

Impact Report



A Letter from A&BC's Executive Director

I have the distinction, pleasure, and position to comment on A&BC's impact on Chicago's artmakers.

In 1985, the same year Business Volunteers for the Arts® incorporated in Chicago, I moved to Chicago to attend The Theatre School at DePaul University to study production management. I often refer to the 1980s and '90s as "heady" because, for me, there were so many employment and early career-building opportunities.

When I came on staff in 2000 as the Director of Programs, the organization had changed its name to Arts & Business Council of Chicago (A&BC) to reflect the unique role it served connecting Chicago's cultural and corporate communities, having expanded its programs in order to help facilitate the now flourishing arts and culture sector.

Now that I steward the organization as Executive Director, it's with a sense of pride that I reflect on this Impact Report, that I see a broad view of the leading role the organization has played in the development of thousands of careers and other organizations.

Throughout this document, you'll read about the nearly four decades of impact A&BC has had on the arts communities who've helped transform Chicago from hog-butcher and wheat-stacker, into the vibrant global cultural hub it is today.

On behalf of A&BC's past and current board of directors, staff and volunteers, and all of the arts partners we've worked with, we celebrate the accomplishments of our 38 years and dedicate our future to continued learning and collaboration to ensure community vitality and an equitable creative economy.



Kristin Larsen

Executive Director

Arts & Business Council of Chicago

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

Arts & Business Council of Chicago (A&BC) commits to championing policies and practices of racial equity that empower a just and creative Chicago. To contribute to real change, A&BC will raise questions of racial equity in our organization and the Arts and Culture sector at large. We encourage our partners to join us as we listen, learn, and grow.

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What We Do

Mission

Our programming serves Chicago's cultural workers and enterprises to ensure community vitality and an equitable creative economy.

Vision

We see a world where creativity is universally valued as a resource with limitless potential for social and economic impact.

Values

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

We value kindness, sincerity, and honesty as they inspire empowerment and transformation.

DIVERSITY BUILDS CAPACITY

We value the inclusion of multiple identities and perspectives, enabling us to make better decisions.

MUTUALITY IS ESSENTIAL

We value partnerships with those who also champion policies and practices of social equity and justice.



Business Volunteers for the Arts@ project launch with The Greater Chatham Initiative at Artists on the 9 (2023).

From left to right: BVAs Christopher Bruce and Jamilah Owens; GCI Executive Director, Nedra Sims-Fears; GCI Housing & Land Use Coordinator, Jeremy Jacobson; and BVAs Kier Lococo, Janice Gonzales, and Emmanuel Neal.



Our Programs

A&BC serves Chicago's artmakers and arts and culture non-profit organizations with a wide range of budgets and tenure and without regard for their specific disciplines. We primarily serve emerging to mid-sized organizations with operating budgets under \$1.5M through these core programs

Business Volunteers for the Arts (BVA)[®]

A consulting program connecting skilled volunteers with arts and cultural organizations in need of operational and management support. Includes team-based projects or 1:1 On-Demand consulting.

Learning Labs

Professional development and skill-building workshops offering practical tools and insights about management, emerging issues, and leading research in the non-profit arts and culture sector.

On BOARD[®]

Unique board governance training program focused on the nonprofit sector's more significant pressing issues and ethical considerations.

The 77 Communities Initiative (77CI)

A research-driven realignment of A&BC resources to prioritize supporting creative enterprises in Chicago's disinvested communities. 77CI measures our success in increased creative production, philanthropic support, and readiness for and paths to capital services and procurement in communities that have been historically marginalized.

