTS & THE CREATIVE PROCESS**



**2. BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGH NETWORKS AND KNOWLEDGE**



**3. PRESERVE AND EXPAND ACCESS TO THE ARTS**



**4. ENGAGE, EDUCATE, AND BUILD AWARENESS OF THE ARTS COUNCIL**



**5. FORTIFY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS**

# Goal 1

## ADVOCATE FOR ARTISTS AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

### Goal 1: Objectives & Strategies

#### 1. Champion arts advocacy in Northwest CT.

- Promote an understanding of culture as vital to strong communities.
- Work with CT Arts Alliance and legislators to advocate for expanded state investment.
- Pursue opportunities to secure regional arts funding through grants as they arise.
- Ensure that funding is allocated equitably and meaningfully.

#### 2. Align with statewide arts initiatives.

- Partner with CT Office of the Arts and CT Humanities to align priorities.
- Spread information about statewide initiatives and encourage local participation.
- Administer statewide programs such as Make Music Day.
- Promote municipal participation in the State's Cultural District program.
- Advocate for the integration of regional and statewide technological systems.

#### 3. Serve as a regional central source of information for arts and culture.

- Stay up to date and regularly update arts funding and opportunities page on the website.
- Share opportunities via our weekly email newsletter and social media.
- Provide publicity, marketing, and clearinghouse services through our online events calendar.

#### 4. Amplify the voices and reach of artists and cultural organizations.

- Spotlight member artist & organizations through social media, email, and blog articles.
- Promote member events through the monthly printed events calendar.
- Create a plan to leverage collective marketing via social media, email, digital & physical marketing strategies to increase engagement for organizations and artists.

#### 5. Advocate for policies that support artists.

- Develop and promote policies that protect the rights and ensure fair compensation of artists.
- Find opportunities and assist artists in critical need of support due to financial hardship.
- Lead by example and demonstrate best practices in the sector.

# Goal 1

## ADVOCATE FOR ARTISTS AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

### Deliverables

- **Year 1:** Conduct Focus Groups as part of a Regional Needs Assessment, Complete the AEP 6 Study with Americans for the Arts,
- **Year 2:** Present finding through Arts Economic Development Summit.
- Annual
  - Track government and private investment in the arts in the region.
  - Analyze data from re-granting programs administered by the Arts Council.
  - Analyze metrics and relevance of regional programs.
  - Compile an annual update on advocacy efforts and outcomes.
- Ongoing
  - Update the Funding & Opportunities pages on the website.
  - Work with CT Arts Alliance to advocate for artists and funding at the state level.
  - Maintain online events calendar & produce monthly printed calendar.
  - Promote artists and orgs through "Member of the Week" in email newsletter & social media as well as the weekly "Calendar Spotlight" on social media.

### Evaluation Metrics

- Amount of total annual arts funding allocated from the state level into the region.
- Amount of federal funding leveraged by arts and culture organizations.
- Economic Impact of the Arts & Culture Industry



Vera and Madeline  
Emerging Songwriter Scholarship recipients, 2021



# Goal 2

## **BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGH NETWORKS AND KNOWLEDGE**

### **Goal 2: Objectives & Strategies**

#### **1. Listen, learn, and educate.**

- Perform a Regional Needs Assessment study to evaluate areas of priority.
- Prioritize listening and systematize learning into measurable data.
- Conduct regional asset mapping to document existing arts infrastructure, identify leaders and areas of opportunity for development.
- Create a plan for broad communication and distribution of research and field learning.
- Share research findings with partners to build capacity and long-term support.

#### **2. Empower our towns.**

- Leverage the state's Cultural District program, the AIR Collaborative, and Sustainable CT to help create infrastructure at the municipal level.
- Work with the Regional Council of Governments to integrate the arts into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plan.
- Meet with town economic development leaders to spread awareness about available resources and advocate for investment in the arts.
- Advocate for arts funding at the municipal level and serve as an administrative partner for funding allocations.
- Partner with town arts councils to empower them and provide resources.
- Represent the Arts Council at regional and municipal meetings.

