

a new angle

ARTS DEVELOPMENT
IN THE SUBURBS

2002

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION



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by Carolyn Bye
Sylvia Paine Lindman, *editor*

about

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

The McKnight Foundation is a charitable foundation that seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. The Foundation supports efforts to improve outcomes for children, families, and communities; contributes to the arts; encourages preservation of the natural environment; and promotes scientific research in selected fields. The Foundation's primary geographic focus in its human services and arts grantmaking is the state of Minnesota. McKnight is the largest private funder of the arts in Minnesota, having contributed \$125 million since 1973.

Founded in 1953 and endowed by William L. and Maude L. McKnight, the Foundation had assets of approximately \$2 billion and made grants totaling about \$91 million in 2001. Mr. McKnight was one of the early leaders of the 3M company. The Foundation, however, is independent of 3M.

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mission

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

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introduction

by R I P R A P S O N, President, The McKnight Foundation

Whether we live in rural towns, big cities, or growing suburbs, the arts matter to all of us.

The arts spark discussion, raise questions, feed our imaginations, and link us to one another. Watercolor classes. Broadway musicals. Knitting groups. Dance performances. Storefront studios. Teen-painted murals. Choral groups. Outdoor sculpture. Battles-of-the-bands. Photos on coffee shop walls. Repertory theater. Cello solos. Paint-your-own-pottery places. It is all art, and it all matters in ways we seldom acknowledge.

The McKnight Foundation's conviction that the arts matter has always inspired our giving. That conviction also has driven us to find ways to highlight the arts and the nourishment they provide. This report is one such effort. *A New Angle* explores a growing commitment to the arts in the Twin Cities' suburbs. The report covers new ground by detailing the history, status, and direction of suburban arts activity.

The growing cultural life of the suburbs is a reflection of regional patterns that have been evolving for decades, with our metropolitan area in constant

motion and the vast majority of the region's 2 million residents living outside the core cities. Slowly and subtly, the arts have helped create a sense of place and build connections within more and more suburban communities. But the arts' importance to enhancing the livability of suburban communities hasn't been acknowledged as openly as it deserves. Housing, transportation, retail development, and other facets of suburban development have received far more attention — while stereotypes about vapidness and uniformity in suburban communities have been left unchallenged.

Questions we should ask about the changing role of the arts in Twin Cities suburbs:

- How will the opportunities of an increasingly diverse region be expressed in the suburbs? The suburbs have never been as homogenized as their reputation suggested. Over the past two decades urban arts groups have tried, some more successfully than others, to reflect greater diversity. Perpetual questions for groups in the core cities also apply to developing suburban groups: How can the arts represent our region's increasing diversity, and how might they increase understanding across class, race, age, and other boundaries? We must always be careful that our private and public work to enhance the arts doesn't reflect a too-limited set of experiences and interests.
- What audiences will be developed? Some arts organizations and local governments may assume that the ripest targets for developing suburban audiences are the most affluent or those who match some other suburban stereotype. But the hard work of developing audiences shouldn't depend on such a narrow definition. Art that speaks to the variety of experiences and views found in the suburbs will help develop a broader audience.
- Will suburban arts development be fragmented? Suburban arts resources need to expand to meet the needs of growing communities. But have we already missed important opportunities for coordination? Suburban communities should find collaborative ways to plan, develop, and support the arts. Otherwise, the region will risk repeating many of the same mistakes made over the last 25 years in the larger world of intra-regional competition for development.

Consideration of the issues raised by *A New Angle* shouldn't be limited to suburban communities, however. The report can help us consider the many ways the arts contribute to community, wherever that community happens to be. There are elemental issues here — for policymakers, arts organizations, funders, and citizens across the state — about how Minnesota's overall arts environment is in flux. We must not ignore how suburban arts development will trigger changes and reactions elsewhere in this vital ecology.