Community Annexes

The physical manifestation of what the 77CI is helping us to achieve, Annexes is an in-person program co-created with community artmakers and organizations in partnership with the Chicago Park District. Annexes was born out of two conditions endemic in our city:

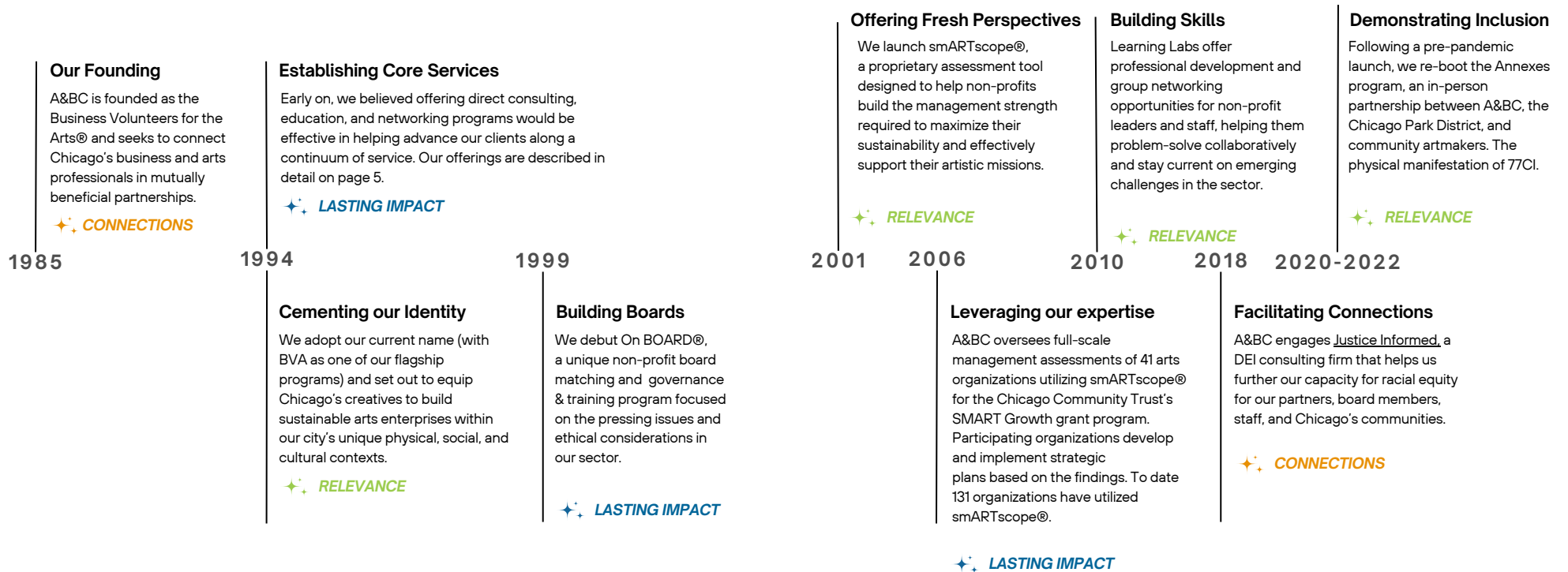
- A lack of capacity-building opportunities in the arts and culture non-profit sector for historically underserved Chicago communities, and
- The need to develop a diverse and equitable creative economy here.

smARTscope[®]

An A&BC-proprietary organizational assessment tool, smARTscope[®] gives arts & culture nonprofit organizations visibility into their management resiliency across seven dimensions:

- Concept Development and Strategic Planning
- Board Governance
- Income Generation
- Financial Management
- Audience Development and Marketing
- Staffing and Organizational Structure
- Facilities

✦ ✦ IMPACT REPORT KEY THEMES



Key Strengths

Connections

We draw together individuals who benefit personally and professionally from knowing one another and building community and camaraderie together.



On Board® workshop. (2018) Photo Courtesy of A&BC.

Lasting Impact

We build capacity in Chicago's cultural and business sectors and develop confident and capable arts leaders.