#### **3. Facilitate networking and resource sharing.**

- Host networking events to facilitate communication and provide artists, cultural organizations, and government leaders with opportunities to connect creatively with each other.
- Promote the use of technology and digital platforms to connect artists and organizations.

# Goal 2

## BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGH NETWORKS AND KNOWLEDGE

### Deliverables

- **Year 1:** Regional Needs Assessment (Focus Groups), Regional Listening Tour, Focus Group learnings report (Fall 2023), work with the Regional Council of Governments to integrate the arts into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plan.
- **Year 2:** AEP6 Study learnings report (Spring 2024), Host an Arts & Economic Development Summit to communicate learnings.
- **Year 3:** Work to find new artists in the region and build out Cultural Database.
  
- Annual
  - Create an annual progress report on the statewide Cultural District program.
  - Host free networking events for artists & industry professionals.
  - Create infrastructure developments report.
  
- Ongoing
  - Promote the State's Cultural District program and assist municipalities in the application process.
  - Attend relevant regional and town meetings.
  - Work with municipalities to allocate arts funding.
  - Maintain and update resource library on the site.

### Evaluation Metrics

- Number of artists and cultural organizations per town cataloged in our database.
- Number of Cultural Districts and municipal arts councils in the region.
- Networking event attendance/feedback.
- Data on programs tied to our resources.



TJ Thompston performs at the Arts Night Out networking event. South Farms, Morris, 2022

# Goal 3

## **PRESERVE AND EXPAND ACCESS TO THE ARTS**

### **Goal 3: Objectives & Strategies**

#### **1. Preserve the availability of affordable arts programming.**

- Advocate for the use of funding for arts initiatives that provide access to the arts for underserved communities.
- Advocate for ethical gentrification practices to preserve and celebrate cultural diversity and help minimize cultural stratification.
- Facilitate large scale collaborative programming initiatives that are free and open to the public.

#### **2. Facilitate the creation and maintenance of public art.**

- Catalog available public art and work with local governments and other stakeholders to create and maintain public art installations and spaces for artistic expression.

#### **3. Ensure people with disabilities have access to the arts.**

- Create an evergreen accessibility plan that outlines actions that remove barriers to accessibility.
- Systematically evaluate programming to determine accessibility for people with disabilities.

#### **4. Strengthen the capacity of cultural leaders to find, engage, and support diverse creative voices.**

- Set aside line item funding for DEI initiatives.
- Refresh expectations for larger legacy institutions, explore how traditional entities can serve and partner with diverse communities in non-traditional ways.
- Identify tools and resources to help organizations examine program relevance to expand their audiences.

# Goal 3

## PRESERVE AND EXPAND ACCESS TO THE ARTS

### Deliverables

- **Year 1:** Accessibility Plan. Documented accessibility goals
- **Year 2:** Regional Public Art Catalog
- Annual
  - Allocate line-item funding for DEI initiatives.
  - Assess program relevancy and audience demographics.
- Ongoing
  - Advocate for arts funding that helps underserved populations and policies that promote ethical gentrification to help prevent cultural stratification.
  - Evaluate all program guidelines and applications to ensure language accessibility.
  - Provide accommodations for people with physical disabilities as needed.
  - Document steps taken to promote accessibility
  - Analyze program audiences to ensure representation and evaluate program relevancy.

### Evaluation Metrics

- Annual funding allocated to DEI and accessible programming.
- Number of participants and attendees at free public programming initiatives.



Community Painting by Mental Health CT  
2022 Litchfield Hills Creative Festival

# Goal 3

## **PRESERVE AND EXPAND ACCESS TO THE ARTS**

### **Accessilby Plan**

**In 2023 we will create an Accessibility Plan. This plan is part of our requirements for State DRSO designation by the CT Office of the Arts.**

"An Accessibility Plan outlines what action(s) an organization will take to remove barriers to accessibility. An Accessibility Plan should be an evergreen document that is updated and referred to on an ongoing basis. The plan should identify barriers that are "readily achievable" (easily to accomplish without much difficulty or expense) and barriers that are considered an "undue hardship" (an action requiring significant difficulty or expense) along with short-term and long-term goals towards achieving greater access. The plan should make note of your accessibility goals and include information of when action will be taken."