Questions we should ask about the changing role of the arts across the state:

- How does Minnesota increase equity in arts funding? As the report details, there is an imbalance between where metro area residents live and where arts resources exist. It appears futile to hope that this imbalance will be addressed solely by increasing funding, without any reallocation of existing resources. How can these decisions about public resources be made as fairly as possible for all communities? And how do other funders, including The McKnight Foundation, determine what kind of cultural work to support for what purpose and in what location?
- Are there prevailing stereotypes about what kind of art occurs where in our region? As assumptions linger, it may be hard for some to let go of limited ideas about arts development, and to understand that a full range of types and quality of art should exist in all parts of the region. The report strongly suggests that suburban arts development cannot be limited to classes and amateur performances, no matter how worthwhile. Minneapolis and St. Paul may not — and perhaps *should* not — forever be the repositories for all art of a certain type or quality.
- How will the balance between capital and operating needs change? Wherever arts infrastructure exists, there is a question of the funding required for capital and operating needs. Can suburban arts development strike a different balance than has existed elsewhere in the state, a balance

that focuses more resources where they matter most — in programming and outreach? How do the changes in the cultural environment impact future capital and operating needs for arts in the core cities or rural areas?

This report sets the stage for considering these and other thorny questions. Key components of the report are:

- A private foundation’s perspective, provided by McKnight Arts Program Director Neal Cuthbert. Neal discusses some of his own assumptions about suburban life, McKnight’s past suburban “blind spot,” and how we’ve worked with the Metropolitan Arts Council to explore these issues.
- The Minnesota Regional Arts Council’s view, from its executive director — and the report’s author — Carolyn Bye. Carolyn looks at redefining the suburbs, the MRAC mandate, and the county-based regranting program that has helped address suburban needs.
- Case studies of what communities and local activists have done to create suburban cultural vitality.
- Case studies of what art performers and presenters are doing in the suburbs.
- Conclusions drawn from this complex array of suburban arts activity.
- A map showing the distribution of various resources in the suburbs and a directory of the largest suburban-based arts organizations, in the report’s appendices.

This rich assortment of information and insights has triggered invaluable examination and introspection among McKnight’s staff, board, and colleagues. We hope the report presents a similar opportunity for you to explore the changing course of arts development in our metropolitan suburbs. Questions raised by the shifting landscape may have critical implications for all Minnesota communities — arts and otherwise.

a funder's perspective:
*the private
foundation*

by NEAL CUTHBERT, Arts Program Director, The McKnight Foundation

Although we'd all like to assume an air of objectivity when discussing any topic, I find it always helps to come clean with one's predispositions. Take attitudes about the suburbs, for instance. I grew up in Detroit, Michigan, in the late 1950s and 1960s. After Detroit's riots in 1967, the city became even more racially divided than it had been, and the exodus of white middle- and working-class families out of the city defined the term "white flight." Businesses soon followed suit, building office parks around the beltways, while Detroit's downtown became a sad and lonely place populated with wig shops and empty spaces.

The story goes on, but suffice it to say that, in my youth, suburbs were inherently about and defined by race and the intense fear of difference. If you lived in the city and fled to the suburbs, perhaps you simply wanted a better life with your family, but it had the veneer of racism.

I brought those attitudes with me to Minnesota. Shortly after moving here, as I was venting about suburbs to a Minnesota native, she challenged me. She talked about newer houses and lots on lakes and more natural environments. It wasn't about leaving neighborhoods that were getting "bad," because even the so-called bad neighborhoods in Minneapolis weren't remotely like neighborhoods in Detroit. Moving out of the city was about improving life for your family and kids. It gave me pause. I recognized that my thinking about the suburbs needed to morph a little.

Statewide, Give or Take 2 Million People

At The McKnight Foundation, we've been trying to develop strategies to help families and communities wherever they are: urban, suburban, or rural. This includes making sure everyone has access to the arts. To be honest, though, when it comes to arts funding, the suburbs have too often been an afterthought.

