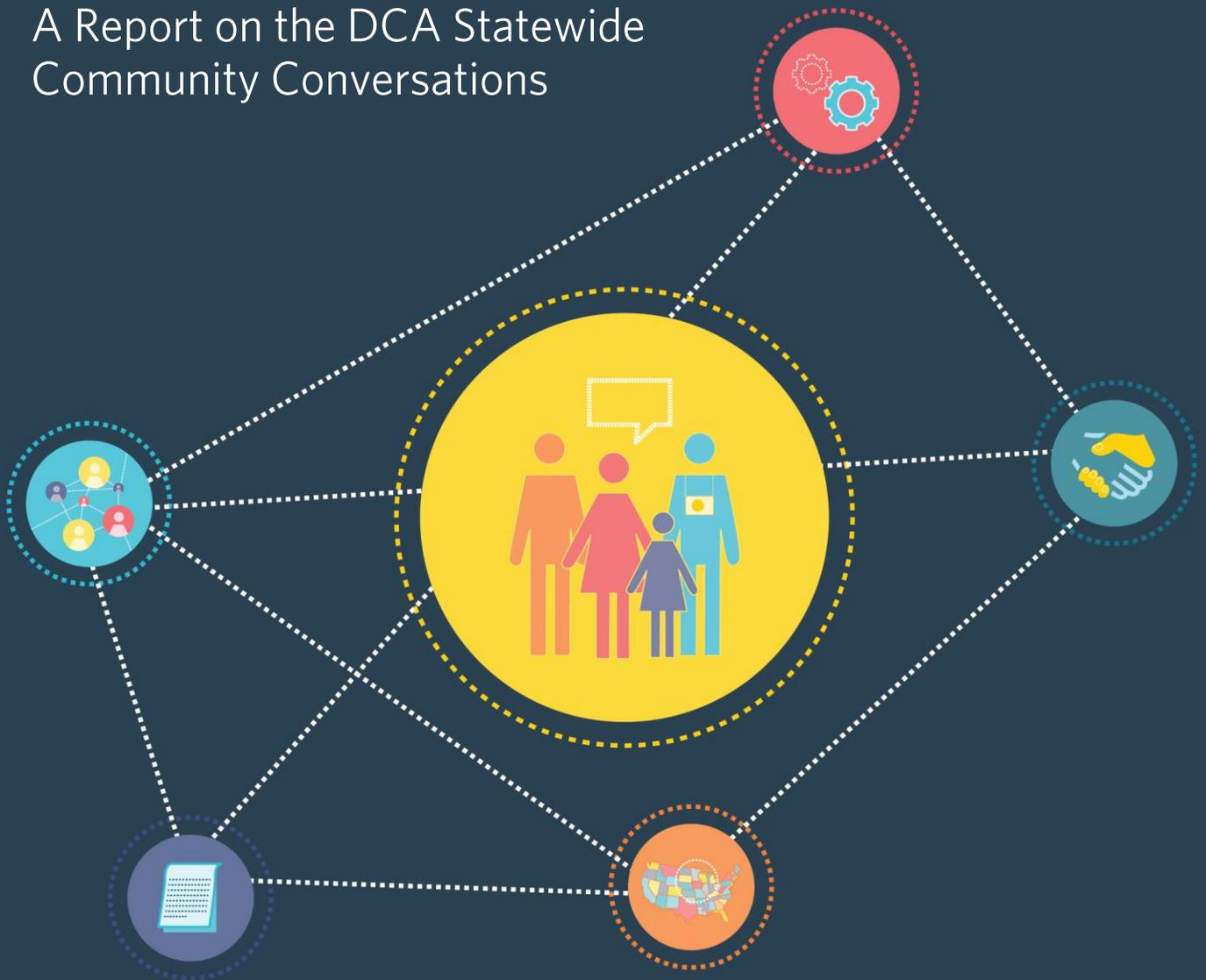


# 2014

# IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Engaging Iowa:  
A Report on the DCA Statewide  
Community Conversations



November 2014

**Lord**  
Cultural Resources

Lord Cultural Resources is a global professional practice dedicated to creating cultural capital worldwide.

Lord assists people, communities, and organizations to realize and enhance cultural meaning and expression.

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Lord values and believes in cultural expression as essential for all people. Lord conducts itself with respect for collaboration, local adaptation, and cultural diversity, embodying the highest standards of integrity, ethics, and professional practice.

The Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) consulted with Lord on this Community Engagement Report to clarify its goals, gain the tools to achieve those goals, and to assist in executing the steps needed to achieve those goals in order to benefit all Iowans.

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Friendly  
Welcoming  
People

The  
Conversations

Wind  
Power!

THE  
ARTS

Quality  
of  
Living

Values  
&  
Kindness

People who  
sincerely want  
to know  
your story

A PLACE  
TO  
GROW:

great place  
for  
families

The  
food!



tomato

loose meats  
maid-rites  
taverns

Historic  
Architecture

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*"We have to work on our perception of Iowa; it's a great state and it's progressive."*

—Quad Cities Community Conversation

The Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) has a significant role in shaping Iowa's future, documenting and celebrating its past and engaging today's Iowans in arts, history and culture.

With the opportunity to renovate the State Historical Building of Iowa, the DCA undertook a dynamic, statewide public input process. Feedback from Iowans was needed not only to inform the revitalization of the state's flagship museum, but also to spark conversation about arts, history and cultural priorities across the state so that the department and the building itself both reflect the needs and voices of all Iowans.

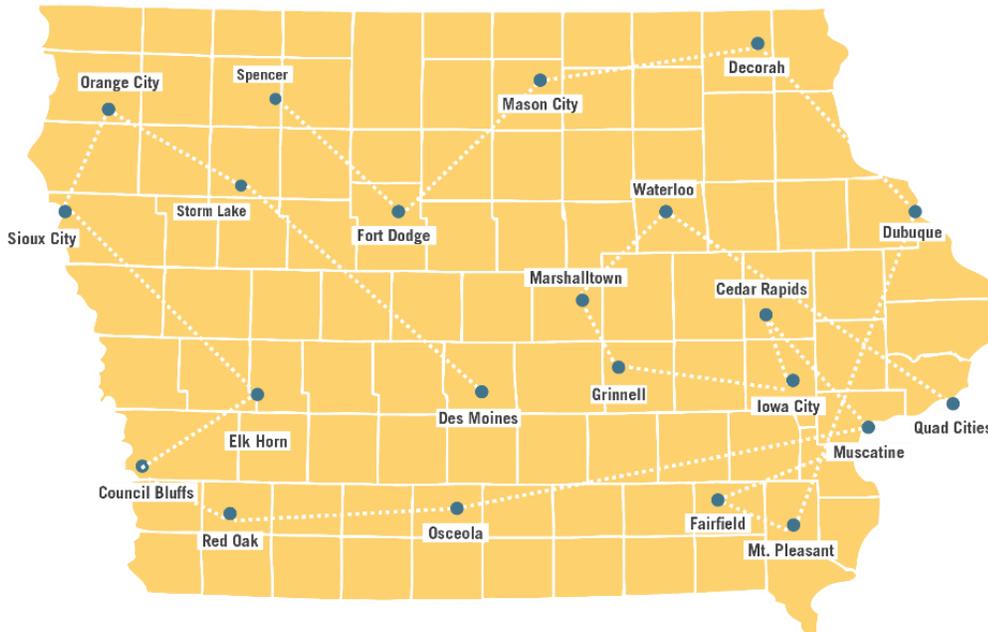
In July 2014, the DCA convened these community conversations to hear Iowans discuss what makes their communities vibrant, ways the DCA can serve as a resource for Iowans, and how this all might be shared in a revitalized State Historical Building of Iowa. Based on the input of Iowans, the DCA has the opportunity to better plan for its future and in doing so, continue to make Iowa a culturally vibrant state by connecting Iowans to the people, places and points of pride that define us.