- CT Office of the Arts, 2022

### **Regional Public Art Catalog**

**In 2024 we will create a regional Public Art Catalog .**

This document will detail artwork that is open to viewing for the public across our 25 town region. It will include details about who owns and maintains the artworks, as well as strategies to protect and preserve existing artworks.

It can be used in the future to create regional Public Art Trails as a part of the tourism plan for the region, and to ensure the proper maintenance and preservation of public artwork.



# Goal 4

## ENGAGE, EDUCATE, AND BUILD AWARENESS OF THE ARTS COUNCIL

### Goal 4: Objectives & Strategies

#### 1. Demonstrate the Arts Council's value as a trusted partner.

- Embark on a regional listening tour to meet leaders and strengthen relationships.
- Lead by example and demonstrate best practices in the sector.
- Establish a leadership reputation amongst the arts sector, municipalities, and legislators.

#### 2. Diversify and expand stakeholders.

- Increase engagement by reinforcing points of entry for new artists and supporters.
- Enhance reach of existing programs via partnerships and outreach support.

#### 3. Implement marketing strategies that increase engagement.

- Evaluate digital analytic data to identify the most successful engagement strategies.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing and outreach strategy to promote the organization, its programs, and initiatives.
- Create program literature and marketing materials that articulate distinct objectives.
- Expand the organization's online presence and use of social media to reach a wider audience.

#### 4. Keep documentation to communicate outcomes.

- Create blog articles to promote awareness of the regional art scene and position the Art's Council as a voice of expertise on the subject.
- Create a press page on the website to catalog media coverage.
- Publish an Annual Report to reflect on yearly goals and analyze evaluation metrics.

#### 5. Stay relevant.

- Regularly evaluate and enhance organizational services and programs to sustain engagement.
- Stay knowledgeable about trends and leverage new technology to expand audiences.

# Goal 4

## ENGAGE, EDUCATE, AND BUILD AWARENESS OF THE ARTS COUNCIL

### Deliverables

- **Year 1:** Digital analytic data analysis. Website Press page with detailed logs of media coverage. Marketing audit.
- **Year 2:** Create and organizational marketing strategy and new digital and print marketing materials.
- Ongoing
  - Update social media accounts with content that builds awareness or organization programs & services.
  - Create engaging blog articles that drive traffic to the site.
  - Seek media partnerships to promote the organization.

### Evaluation Metrics

- Digital Engagement: email subscribers, social media followers, and website traffic.
- Number of events listed on regional calendar.
- Number of blog articles published.



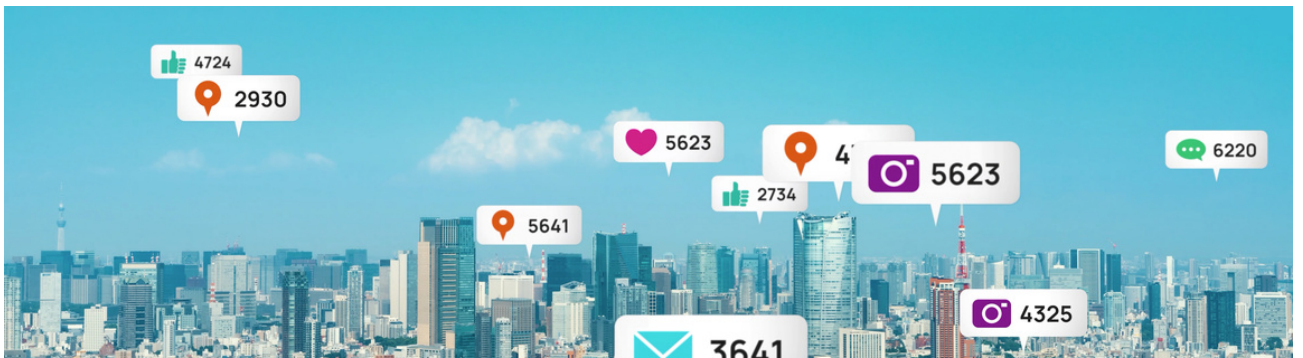
Arts Council Staff  
2022 Litchfield Hills Creative Festival