The Foundation has been supporting the arts for almost 50 years. Over that time McKnight has become the largest private supporter of the arts in Minnesota. Early on, McKnight's grants tended to respond to immediate needs and requests. In 1981, by establishing a formal arts program, McKnight wanted to accomplish two things. The first was to create a system of support to provide access to the arts for people all over the state. The second was to support and develop Minnesota's world-class cultural infrastructure in the Twin Cities.

In Greater Minnesota, we addressed the first goal by partnering with the regional arts councils. It was clear that rural residents had a great hunger for the arts, and it was understood that it was difficult for them to travel to the

Never mind that the suburbs were home to three times as many people as Minneapolis and St. Paul; unless a suburban organization could compete for our general grantmaking—and only a few could—we had nothing for it.

Cities for performances. McKnight's program complemented (or took advantage of) the 1977 state-created system of regional arts councils, 10 of which are in Greater Minnesota. As a result, today cities and towns such as Moorhead, Fergus Falls, Duluth, Rochester, Alexandria, Grand Marais, Bemidji, New York Mills, Lanesboro, and dozens of others enjoy a reliable stream of state and foundation support, not to mention their own loyal audiences.

In the metro area, McKnight's program also provided long-term stability for four of our major arts organizations — the Guthrie Theater, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and Minnesota Orchestra — through an innovative joint investing program. It also provided important support to other professional and community arts organizations through general operating and project support.

This strategy made sense at the time. It seemed to take care of the entire state. The Twin Cities were the locus of culture for the region, and, as for the suburbs, well, weren't they served by the same central-city arts organizations? Surely they had no art of their own.

This erroneous assumption was based on the stereotype that the suburbs were homogeneous bedroom communities that had little or no cultural infrastructure and depended on the urban core. This attitude prevailed for a long time, even as the suburbs grew more socially, economically, and ethnically diverse and generated their own arts activity. We didn't even recognize that our program was serving every part of the state except the suburbs.

There was an invisible ring in our program — the “donut,” as some call it, referring to the suburbs surrounding the urban core. Never mind that the suburbs had become home to three times as many people as Minneapolis and St. Paul. Unless a suburban organization could compete for our general grantmaking — and only a few could — we had nothing for it. And yet we were eagerly supporting small organizations in Greater Minnesota, as well as in urban neighborhoods, because they brought people together, nurtured creativity, and strengthened their communities.

The Last Arts Frontier

The 11th regional arts council is the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC), originally part of the Metropolitan Council. MRAC and McKnight eventually helped each other understand and support art in the suburbs.

Like McKnight, MRAC had been more or less blind to the needs and activities of the suburbs. While its mandate is to serve the seven counties of the Twin Cities metro area — just as the other 10 councils serve largely rural counties — in practice, for many of its early years, MRAC served largely as an incubator for small professional groups based in the urban core. It was assumed that eventually those groups would grow large enough to leave MRAC and receive support from the State Arts Board.

Despite efforts in the 1980s to spread MRAC funds into the suburbs by supporting “art-in-the-park” programs, it wasn’t until the mid-1990s that MRAC’s innovative and groundbreaking suburban work began with the County Arts Regranting Program. What differentiated this program from previous efforts was that it empowered people in suburban communities with resources and decision-making authority. Those people were considered

“professional expert peers” whose intimate knowledge and understanding of their communities was essential to the program’s success (a grantmaking philosophy shared by McKnight). Entrusting suburban art experts with money for suburban arts organizations was unheard of at the time.

If we believe that the arts offer people a deeper, more meaningful existence, then popular culture should not be the primary purveyor and definer of our nation’s or state’s cultural life.

In 1996, MRAC proposed changing its funding patterns to better serve suburban communities. MRAC requested McKnight’s help, and our board and staff welcomed the idea enthusiastically.