## GOALS OF DCA STATEWIDE CONVERSATIONS

- Identify a long-term vision for the Iowa DCA
- Identify Iowans' top priorities for arts, history and culture across the state
- Enable the DCA to maximize its impact on Iowa communities
- Recommend a dynamic structure for the DCA that is sustainable in scope and use of state resources
- Develop a vision for the future State Historical Building

## ENGAGING IOWANS

The Iowa DCA Community Conversations launched in early July 2014 with a series of large public meetings in locations throughout the state. To ensure that every Iowan who wanted to could attend, the DCA and planning team selected locations that were within 30 minutes of every Iowa citizen. The community conversations were held in the following locations:



The entire community engagement process reached **more than 1,500 individuals**, soliciting public input through:

- 30 community conversations in multiple locations throughout Iowa
- 20 interviews with community leaders and Iowa legislators
- A dedicated digital forum consisting of an online town hall meeting
- An online survey

Following the initial July conversations, the DCA confirmed the findings in meetings with statewide community, social, and business leaders.

## DEFINING IOWA'S ART, HISTORY AND CULTURAL NEEDS

Participants were encouraged to celebrate their state and community by:

- Taking their photo while holding their answer to the question: "What do you love most about your community?"
- Writing on sticky notes—as many as they wanted—the answer to the question: "What makes you proud of Iowa?"



Each meeting was structured with discussion points and the following four questions:

1. What is your name and hometown and where do you go for fun in your town?
2. How is your community culturally vibrant? And how can the DCA help you enrich it?
3. What Iowa stories or themes would you want to know more about?
4. How can all of this be shared in a revitalized State Historical Building of Iowa?

Iowans freely shared information and reports on the highlights of group conversations. They provided insight into challenges, priorities, and vision for each community. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions of DCA officials. From these conversations, the team categorized the feedback of attendees into five key findings:

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Connectivity.** Iowans want opportunities for residents, creative businesses, arts and cultural organizations, and others to network with each other and across the state. They are looking to the DCA to provide and facilitate opportunities to connect, communicate, and access resources.
- **Awareness.** Promoting Iowa's identity as a progressive, innovative and culturally healthy state that has much to offer is imperative for many Iowans. Iowa has too many "best kept secrets" and we need to ensure Iowans—and those outside our borders—are aware that Iowa and its communities are culturally vibrant and have much potential to seize.
- **Sustainability.** Capacity building and providing access to resources to ensure sustainability of Iowa's art, heritage and cultural assets was a top priority for Iowans. Communities want the DCA to help enable them so they can grow and thrive, implement long-term visioning with community buy-in, and identify ways to attract and retain young talent.
- **Education.** Communities want access to creative learning experiences, especially for students related to arts in education and Iowa history. The DCA can enhance these innovative learning experiences, and continue to help build a 21<sup>st</sup>-century-skilled workforce.
- **A Cultural Center for ALL Iowans.** Iowans want a State Historical Building of Iowa that is a cultural hub for the state, and a place that reflects all 99 counties. This cultural hub needs to be the core from which different aspects of our quality of life can stem.

# FULL REPORT



# 1. ENGAGING IOWANS

.....

*“We have to work on our perception of Iowa; it's a great state and it's progressive.”*

—Quad Cities Community Conversation

The Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) has a significant role in shaping Iowa's future, documenting and celebrating its past and engaging today's Iowans in arts, history and culture. With the opportunity to renovate the State Historical Building of Iowa, the DCA undertook a dynamic, statewide public input process to inform not only the revitalization of the state's flagship museum, but to have a larger conversation about arts, history and cultural priorities across the state to ensure that not only the building itself but our department as a whole reflects the needs and voices of all Iowans.

Four principles were developed to guide the engagement process:

- Reach a range of existing and potential audiences and encourage arts and cultural participation
- Understand the expectations and needs of each community for arts, history and culture in the state
- Communicate to the public who the DCA is, what it does, and how it impacts communities—using specific examples
- Encourage Iowans to think BIG

## PURPOSE

In July 2014, the DCA convened these community conversations to hear Iowans discuss what makes their communities vibrant, ways the DCA can serve as a resource for Iowans, and how this all might be shared in a revitalized State Historical Building of Iowa. Based on the input of Iowans, the DCA has the opportunity to better plan for its future and in doing so, continue to make Iowa a culturally vibrant state by connecting Iowans to the people, places and points of pride that define us.



*“We need to help people appreciate what is already available to them.”*

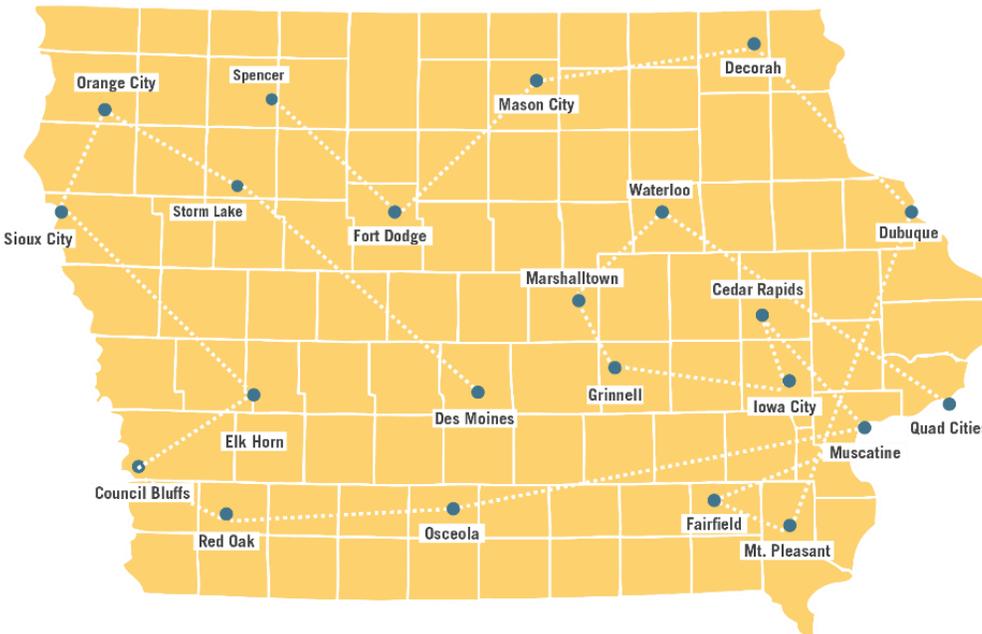
—Mount Pleasant Community Conversation

*“Culture is not something you can easily pack up—it’s who we are...our ideas of ourselves.”*

