



History of the Council of Culture & Arts

In 1983, the state of Florida passes Statute 265.32, giving individual counties the authority to create a county arts council. Then in 1985, a group of citizens took the necessary steps to go before the County Commission to create a local arts agency for Leon County. The Cultural Resources Commission was created by County resolution, under the authority of the state statute. The City of Tallahassee then signed an interlocal agreement, making the CRC the joint local arts agency for the City and the County. The Initial Board of Directors was appointed by City and County Commissions. The CRC operated under Florida's Sunshine Law. The Founding Board created guiding policy that the CRC may not raise private funds from individuals and local businesses for its own operation, in competition with the organizations it serves. With advice from local accountants and attorneys, the CRC Board applied for and was granted 501(c)(3) status. The CRC was then classified as an instrumentality – "organized as a separate entity from the governmental unit that created it and otherwise meeting the organizational and operational tests of section 501(c)(3)." The CRC's Board appointments involved both governments, but remained independent as required by statute. All nominations must originate with the Board itself before being approved by the City or County.

From 1985 to 1993, the CRC existed with small budget, one part-time employee, and minimal services. The primary tasks were to publish a newsletter and hold quarterly meetings with local arts organizations. By 1993, the 15-member Board of Directors had dwindled to three. The remaining Board members engaged a consultant to evaluate the efficacy of the agency and community needs. The consultant interviewed community members, local government officials and provided research from other local arts agencies in the state and nation, concluding that this agency could be integral to the cultural development of the area.

The consultant presented the recommended action plan, which required increased funding from the public sector and broader programming. The highest priority was to bring the cultural community together to optimize opportunity and achieve common goals.

In 1994, a full-time Executive Director was hired and the consultant's action plan was implemented. The Board was built back up to 15 members and new programming was initiated through performance contracts with the City and County. With the arrival of a new City Manager, the existing City-run art program was recommended for elimination. The CRC approached the City to see what could be done to save the program. The administration of the City's Art in Public Places Program was contracted to the CRC and funded by the City. The CRC hired a part-time Arts in Public Places staff member.

In 1995, the CRC convened meetings with all existing cultural organizations to identify the potential role of the newly re-structured arts agency. The arts organizations identified the lack of public financial support as their primary barrier to leveraging other funds. The arts community re-affirmed its strong support of the CRC's "no fundraising from individuals for operating expenses" policy.

The arts organizations worked with the CRC professional staff to create rigorous and fair guidelines for cultural funding.

In 1996, the CRC approached the City with a proposal to use designated non-social service line item funding to create a competitive, accountable grant program for cultural organizations. The City funded and contracted with the CRC to create and operate a grant program which would award a total of \$154,000 to local cultural organizations.

From 1997 to 2000, the CRC programming expanded, and new programs and publications were created, including the Some Enchanted Evenings outreach program, A Pocket Guide to Capital Culture, First Fridays, technical assistance to artists, online programs, and more. The CRC funding, both public and through grants, increased. Staff enlarged to four as programming expanded. In 2000, Leon County contracted with CRC to create and operate a granting program similar to the City's which would award a total of \$125,000 to local cultural organizations. The CRC expanded its professional development workshop offerings for artists and arts organizations.

In 2001, the CRC brought in Craig Dreezen to conduct a community cultural planning workshop. The response from the community was overwhelmingly positive. The CRC proposed that the City and County hire a consultant to help create a community-wide cultural plan.

In 2002, the City of Tallahassee hires consultant Craig Dreezen to oversee the creation of the Cultural Plan. The mayor appointed a 20-person citizen's steering committee. The steering committee identified five main community cultural goals, and formed corresponding task forces to study the issues and present recommendations. The Cultural Plan was written and presented to the general public and public officials. The Cultural Plan recommended, among other things, that the CRC be provided with additional funds in order to take on additional responsibilities. It also recommended that the CRC change its name to better reflect its expanded mission.

In 2003, the City and County each adopted the Cultural Plan, including the recommendation that the CRC be the lead agency charged with implementing it. The City and County expand funding to the CRC, allowing for greatly increased programming and added Education and Marketing staff.

COCA was also asked to administer Citizens Committees charged with making recommendations regarding the two Cultural Facilities in the Cultural Plan.

From 2004 to 2007, CRC staffed seven citizens committees, including the Performing Arts Center Committee and the Cultural Support Space Committee. The CRC initiated multiple new programs, including Capital Culture Magazine, Arts Education programs, MoreThanYouThought.com website, and more. The CRC's two grant programs began distributing more than \$1 million annually. In 2006, the CRC changed its name to the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA) to better reflect its expanded mission and programming.

As the economy declined and the City made a \$48,000 reduction beginning in 2010 in its contract funding to COCA, three staff members were eliminated and the remaining five staff members took on their workload rather than eliminate those programs.

In 2012, COCA's grants programs awarded \$1,030,898 in City and County funds. As we approached the tenth anniversary of the Cultural Plan, an effort was initiated to revisit or reimagine where we will go together next. In 2012, the City and the County appointed a committee of citizens to lead the Cultural Planning process. The Capital Area Cultural Plan was accepted by the City and County Commissions in 2014 and COCA has again, been charged with implementing it. Due to the drastic changes that occurred in 2020 and 2021, it is clear that a new community Cultural Plan is needed and COCA will initiate conversations about a new planning effort.

Since 1985, COCA has had only three leaders. Kathleen Spehar, serves as our current Executive Director, and she will continue to support the growth and development of the arts and cultural community in our area.