Since then, our partnership has continued. During recent years, we’ve seen steady growth in the number of community arts councils; several cities’ park departments have changed their names (and responsibilities) to include “parks, recreation, and arts”; several communities are drafting cultural plans; and several multimillion-dollar facilities have been planned and many have already been built. There is no end in sight to these promising developments.

The proliferation of suburban cultural activity reflects two needs. The first is economically driven — local governments and chambers of commerce are always competing for new businesses, and they look to the arts to help build a stronger community identity. Second is the very human need to connect, to build a sense of place and community. The arts provide opportunities for audiences to share experiences; for young people to find creative, positive, and healthy outlets; and for communities to celebrate the creative and diverse accomplishments of their citizens.

Like people everywhere, suburb dwellers long to create art, appreciate art, learn about the arts, and gather to enjoy the arts together. The result is an astonishing array of art centers, community theaters, music and dance organizations, galleries, and, of course, individual artists who are finding eager audiences in the suburbs. Children, in particular, find their lives enriched by opportunities to perform and enjoy the arts in their schools, parks, and community centers. They develop creativity and problem-solving skills, explore the meaning of life, stretch their imaginations, work collaboratively, and simply have fun.

Culture's Front Guard

While funders have a major responsibility to ensure that arts opportunities are available to people wherever they live, a similar responsibility falls on arts organizations. Arts organizations are the repositories and creators of our shared cultural life. But they do not own the culture — it belongs to every citizen. Too often art or culture seems to be a possession that our citizens must visit to experience, rather than a fact of existence that informs, defines, and enriches our daily lives.

The past decade has witnessed a transformation of the role of the arts in communities all over the country. Now more than any other time in our shared history, arts groups are creatively engaging people through education and outreach programs in schools and community centers. This is a major stride for the cultural sector. But, in spite of record-breaking attendance at some institutions, most Americans don't go to arts events. They still aren't involved, engaged, or informed by the cultural offerings available to them.

This staggering fact should become the defining challenge for all of us in the arts. If we believe that the arts offer a deeper, more meaningful existence, then popular culture should not be the primary purveyor and definer of our nation's or our state's cultural life. We really don't have the luxury of just marketing to the "key" demographics. We must believe as John

Davis did when he set up the New York Mills Regional Cultural Center, that programs have to make sense and be accessible to everyone because they can't survive otherwise. That same sense of urgency should exist throughout all sectors of the arts. Many are beginning to embrace this idea and have developed innovative strategies, but too often it is easier to market to the converted.

The realities of modern life mean that fewer and fewer people will travel long distances to attend arts events in the urban core. Arts organizations can't afford to ignore the nearly 2 million people who live in the suburbs.

The realities of modern life mean that fewer and fewer people will travel long distances to attend arts events in the urban core. And those arts organizations can't afford to ignore the

nearly 2 million people who live in the suburbs. What's more, if children growing up in the suburbs are to become the artists and audiences of the future, they need to be exposed to and engaged by the arts today.

This publication is a cautionary tale — not a policy statement by this foundation — but simply an effort to start the discussion about what the suburbs need from the arts and how funders, communities, and arts organizations together need to engage with the suburbs. There is no single solution; rather, each community has its own evolutionary process, as does each organization, in establishing and building relationships.

Author Carolyn Bye, executive director of MRAC, is passionate about giving suburban residents the same cultural advantages as city dwellers. She has interviewed dozens of suburban artists, arts administrators, and city officials to put together a complex portrait of arts activity in the suburbs. As she points out, Minnesota's population, like that of most populous states, is now largely suburban, and suburban arts activists are lobbying their legislators for their fair share of the funding pie. Urban arts organizations must wake up to this huge potential audience and political force — or risk diminishing what we've worked so hard to build.