—FilmScene Community Conversation, Iowa City

## PROCESS

The Iowa DCA Community Conversations launched in early July 2014 with a series of large public meetings in locations throughout the state. To ensure that every Iowan who wanted to could attend, the DCA planned conversations in these locations - within 30 minutes of every Iowa citizen.



Locations were chosen with consideration for the composition of each region and community—ways that residents gather and socialize as well as demographic information such as age, education, ethnicity, and income.

Outreach was critical to the engagement effort and was undertaken by both state officials and the consultant team. The outreach extended to multiple areas:

- **Governmental:** DCA officials reached out to every state legislator, their office, and their numerous networks along with other state employees and agencies.
- **Associations.** Trade and Industry Associations such as the Association of Business and Industry, Farm Bureau, Chamber Alliance.
- **Public Entities and Facilities:** Cities, Counties, Libraries, Social Services, Cultural, Historical, Artist, and Other Organizations.

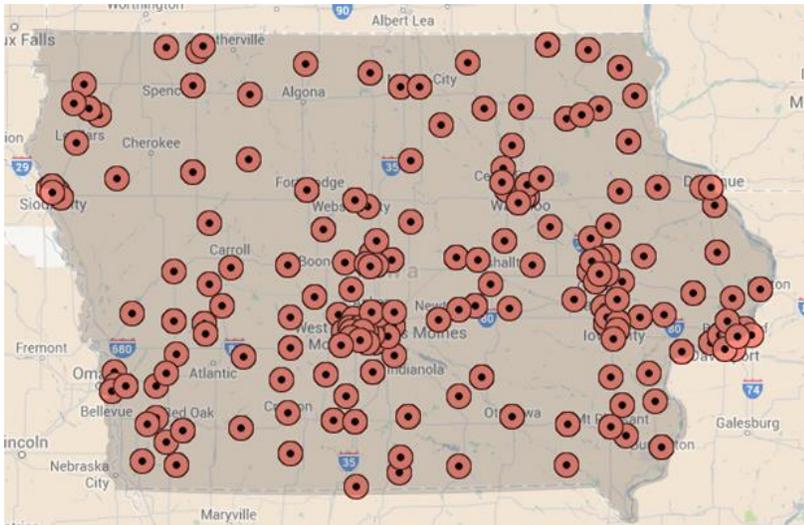
- **Physical and Electronic Flyer Distribution:** Throughout the state and community conversation host sites, as well as at the actual town hall meetings and neighborhood cultural conversations.
- **Education Facilities:** Hosts from colleges, art centers, museums, and other cultural organizations reached out to their extensive audiences and networks.
- **Electronic:** Email and social media campaigns via e-blast, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook posts.
- **Personal:** Phone calls and personalized emails.

Participants were urged to register in advance but everyone was welcome, including walk-ins. Meetings were well attended and held in the following locations:

Session	Attendees
Produce Iowa Film Workshop Conversation	13
STEM Informal Educators Conversation	9
Blood Run	2
Spencer	15
Fort Dodge	56
Mason City	28
Decorah	41
Dubuque	38
Mount Pleasant	28
Fairfield	33
Quad Cities	72
Iowa State University, Ames	18
Urban-Ag Academy	30
Waterloo	57
MLK Center	8
Marshalltown	25
Grinnell	25
Iowa City/Coralville	56
FilmScene, Iowa City	16
Cedar Rapids	34
Muscatine	20
Osceola	37
Red Oak	16
Council Bluffs	41
Elk Horn	24
Sioux City	27
Orange City	38
Storm Lake	18
Iowa Educators Institute, Library of Congress	26
Des Moines	138
<b>Total</b>	<b>987</b>

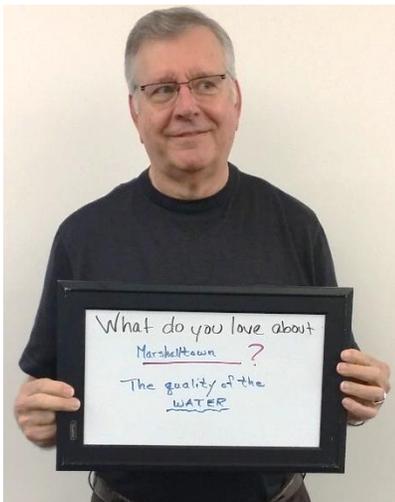


As shown below, the team was able to identify the areas of the state where participants lived using zip codes. This ensured accurate representation of all lowans in the community conversations.



*“I believe for a small community of 7,600 people there are always things going on.”*

- Fairfield Survey Respondent

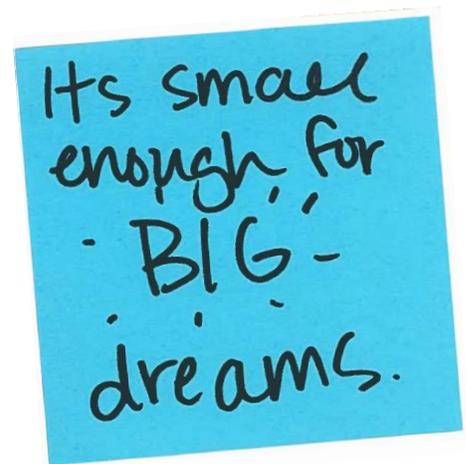


Community leaders from across Iowa gathered in the State Historical Building to participate in meetings to confirm that findings from statewide conversations resonated in their community.

A structure for each meeting was set, allowing for a brief introduction of the inspiration and purpose of the Iowa DCA's Community Conversation effort followed by small-group discussions at even the largest of community meetings. This provided participants with the opportunity to speak comfortably and reduced the risk of one person monopolizing the conversation.

Participants were encouraged to celebrate their state and community by:

- Taking their photo while holding their answer to the question: "What do you love most about your community?"
- Writing on sticky notes—as many as they wanted—the answer to the question: "What makes you proud of Iowa?"