# Goal 4

## ENGAGE, EDUCATE, AND BUILD AWARENESS OF THE ARTS COUNCIL

### Digital Engagement Goals

	Current (2022 Year End)	2023 Year End Goal	2025 Year End Goal	2027 Year End Goal
Email Subscribers	1606	2000	4000	6000
Instagram	2,269	2,700	3,400	4,000
Facebook	3,300	3,500	3,800	4,200
Annual Website Visits	31,431	35,000	45,000	55,000
Annual Website Page Views	54,873	60,000	80,000	100,000
Annual Calendar Event Postings	1308	1500	1800	2000



# Goal 5

## FORTIFY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

### Goal 5: Objectives & Strategies

#### 1. Build trust.

- Practice radical transparency of organizational operations and finances.

#### 2. Strengthen existing relationships.

- Ensure that our strategic priorities are in alignment with those of our funding partners.
- Advocate for increased state and foundation support.
- Increase focus on donor re-engagement and retention.
- Schedule meetings to re-engage past board and gain historic institutional knowledge.

#### 3. Cultivate new relationships.

- Hire a part-time development coordinator to focus on new member and donor cultivation.
- Increase institutional engagement through existing and new board leadership.
- Schedule cultivation meetings and events to engage key potential funding partners.

#### 4. Enhance revenue streams.

- Create an Annual Fundraiser and set revenue goals based on long term operational needs.
- Enhance membership value to restore and grow membership numbers.
- Grow sponsorship support for major programming.
- Leverage contract workers to create new revenue opportunities.

#### 5. Build sustainability.

- Build the organization to financially sustain 3 competitive full time salaries.
- Continue to offer benefits such as working from home and scheduling flexibility.
- Perform annual check-in reviews to ensure employees needs are being met.

# Goal 5

## FORTIFY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

### Deliverables

- **Year 1:** Hire part time development coordinator, pilot a Collaborative Marketing Program.
- **Year 2:** Expand Collaborative Marketing program and leverage subcontractors as needed.

#### Annual

- Evaluate annual fundraising revenue by campaign.
- Create individual program P&Ls.

#### Ongoing

- Identify opportunities for new member and donor cultivation.
- Schedule donor cultivation meetings and events throughout the year.

### Evaluation Metrics

- Annual foundation grant support.
- Annual state support.
- Annual donor support.
- Annual membership revenue.
- Membership numbers (artists & orgs) by year.
- Number of donors, total number of donations, average donation amount.