Minnesota looks very different than it did 50 years ago. It is more racially and culturally diverse, older, better educated, and more pluralistic. People know the difference between the community band and the Minnesota Orchestra; between the watercolor in a local art fair and the Matisse in a great museum; between a children's dance recital and a touring ballet company. But there is room — and need — in all our lives, for both.



suburban timeline

National

- Late 19th and early 20th centuries:** Early East Coast suburbs are refuges from crowded cities.
- 1920:** Ratio of cars to people in the U.S. is 1:13.
- 1933:** Home Owners Loan Corporation standardizes home appraisal with rules that favor houses in (white) neighborhoods outside city cores.
- 1934:** New Federal Housing Administration insures long-term mortgages, enabling middle-class housing ownership to begin in earnest.
- 1944:** GI Bill helps returning World War II veterans buy homes, fueling suburban development.
- 1949:** Congress authorizes urban renewal loans, spurring expansion in first-ring suburbs.
- 1956:** Federal Highway Act aids the construction industry's outward expansion.
- 1956:** Southdale, the nation's first enclosed shopping mall, opens in Edina, Minnesota.
- 1968:** Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing and lending.
- 1980:** Office space in American suburbs surpasses that of downtowns.
- 1990:** Ratio of cars to people is 1:2.
- 1990:** People of color and recent immigrants are reported moving to the suburbs in record numbers.
- 1991:** Congress grants localities more flexibility in using federal highway funds for mass transit and other nonhighway transportation.
- 2000:** Voters nationwide approve 400 of 553 growth-related ballot measures, most of which encourage "smart growth" (pedestrian-friendly communities, a mix of housing types, and less reliance on automobiles).

Primary sources:

- "Regional Policy and Development Timeline," a collection of articles prepared for the conference: "Reframing the 1945-1965 Suburb," January 21-23, 1999, hosted by the Design Center for American Urban Landscape and the Reframing Suburbia Project.
- "Urban Sprawl: The American Dream," *National Geographic*, July 2001.

Minnesota

- 1900s-1910s:** Villages of Edina, Golden Valley, and Robbinsdale established and soon are served by streetcars.
- 1909:** Minnesota has 7,065 licensed cars and 4,000 licensed motorcycles.
- 1916:** Federal Aid Road Act spurs Minnesota State Highway Commission to plan 6,200 miles of roads. User taxes (1921) and fuel taxes (1924) follow.
- 1920s:** Retail commerce grows along streetcar lines.
- 1940:** Census reports that 90 percent of the population of Hennepin and Ramsey counties lives in either Minneapolis or St. Paul.
- 1947:** Housing and Redevelopment Act enables cities to respond to postwar housing needs. Housing construction peaks in central cities and suburban communities — the last time that housing construction in the central cities even comes close to that of the suburbs.
- 1954:** Twin Cities streetcar service ends.
- 1957:** Regional Planning Act creates the Metropolitan Planning Commission, the first such agency in the country.
- 1965:** By now, all Minnesota cities having more than 10,000 people and 70 percent of those having more than 2,500 have city planning departments, and the area's second-ring suburbs are well established.
- 1971:** Fiscal Disparities Bill provides for the sharing of growth in the commercial-industrial property tax base of the metropolitan area.
- 1971:** The suburbs contain 59 percent of the metro area's population but only 12 percent of its subsidized housing units.
- 1967:** Metropolitan Transit Commission is formed to develop a long-range transit development plan with oversight from the Met Council. At about the same time, the state's first eight-lane highway, I-94, is completed between Minneapolis and St. Paul, and I-35W opens south of Minneapolis.
- 1982:** Suburban stores claim 75 percent of the metro area's retail trade, and 70 percent of all daily trips in the metro area are suburb to suburb — the dominant pattern for employment commuting as well.
- 1987:** State Legislature imposes a uniform pricing system through which the whole region shares the cost of new sewer capacity — an incentive to outward development.
- 1999:** It's estimated that the average Twin Cities suburban family makes 13 car trips a day.