*Attendees answered the question, "What makes you proud of Iowa?" Their responses inspired group conversation during the meetings and allowed the DCA team to better understand what Iowans value in their state.*

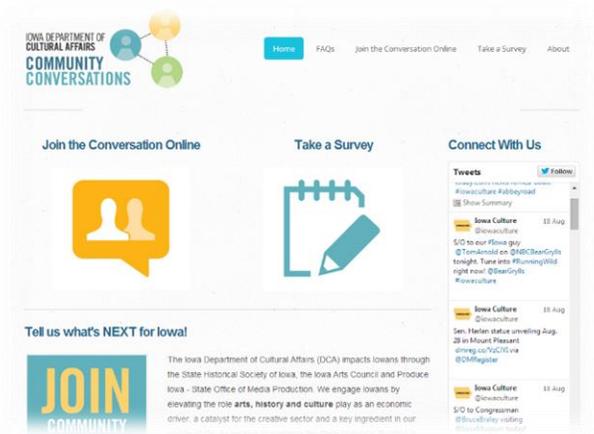
Meeting conversations were guided by four questions:

1. What is your name and hometown? Where do you go for fun in your town?
2. How is your community culturally vibrant? And how can the DCA help you enrich it?
3. What Iowa stories or themes would you want to know more about?
4. How can all of this be shared in a revitalized State Historical Building of Iowa?

See "What We Heard From Iowans" on page 14 to read key findings from the groups' discussion around these questions.

## EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION

Technology has reshaped the way many citizens engage with culture and participate in the arts; a National Endowment for the Arts finding shows that people who participate in the arts through electronic media are nearly three times as likely to attend live arts events as non-media participants. To further the conversation on Iowa’s cultural future, and to allow an even greater voice for citizens, the team launched an interactive website where Iowans were asked to submit ideas and participate in the discussion. Social media outreach was designed to elicit thinking about “big ideas” about the future of arts, history and culture in Iowa, augmenting input from participants not able to attend the community conversations.



The dedicated online forum allowed the following user actions:



1. Submit ideas
2. RSVP for meetings
3. Post a picture
4. Take a survey

The social media campaign ran between late June and early August 2014. Twitter was the most effective tool for reaching meeting participants and creating buzz for community conversations. With more than 500 followers, images, and videos, Twitter also saw the most daily activity. Lengthier dialogue-driven online interactions were most effective in the online town hall meeting.

# 2. WHAT WE HEARD FROM IOWANS

Iowans freely shared information throughout the conversations. Highlights of group conversations provided insight into challenges, priorities, and vision for each community. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions of DCA officials.



From these conversations, the team categorized the desires and concerns of attendees into five key findings:

- Connectivity:** Iowans want opportunities for residents, creative businesses, arts and cultural organizations, and others to network with each other and across the state. They are looking to the DCA to provide and facilitate opportunities to connect, communicate, and access resources by creating:
  - Ways to communicate offerings and opportunities across the region,** including press releases and information on the activities of the state/community before the event occurs.

- **Opportunities for cross-promotion** with profits/non-profits and a calendar of events or database for happenings in the community, in the region, and across the state.
- **Opportunities to inspire regional thinking** so that all communities thrive. Participants suggested partnerships with Iowa Tourism, area businesses, and schools to promote arts, history and culture as significant quality-of-life assets for workforce development, recruiting and attracting people to the community.
- **Ways for cultural organizations to consolidate equipment**, such as a state resource bank, which could be for digitizing or simply sharing materials in the region.



Photos taken by Abby Friedmeyer of Iowa DCA

*“Provide support for local entities to educate about Iowa history, culture, promote sustainability and the story of Iowa.”*

—Decorah Community Conversation

2. **Awareness:** Promoting Iowa's identity as a progressive, innovative and culturally healthy state that has much to offer is imperative for many Iowans. Iowa has too many "best kept secrets" and we need to ensure Iowans - and those outside our borders - are aware that Iowa and its communities are culturally vibrant with great potential. For example:
  - **Opportunities for the DCA** to form relationships with non-arts organizations that are using the arts to fulfill their mission.
  - **Division of state granting programs** into regionally focused concerns (or quadrants) to increase impact across the state.
  - **Representatives of the DCA or a DCA liaison in every region of the state.**
  - **Partnerships/relationships between DCA agencies and communities**—like those in development with the film office to link Iowa locations and services with the film industry.
  - **Artifact exchanges between the DCA** and cultural organizations across the state.
3. **Sustainability:** Capacity building and providing access to resources to ensure sustainability of Iowa's art, heritage and cultural assets was a top priority for Iowans. Communities want the DCA to help enable them so they can grow and thrive, implement long-term visioning with community buy-in, and identify ways to attract and retain young talent. Participants want assistance from the DCA in multiple areas, such as:
  - **Marketing and promotion** to different markets; for example, through social media/newspapers/radio.
  - **Providing educational resources** for teachers and students.
  - **Clearly defining and carrying out the vision of the many local arts, history and cultural organizations** as they age.
  - **Identifying ways to attract and retain young talent.**
  - **Finding solutions to issues with professional development**, staff turnover, and waning and aging volunteer corps.
  - **Increasing, maintaining, and maximizing the use of the state historic tax credits** program.

- **Aiding communities in leveraging the power of local talent** and showing that to people who are passing through; spending the money on amazing Iowa acts.
4. **Education:** Communities want access to creative learning experiences, especially for students related to arts in education and Iowa history. The DCA can enhance these innovative learning experiences, and continue to help build a 21<sup>st</sup>-century-skilled workforce. Important steps toward fulfilling this idea include:
- **Working with the Board of Education** to include Iowa history in classrooms across the state to instill state pride in students.
  - **Illustrating the reasons that Iowa is special**, like the fact that there are world-class entertainers but open opportunities to get in on the ground floor; the fact that this state likes risk-takers.
  - **Major state tourism campaigns** to bring attention to Iowa's important role nationally and internationally.
5. **A Cultural Center for ALL Iowans:** Iowans want a State Historical Building of Iowa that is a cultural hub for the state, and a place that reflects all 99 counties. This cultural hub needs to be the core from which different aspects of our quality of life can stem. Elements should include:
- **Exhibitions and information** communicated in accessible language.
  - **Exhibitions telling the stories of the 99 counties of Iowa** that begin at the SHB and travel across the state.
  - **A hub that allows people access to all of Iowa's communities** with inclusionary elements like virtual opportunities, technology, and dynamism. Allow visitors to experience different areas across the state.
  - **Delivery of information in a way that allows visitors to direct their own experience.** Allow people to select their own terms in a way that is not intimidating, e.g., self-guided tours.

*“Every story, every focus in the State Historical Building of Iowa, every experience needs to have a digital mirror.”*

—Steve C, Online Town Hall

## HOW CAN THE DCA MOST IMPACT OUR COMMUNITIES?

Across the state, participants identified specific regional opportunities and needs as well as affirmed that the cultural vitality of Iowa's communities is among its greatest asset. This chapter addresses those regional concerns.