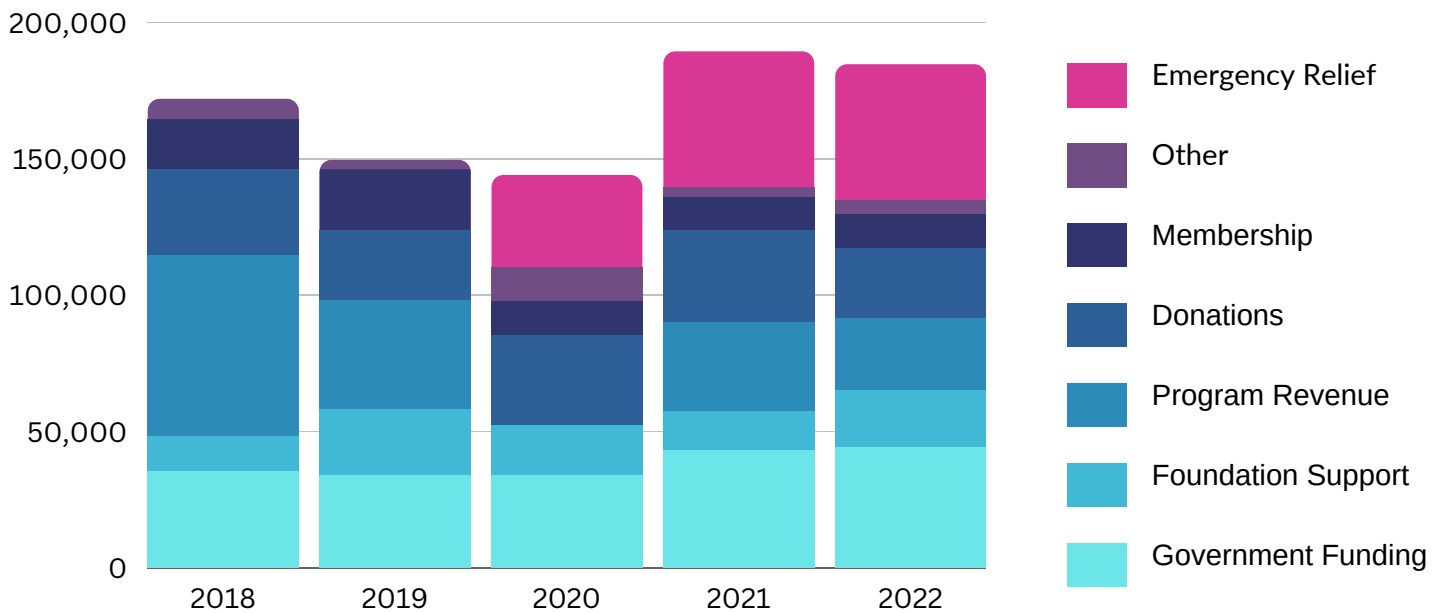




# Goal 5

## FORTIFY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

### Revenue Actuals: 2018 – 2022



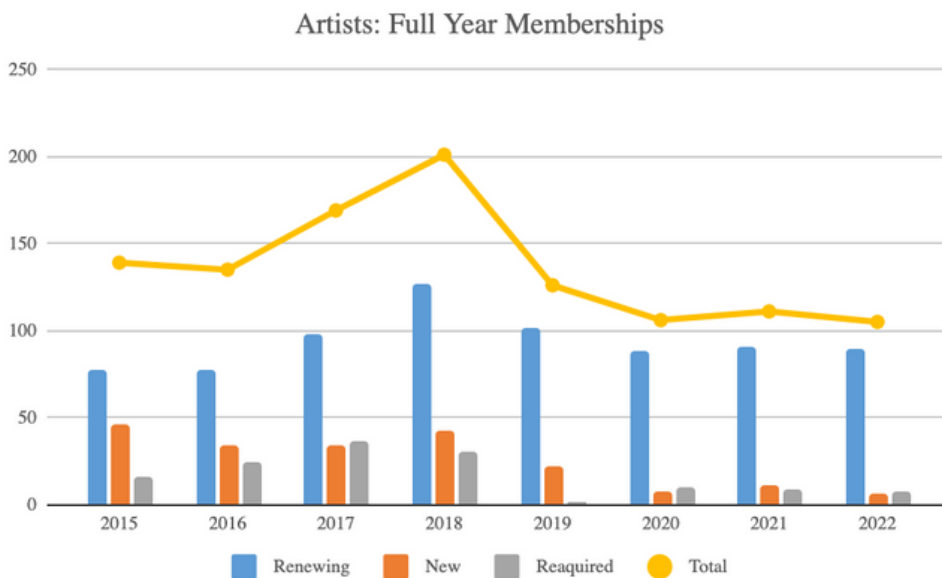
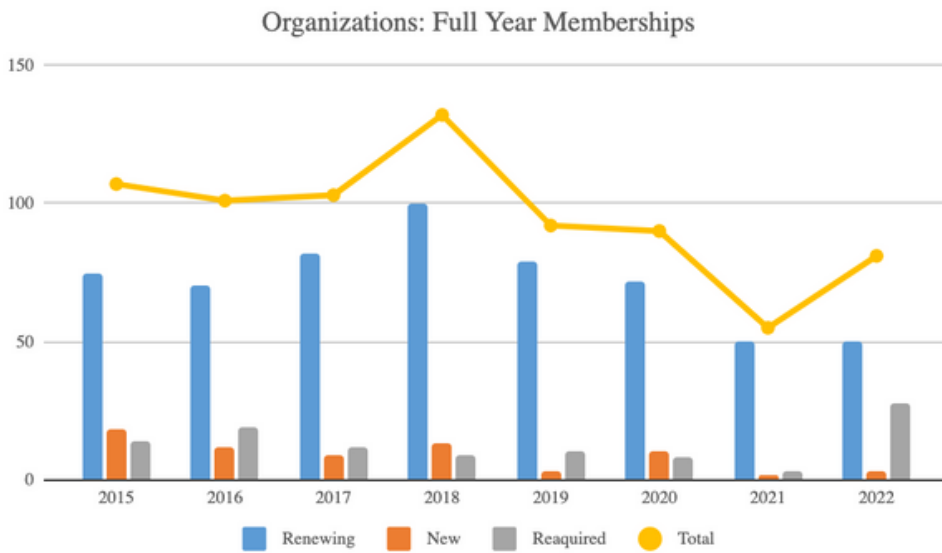
In 2020, the pandemic eliminated all program revenue, but a shift towards emergency relief efforts increased donor support. That, paired with emergency funding allowed us to continue operation.