conclusions

- 1. The suburbs are not all alike.** They are distinct communities with different needs, different opportunities for collaboration, and different tastes. What works in one may not work in another.
- 2. Contrary to the stereotype, suburban communities are deeply involved in and committed to the arts.** Many are establishing arts centers, forming community theaters and orchestras, making sure their children (and sometimes adults, too) have access to lessons, providing arts education and activities in their schools, volunteering to support and participate in the arts, and patronizing large and small arts organizations in the core cities.
- 3. One thing missing from the suburban cultural scene is funding more appropriate to the population.** On a per capita basis, towns in the suburban ring of the seven-county metro area receive significantly less legislative arts funding than either the core cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul or communities in Greater Minnesota. As Minnesota's legislative power base continues to shift to the suburbs and beyond, suburban legislators will expect a "return" on the investment their taxpayers make to fund arts in

the state. But the needs can't be satisfied simply by dividing the current pie differently. To support the arts equitably throughout the greater metro area while maintaining the strength of our premier cultural organizations will require new statewide and local government dollars.

4. Established arts institutions must look for ways to court potential audiences in the suburbs. Successful models include the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra's suburban "homes," Stages Theatre Company's FAIR School program, East Metro Music Academy's multisite approach to delivering programming, and SASE's partnership with Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts. Because major institutions must be deeply invested in developing tomorrow's arts audiences, arts education should be a top priority and would be a good "first step" for many groups wishing to make inroads into the greater metro area.

5. Communities need visible and proactive arts leadership. Arts supporters who are respected regionally and statewide must publicly make arts a priority and regularly acknowledge the arts' importance in the suburbs. Legislators could watch for and advocate policies that may improve opportunities for the arts in the suburbs, such as the removal of levy limits from property taxation that enabled many towns to pay for cultural centers. Agencies could issue regular public policy statements, speeches, articles, and media stories about the importance of the arts in all communities. Private funders could reinforce the importance of the arts and develop meetings, conferences, and training opportunities for staff of greater metro arts organizations and community leaders. All policy statements and references to arts in communities should explicitly include suburban communities. Such measures would help build local advocacy networks that are critical to increasing government support for the arts.



observations

When we started the art center project and wanted to put bonding on the city ballot, there was a lot of vocal opposition.

There was even threat of a recall. That opposition is still there. What we really need is more arts activism, and community arts activists need to understand how to do it successfully.

— FRAN HESCH, Hopkins City Council



When there is endorsement of the arts by leaders of foundations . . . and state agencies . . . it legitimizes and reinforces that arts are important in all communities; and it makes it easier for us to ensure that there are arts in our municipalities.

— BOB ERICKSON, City Manager, Lakeville



The arts community should consider parents of teenagers a critical market and a hook for groups wanting to build an art center in their community. They want opportunities like the arts available to their children and they want them available in their own communities. And they are a very powerful voice.

— JOAN NAYMARK, Director of Research and Planning,
Target Corporation

There needs to be some sort of planning that stops every city from having its own hockey rink. It also should be about every city understanding whether it can really support an art center. Someone needs to be helping communities learn to work across jurisdictional lines and share art centers and sports facilities.

— PETE BEBERG, former Mayor, Anoka



Some cities have decided that building a sports, arts, or community facility is the answer to ensuring their community's quality of life and identity. But we aren't going to ensure quality of life or livable communities by individual projects. You won't save a city with a theater, just as you won't save it with a baseball stadium. It's how you link the art, the economic development, the social structure, and the environment — all of the fragmented pieces that make up a community and region. Connection is the key.

— WILLIAM R. MORRISH, Director,
Design Center for the American Urban Landscape



I began to identify myself as a “community artist” when I realized that art is about more than beauty. It's about creating, developing, and weaving a spirit together, and about people having a voice and a way of saying, “This is where we live, this is what we look like, this is how we feel.” My work is about helping any community or people — suburban, urban, or rural — come together to identify and celebrate their community's unique personality.

— TA-COUMBA AIKEN, Visual Artist / Activist