To present multiple common statements, feedback from participants in different regions is provided as composite statements rather than verbatim quotes.

## NORTHEAST IOWA



*“The DCA needs to be enablers. Help us learn the process so we can do it.”*

—Mason City Community Conversation

Community conversations were held in Mason City, Decorah, Dubuque, Waterloo, Marshalltown, Cedar Rapids, and Ames. Participants in these meetings were particularly concerned with the need to:

1. **Develop arts education, both in schools and more informally. In larger cities, participants saw the arts as an opportunity for students to express themselves as well as explore new places and things.**
  - **Create more outlets for youth to explore their talents.** Facilitate extracurricular activities in schools. How can that transfer to things after school? You like drums, marching band, what’s available after? Connect to careers and volunteer!
  - **Have the DCA work with the state to turn STEM into STEAM.** The schools have a great social studies program that introduces history to kids in kindergarten, but then it gets hidden behind STEM.
2. **Facilitate collaboration among arts and culture organizations to help create a regional identity. This means facilitating ways to work with cultural organizations in the community, in the region, and statewide to form a local identity. Every region or town does not want to be Ames or Des Moines; instead, capitalize on the uniqueness of each place.**
  - **Help us to share more history of the community with the community.** You can’t know where you’re going if you don’t know where you’ve been; present this history. We’ve got children who are into poetry. If you can tell those stories, you can motivate people from the inside.

3. Find ways for the brick-and-mortar SHB to help people across the state. Include initiatives like an Education Conference Center and continue to invite people to Des Moines to participate in ongoing conversations like TED Talks.



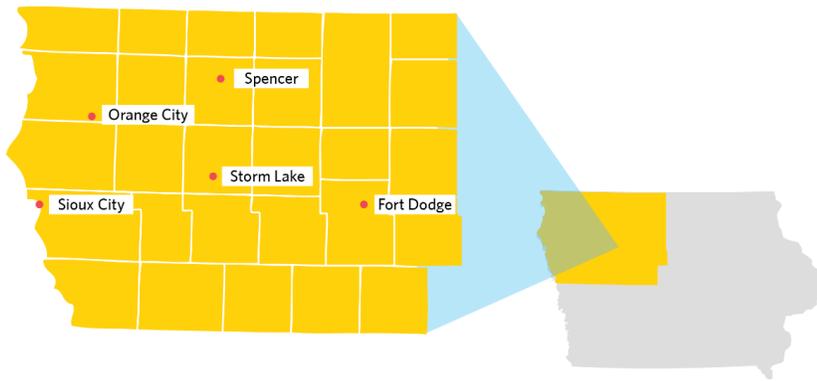
4. Celebrate diversity. Collect stories of diverse ethnic, religious, and underrepresented groups and circulate them across the state.

- Create an appreciation for incredible diversity in our community.
- Help others to see through the lens of different cultures.
- Healthy background in diverse cultures.
- **Collect oral histories.** Facilitate diverse communities coming together to share opportunities to ensure that history is not lost. Who's taking time to collect the elderly populations?
- Diverse heritage goes back to way before Iowa became a state—wave after wave of different ethnicities.

5. Re-address DCA funding programs and legislative and corporate relationships so that they address the needs of arts, history and cultural organizations today.

- **Be an arts advocate and liaison** between the legislature and arts organizations.
- **The benefits gap for employees is increasing and few donors want to give for operations.** Address this issue by providing crowd-funding legislation to help investors at a smaller level get involved.
- **Quantify economic benefits of the arts.** Help businesses to understand that communities with strong arts are good places to invest, help them see why this is a great place to invest.

## NORTHWEST IOWA



*“DCA could come alongside our local efforts more visibly.”*

—Orange City Community Conversation

Community conversations were held in Spencer as well as in Fort Dodge, Sioux City, Orange City, and Storm Lake. They contributed the following thoughts:

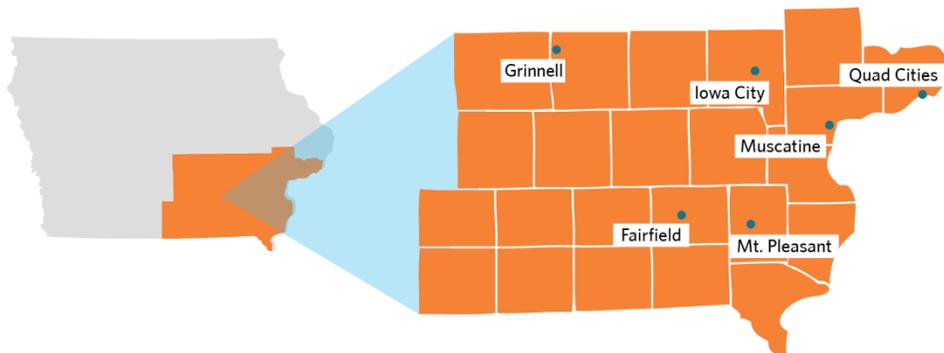
**1. Attract, retain, and support young and diverse talent in the cultural realm. Help cultivate untapped talent.**

- Engage and cultivate youth participation and leadership. Facilitate outreach programs for youth.
- Partner with minority populations to develop leadership roles in the arts. Many can communicate their history and culture.
- Offer scholarships to youth and people of color in the arts and culture.

**2. Nurture sustainable elements and encourage people to take ownership of arts and culture in their own community. People are committed to something based on their passion, and there’s a sense of ownership, which allows for sustainability.**

- **Work with the Urban Land Institute of Iowa** to identify ways that cities can shape their development to better include the arts.
- **Create “culture kits.”** For instance, if you were going to another county, you could go and they would give you this. What if I could get a culture kit about Decorah, find out more, get fired up before I left, maybe I could BIKE there. People can participate in their own neighborhoods.
- **The most distinctive and valuable asset is the culture that flows from our farm families and rural communities.** Treasures like trying to treat strangers like they are family, surviving as settlers on the harsh plains made us people who can endure (Great Depression) and survive. Faith in God, the Bible, and church communities. Practicality and genuine conviction in what we believe: this is a strength that needs to be conserved, sustained, and built upon for future generations and other peoples.
- **Offer a stage for live performances, multiple language interpretation.** Grants for Iowa artists to perform Iowa stories at the SHB and across the stage.
- **A sculpture walk would be great in places like Orange City.** Make the trails that connect our community with arts and history . . . make them fitness, educational, arts as well.
- **Celebrate authors in the area.**

## SOUTHEAST IOWA



*“Engage youth – take their present and their future and use as a gateway to the past.”*

— Muscatine  
Community  
Conversation

Community conversations were held in Mount Pleasant, Fairfield, Quad Cities, Grinnell, Iowa City, and Muscatine. They contributed the following thoughts:

### 1. Find opportunities to sustain and foster the growth that is already happening.

- **Provide assistance** in sustaining existing entities.
- **Help artists make a living as artists.** Help give them business sense. Get artists to be businesspeople too.
- **Create a team of expert volunteers** for different cultural organizations, maybe for each region. DCA folks coming into the various regions—we know that will take professional staff and investment, but regional organizations like Grinnell would invest time if it provided networking opportunities.
- **Help regions find ways to set up connections** with professional staff and investment from local and statewide colleges. This could be done regionally.