We are unsure if we will receive any additional emergency funding, so it is critical that we increase revenue to become sustainable.

# Goal 5

## FORTIFY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

### Membership Trends 2015–2022



# Revenue Goals

	FY'24	FY'26	FY'28
<b>Overall Budget</b>	<b>\$160,000</b>	<b>\$180,000</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>
<b>Membership</b>	\$15,000	\$17,000	\$19,000
<b>Fundraising/ Donations</b>	\$42,000	\$45,000	\$50,000
<b>Program Revenue</b>	\$48,000	\$55,000	\$61,000
<b>State Support</b>	\$40,000	\$45,000	\$50,000
<b>Foundation Support</b>	\$15,000	\$18,000	\$20,000

## Financial Target – Staff Salaries (Totals for all staff.)

**FY'24: \$108,300**

1 FULL TIME, 40 HRS/WK  
 1 PART TIME, 30 HRS/WK  
 1 PART TIME, 20 HRS/WK

**FY'26: \$122,860**

1 FULL TIME, 40 HRS/WK  
 1 FULL TIME, 35 HRS/WK  
 1 PART TIME, 25 HRS/WK

**FY'28: \$157,760**

3 FULL TIME, 40 HRS/WK



# Proposed Timeline

GOAL	YEAR 1 2023	YEAR 2 2024	YEAR 3 2025	YEAR 4 2026	YEAR 5 2027
<b>ADVOCATE FOR ARTISTS AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS</b>	Regional Needs Assessment-focus groups  Complete AEP6 Study	Create an Action Plan from research learnings	Implementation of Action Plan initiatives	Evaluate outcomes	Share outcomes to inform state advocacy efforts
<b>BUILD INFRA-STRUCTURE THROUGH NETWORKS AND KNOWLEDGE</b>	Work with COG to integrate Arts into the Regional CEDS Plan  Pilot Marketing Service Plan	Host an Arts Economic Summit  Grow Marketing Service Program	Expand and update Regional Arts Database (to be done every 5 years)	Improve technology systems to increase data access	Host an Arts Economic Summit
<b>PRESERVE AND EXPAND ACCESS TO THE ARTS</b>	Accessibility Plan  Admin Municipal ARPA Funds	Regional Public Art Catalog	Program Relevance Evaluation	Regional Nonprofit Accessibility Audit	Create Nonprofit Accessibility Toolkit
<b>ENGAGE, EDUCATE, AND BUILD AWARENESS OF THE ARTS COUNCIL</b>	Regional Listening Tour	Create a Comprehensive Organizational Marketing Plan	Implement Marketing Plan Strategies	Evaluate Outcomes	
<b>FORTIFY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS</b>	Create a Board Led Annual Fundraising Event	New Member & Donor Cultivation Plan	Expanded Outreach	Strengthen Relationships	5 Year Financial Analysis

# Northwest Connecticut Arts Council

**NWCT  
ARTS  
COUNCIL**

[artsnwct.org](http://artsnwct.org)

[info@artsnwct.org](mailto:info@artsnwct.org)

860-618-0075



Couple Dancing on Main Street, Torrington  
2022 Litchfield Hills Creative Festival