### 2. Create a strategy to attract and retain young talent within the age demographic of 20–40-year-olds so that we can solidify and build up Iowa’s human resources.

- **Having culture attracts a young population.**
- **Instead of trying to keep people out, let people in,** #occupyiowa, please! Bring your money and your children!
- **Funding comes from national sources, but little from the state:** this is a problem in terms of keeping people in state. I battle this all the time, talent leaves every three years.



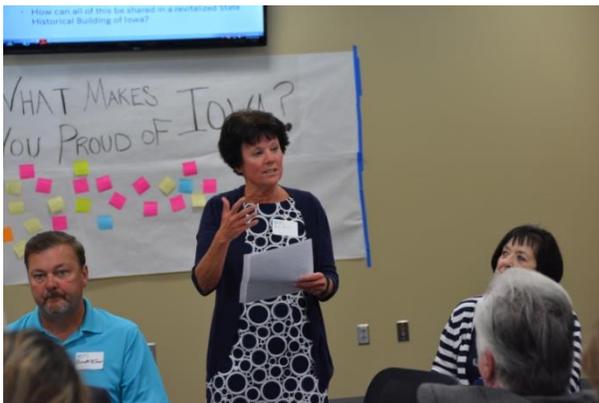
### 3. Develop a marketing infrastructure or “marketing tool kit” that cities throughout Iowa can easily adopt and adjust to their specific needs.

- **It is common for arts organizations to need support from the state** for public relations and marketing. I envision that the DCA might be able to put together a community cultural marketing program that communities could use.

- **Help us promote the river city collaborations** on either side.
- **Marketing** throughout the state for southeast Iowa “treasures.”
- **Advertising the events.** Maybe events shouldn’t happen every weekend. Get the word out so more than just LOCAL people show up. Can the DCA help draw people to these events?

#### 4. Create a dynamic, interactive element to the State Historical Building that is flexible and that has opportunities to reflect all parts of the state.

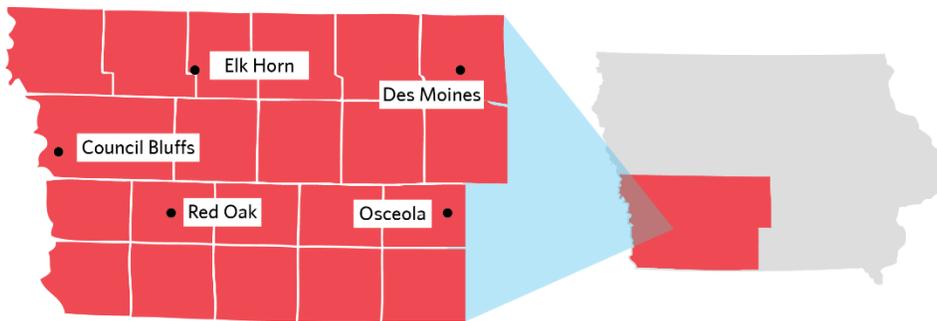
- **Rotate exhibits** at the state level from small museums.
- Incorporate **flex space with solid programs** that provide opportunities to a varied audience. Cultural representation on site that promotes/sells the regions appropriately and celebrates what they do. The goal is that visitors leave with a positive impression.
- **Theater museum has not changed exhibit** upstairs in 5 or 10 years, so it’s not attracting new people.
- The SHB is **not warm and welcoming**.
- **Incorporate a human element:** a performance element, lectures, something that keeps people coming in the door.



#### 5. Engage in a new branding and awareness campaign that flows both ways, so that as the DCA shares its new brand resources with the state, it simultaneously learns about the communities it is reaching and what each has to offer.

- **DCA could pick one or two communities to find out what’s going on** and who’s doing what: not just the names but what’s underground.
- **Implement an awareness campaign:** signage along roadways.
- **Maybe go with pigs, corn, farms and develop cultural tourism around that.** Go with the existing perception and BE IOWA.
- **Present in a multilevel, interactive way.** We are progressive and innovative; we are not conservative, we are not American Gothic, we are far more forward thinking.
- **Iowa needs brand identity,** especially in the rest of the country.
- **Integrate the past and the present:** we’re good about honoring that in Iowa. Celebrate Grant Wood, but there are GREAT current artists in Iowa. Tell the connection: yes, we build on wonderful things, what’s happening now we can continue to celebrate.

## SOUTHWEST IOWA



*“The State Historical Building should be a celebration of all the uniqueness of each community in Iowa.”*

—Red Oak Community Conversation

Community conversations were held in Red Oak, Elk Horn, Council Bluffs, Osceola, and Des Moines. Conversation participants saw a crucial role for the DCA in enabling greater access to resources. Ideas included the following:

1. **Create incubators to foster arts, history and cultural growth. Develop strong arts councils in each area, help artists with access to media relations, offer artist residencies, etc.**
  - **Combine trails with cultural locations;** collaborate with other state agencies, which is vital in small communities (DOT, Tourism, DCA).



Photos taken by Abby Friedmeyer of Iowa DCA

2. **Create an ambassador program so that the DCA can share directly with communities.**

- **Form partnerships with Iowa museum associations and small museums** across the state. Take this show on the road. Loan out parts of the collection to local museums. Encourage public art in places like churches, a DCA mobile museum?

### 3. Offer more user-friendly and customer-friendly services through the DCA overall—staffing, technology.

- **More community conversations** like these. Make this the first step. This gathering point is what you need to do to energize. DCA should push themselves out across Iowa. Replicate success here and make it happen out there, so that this is a destination.
- **More open attitude to people with differences.** Increase inclusion of immigrants and others. Interaction across our cultural and ethnic communities; focus should be on community, diversity, and commonalities of everyday people.

### 4. Enhance and maximize use of the State Historical Building in service of the DCA's mission. Participants saw great potential for the building to be better utilized and leveraged.

- **Redefine the SHB as something like the “Arts and Culture building”** so that it embraces the DCA.
- **Share SHB with the state.** Look at it as the mother ship. Digitally, going out and presenting things. Sharing the actual items we have in this building.
- **Use the historical building as a hub,** encouraging activities out in the community that drive people back to the building beyond the initial introduction. Be at festivals that say, “If you want more, you can connect with us at SHB”; invite more community involvement inside and outside the building.
- **This building should be a space that is visually connected with every county historical society in our state.** For example, if there’s a barbershop and they are having a competition, you can see it here live-streamed at the SHB.
- **Be more user-friendly.** Have parts of the exhibits on the first floor to get people to go upstairs. Be better utilized; more marketing through apps to interest today’s children. Improve signage.
- **Offer programming so that the building is a vibrant public space.** Every week you should have some type of event relating to your displays to encourage people to attend. Invite cultural groups into this building; get them in to do performances, art shows.
- **Open the space to provide more resources for an improved visitor experience:** allow people to see inside, make space for archives, bring in the capitol visitor center with a gift-shop area, create a real performance space.



### 3. ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

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*“Sioux City has the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, Sergeant Floyd Monument, and many sites that the [schools] visit every year.”*

—Survey Respondent

While the DCA team crisscrossed the state engaging with Iowans in person, the team simultaneously launched a website designed to both inform potential participants about the process and gain feedback from people who preferred to contribute their thoughts online. Feedback was gathered in two ways:

1. A monitored online town hall meeting that posed the same four questions asked of in-person community conversation participants:
  - What is your name and hometown and where do you go for fun in your town?
  - How is your community culturally vibrant? And how can the DCA help you enrich it?
  - What Iowa stories or themes would you want to know more about?
  - How can all of this be shared in a revitalized State Historical Building of Iowa?
2. A community survey to gain an understanding of general cultural awareness/behaviors as well as the familiarity with Iowa’s cultural institutions within the Iowa community.

Links to the survey were sent out across the state to a variety of institutions, universities, community organizations, and elected officials, and publicized widely in publications and at the community conversations. The online town hall and dedicated website had more than 11,300 visitors. Additionally, more than 500 Iowa residents over the age of 18 responded to the online survey.

## ONLINE TOWN HALL MEETING

- 1. The stories of Iowa’s lesser-known figures and events are still an important and relevant part of Iowa history that need to be told. Iowa is rich in history and diversity, and telling the story of the state will create a more active and civic-minded population today.**
  - Bring the Iowa story and history into a great national and world context. There needs to be space for the formal, the professional, the curated, and the juried as well as for the informal, the community, the amateur, and the enthusiastic. Every conceivable story presented, on some level, in some fashion, has some direct link to me, has some direct link to you, no matter how fleeting or fragile or distant that link might be.
  - Several different cultures settled in different parts of Iowa. It would be very interesting to learn more about how many there actually were and the different areas they settled, why they may have come specifically to Iowa or chosen the areas they did, and whether there is still a strong cultural influence in those areas today.
  - Transportation in Iowa. From the earliest routes along rivers, wagon trails, and dirt/plank roads, to stagecoaches and railroads, to automobile routes. How towns developed along these routes and then declined as transportation and the routes used changed.
  - The Meskwaki Indians purchased land. When the Indians were chased from their lands and the U.S. government sold the ground, the Meskwaki Indians were the only (or one of the few) tribe(s) to actually purchase land. So Iowa Indians do not operate on a reservation as most of the others do.



## 2. Educate both Iowans and non-Iowans about our state's progressiveness as well as the challenges it currently faces.

- Iowa was created during a surge in Utopian thinking that brought many communities to the state. One must not forget the socialists or political communes. The religious and nonreligious heritage of Iowa is a lot more colorful than many can imagine.
- Iowa's religious diversity: Hasidic Jews, Maharishi, Amish, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic/ Christian. How do we model for other states what it means to have such deep religious respect and freedom to practice religion?
- Iowa government. How Iowa county, local, and state governments were developed and have evolved over time. These relationships seem somewhat complex. Helping Iowans to understand these relationships historically and at the current time will lead to more effective participation by the citizenry in the affairs of Iowa government at all levels.
- Debunk some of the myths about Iowa. Educate both Iowans and non-Iowans about the state. The high level of education of our residents (not Hicks). How we've been very progressive with African Americans and women (Fort Des Moines) and gay marriage, and accepting refugees from Vietnam, etc. Info, facts, stories that may jar people's perceptions of our state.
- Its progressiveness! Iowa has a long history of progressiveness. In recent history, it was the second state in the U.S. to adopt same-sex marriage. It also issued an Iowa Supreme Court ruling in 1868 outlawing "separate but equal schools" and is home to the first state university to open degree programs to women.
- We are leaders for human rights. We are seen as conservative but when it comes to human rights we tend to lead the way. For example, more volunteers per capita signed up for the Civil War than many other places and gays have the right to marry.
- Homegrown development. I want to see the people who succeed. Often we don't understand how Iowa and Iowans fit into the larger picture. We do not see the success of the local mechanic with a good idea that actually has an impact. Both great stories and those little-known anywhere, including where they happened.
- The future. Our industry is rooted in tradition and tends to look backward for context and meaning. I'd love to hear more about how people in the arts and culture sector are dealing with trends like hyper-personalization of tastes, convenience over quality, and the decline of traditional (face-to-face) social interaction.



### 3. The people are what make Iowa great.

- The small and disappearing moments when we act like neighbors. We need to use the arts to help us reclaim and sustain true public spaces and take care of our vulnerable rather than demonizing them.
- Friendliness, with a side order of judgment. An underlying belief that we are not special, but we can be better. Remarkable dichotomies: a strange brew of liberal and conservative, agrarian and tech/manufacture, selfish and generous.
- Traditional values. Clearly, from the beginning of our great state and into the present, the people of Iowa have understood that all our blessings of land, water, people, environment, and everything else that makes this state great are ultimately derived from the Creator of the universe. The people of Iowa are also a practical people who understand that while these wonders have been given to us, they are not to be wasted but, rather, we are to be stewards of these resources, using them wisely, and passing them on to future generations.
- The climate of Iowa makes the people of Iowa unique. Although there is rain and warm weather aplenty in the spring and summer, the winters are treacherous, dangerously cold, and the pioneers who settled Iowa needed reliance both on almighty God and on their own resourcefulness and skills to survive. This gives Iowans a determined focus that people in kinder climates can afford to relax a bit upon. Iowa is a land of bounty, but it is also harsh. Both of these extremes have forged a unique people who understand that they must work hard to survive but can also rely on a loving, beneficent heavenly Father for all things.
- Wonderful natural history stories. I have read these at the SHSI in Iowa City, and used them in my writing.

*“The DCA can better service its constituents by branding itself. Many residents have visited institutions throughout the state but do not connect those with the DCA.”*

—Survey Respondent



#### 4. To reach all the people of Iowa and truly foster access there must be physical and virtual portals into the State Historical Building, especially for those Iowans who will not make it to Des Moines.

- A huge percentage of the people that would gain value from hearing the stories the SHB wants to and should tell do not live in Des Moines. What it does mean is that every story, every focus, every experience needs to have a digital mirror. A huge majority of potential users will rely on digital access, and failure to create an equally robust and state-of-the-art online component will reduce access to Iowa's stories to a small minority.
- Make the SHB interactive. Have a theater with stage plays or movies. Have live theater reenactments or movies at certain times with popcorn and drinks. Make these stories personally engaging, besides being museum pieces or Internet stories. Make the historical building the "place to go" for families.
- Change the focus from only Des Moines and refocus on other sites where there are resources to build upon. There is more than one building; use them all. Programming and use of what is available needs to be addressed statewide and not just in Des Moines.



## SURVEY FINDINGS

**Iowans enjoy spending time with family:** when asked how they spend leisure time, the most common response was "at home," "watching television and movies," but outdoor pastimes involving physical activity came in a close second. This is borne out in the number of Iowans that participate in statewide activities like RAGBRAI and suggests that activities that allow individuals to experience the unique artistry of local Iowans while also enjoying the outdoors will be appreciated. Other notable activities were attending festivals, visiting museums and galleries, and going to film or film series.

**Iowans are active:** although the top two leisure activities involve being at home or engaging in outdoor activity, every other leisure activity has a creative factor of some sort. If the DCA utilizes creative strategies to combine some of its programs and activities with what locals seem to enjoy the most, it has the potential to move the pendulum to draw more audiences to its cultural institutions.



From Twitter: *"Great Iowa stories include—railroad history, Buxton (originally an African-American settlement), Des Moines Arts Center #iowaculture."*

—@Alyp Brown, Decorah

## VISITATION OF HISTORY AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN IOWA

Visitation is consistent with community awareness; although the arts and entertainment destinations did not rank #1, all other events reported had a cultural aspect to them in some capacity. The residents of Iowa most enjoy attending the state fair; however, the second most visited sites are historic in nature. The percentages are also consistent with the responses surrounding leisure time favorites, as the highest percentages are shown for outdoor events.

The top-ranked history or cultural destinations in Iowa in terms of visitation were:

1. Iowa State Fair (66%).
2. Historic sites (59%): Special sites noted by respondents were places like the Dubuque River Museum and the Amanas.
3. Festivals (not including State Fair) (54%): Festivals included McGregor Fall Festival, the Hinton Tractor Pull.
4. Live informal music performances (festivals, houses of worship, music in the park, etc.) (53%): the swing dance conference.
5. Museums and galleries (50%).

**Iowans enjoy arts and history but are not aware of the DCA:** 29% of the respondents visit sites every few months, 24% visit often and 16% visit about once a month; these are frequent visitors. The main reason for visiting historic or cultural sites was walk-ins (41%). Coming in second was bringing family and friends to see the sites (22%). Other reasons for visiting were special exhibitions (14%), programming for children (7%), adult programming (2%), the library (5%), and space rental (1%). Eight percent of the respondents indicated that they visited sites for other reasons, including visiting the rooftop restaurant, company parties, and school trips.

**The State Historical Building and the Iowa DCA have a significant opportunity to build new audiences and constituencies:** 90% of respondents have been to Des Moines, but only 21% of those have visited the SHB within the last five years. Although a majority of the respondents have attended a cultural institution of some sort in Iowa, a majority were also unaware of the DCA, with 77% noting that they had not explicitly heard of the DCA. Of those that had heard of the DCA, by far the majority of interactions with the DCA were through a visit to the SHB (58%) and/or a visit to a state historic site (55%).

**Special exhibitions on individual Iowa communities will draw new or returning visitors:** the majority of respondents found that the exhibitions at the SHB were excellent or good, 38% and 56% respectively, and said that special exhibitions on individual communities as well as events and people would draw more people (41%) to the building. Additionally, people were interested in seeing a permanent exhibition on Iowa arts, history and culture (33%), programs for families (28%), and programs for children (30%); 28% were interested in having unique Iowa items available for purchase. Only 14% of the respondents were interested in library and research opportunities and 11% of the respondents indicated "other," such as better advertisement, parking, and transportation.

**Iowans seek self-directed experiences:** of those who indicated that programming was a factor in determining their visit to the building, DIY classes (43%), activities for children (34%), and online tours/courses (29%) were most popular. Subject-matter-expert talks and lectures, handheld audio tours, phone apps, and others came in behind that. Of those that responded to "other," most indicated that they did not know what type of programming they would enjoy.

Iowans get their information online and through social media: respondents received their information about events and activities throughout the state of Iowa through online or social media means at a rate of 76%. Word of mouth was the second means at 44%, and the newspaper came in third with 37%. People also found out about events in person (27%), through the free weekly (11%), and lastly through a museum newsletter (6%). Three percent indicated that they found out about events through other means of communication. Television was highly noted as a means of finding out about events. Other means were radio, emails, flyers, and regular mail. Some responded that they do not receive any information at all.

## HOW CULTURALLY VIBRANT ARE IOWA'S COMMUNITIES?



**Iowa's communities are culturally vibrant, and college towns matter:** of the 447 responses received, the majority indicated that their community was culturally vibrant (57%), while 43% felt that their community was not. Respondents noted that there were a variety of activities, festivals, art shows, and community events to attend throughout their community. Respondents also noted that there is much diversity among the people and talents, largely because of the college town communities. Others felt that there were opportunities for cultural exploration, learning, and expression, with many feeling that these opportunities have increased in the last 10 years. Concerts, jazz festivals, operas, and symphonies were the most frequently noted cultural activities in the survey. Many respondents noted the smallness of their community and felt that

their community had an array of cultural amenities. People felt that there was a long-standing history within their communities that everyone took pride in. It gave them something to hold as their own. Additionally, respondents felt that the landscape and farmland added a sense of culture and uniqueness to the area.

Those who did not feel their community was culturally vibrant felt that it was extremely small and did not have cultural institutions, or that people were not interested in culture. People who lived within communities that did have cultural institutions but still felt that their community was not culturally vibrant felt this way because those institutions did not fully represent the people who lived there. There were respondents who had come from other areas of the U.S. and felt that they were in the extreme minority within the community, and that people did not necessarily know how to relate to them or include them in activities.

**Iowa residents are interested in having and participating in cultural events.** The majority of the responders were satisfied with the activities available to them but would like to see more variety. They would also enjoy outdoor activities that are family friendly.

Friendly

WORK  
ETHIC

Family  
Friendly  
activities

Open-Mindedness  
Overall sense  
of Community

Nature  
wide open  
spaces

Unique  
Communities

Can  
Easily Get  
ANY where

History  
of  
Progressive  
Thinking

Z-71  
pickups

Sincere,  
Caring,  
Hardworking  
People

Education  
is a  
Priority

CLEAR  
BLUE  
SKIES  
& People

You can SMILE  
at a Stranger  
and get a  
Smile And wave  
back!

Green  
space

IOWA  
is a  
place to  
GROW!

History of  
Iowa

Its small  
enough for  
- BIG -  
dreams.

Friendly  
People

Historically  
progressive  
+  
inclusive

♡ Iowa ♡

- Freedom to create  
what we want
- The focus on using  
our land for good
- Sustainability in all  
areas of development

Pigs

The great  
arts & culture  
organizations!

The rich  
heritage of  
Band music

\*  
CORN\*  
~