These anchor and legacy Chicago arts institutions received support from A&BC during their early days:

- Chicago Children's Museum
- Chicago Humanities Festival
- Chicago International Film Festival
- Chicago Sinfonietta
- Deeply Rooted Dance Theatre
- Garfield Park Conservatory
- Kalapriya Center for Indian Performing Arts
- Kartemquin Films
- National Museum of Mexican Art
- Old Town School of Folk Music
- Southside Community Arts Center

Relevance

Our expertise is meaningful and effective because it is specific to Chicago's creative economy, and provides tangible, action-oriented guidance to those we serve.



"The thing that I find most significant [about] BVA is that knowledgeable experts in their field [worked] with us hand in hand, side by side, not to create cookie cutter processes or outcomes, but to help us develop projects that would really benefit us as an organization. And while I received important information to guide the organization, I also had an opportunity to talk about some of the personal growth areas that I wanted to excel. I don't think we would be anywhere near as successful as we are today without the support we've received from [BVA]."

- Pierre Lockett, Founder and Executive Director of Forward Momentum Chicago

Studying our Impact

Since our founding in 1985, Arts & Business Council of Chicago (A&BC) has engaged with over 1,100 unique arts organizations and entrepreneur artmakers across our city's 77 culturally diverse communities to provide the business support and expertise they need to grow and thrive.

Beginning with our close partnership in 2018 with [Justice Informed](#), A&BC set out to understand the benefits we provide to Chicago's communities and arts organizations. This self-assessment would reach a significant milestone in 2022, with the fielding of the Impact Study described here.

As an arts service organization, A&BC supports cultural workers and creative enterprises by helping them build capacity on their own terms, to fulfill their missions and contribute, with our help, to an equitable creative sector and economy in Chicago. Here's what we mean by these terms:

Arts service organizations (ASO): ASOs provide essential support for arts organizations and individual artists in such areas as fundraising; advocacy; technical, management, and operations assistance; marketing, and collaborative learning. [The linked report](#) provides more information about ASOs and what they provide (see page 14).

Creative economy: The creative economy is an ecosystem of for-profit and non-profit creative industries, artists/artist workforce, educators, entrepreneurs, vendors, policymakers, and funders that produce and distribute creativity-based and art-based goods and services. Reference [Americans for the Arts](#) for more information.

We believe that our services provide effective capacity-building to independent artist-entrepreneurs and arts organizations through sequenced, equitable support as they build balanced, sustainable businesses and develop capable, engaged leaders. Furthermore, we believe ourselves to be sensitive to the cultural and organizational contexts that matter to these partners and artmakers. But without data and input from the people and organizations most directly affected by our work, we couldn't be sure. This study aims to gather that information in order to validate our assumptions and uncover new insights.

Creative sector: Multiple industries make up the creative sector. Individual artists and cultural workers can and do participate in single or multiple industries, but all are part of the creative sector, which itself sits within the creative economy as a pillar of a creative ecosystem alongside the consumers, educators, and resource managers. (Reference [Americans for the Arts](#) for more information.)

For example, the creative sector might include design as an industry pillar. Design would include sub-sectors such as industrial and graphic design. Individual creative workers hold creative occupations in those industries but may also find work in other sub-sectors.

Cultural workers: A cultural worker's technical or administrative labor is necessary for producing goods and/or providing services in cultural and creative industries.

The Impact Study was comprised of 14 preliminary stakeholder interviews followed by a broader survey sent to over 800 members of the same stakeholder groups, which were:

- Leaders and board members of arts organizations served by A&BC
- Past and current Business Volunteers for the Arts@
- Independent artist-entrepreneurs who have engaged with A&BC
- Individuals representing corporate supporters of A&BC

Stakeholder interviews: Key themes

We heard three things most prominently in the stakeholder interviews:

- A&BC builds connections and community, serving a vital role in bringing together groups who otherwise might not intersect. Artists, volunteers, and arts leaders all find this valuable and encouraged A&BC to lean into this strength.
- A&BC's programs and curricula are relevant. BVAs, artists, and arts leaders find value and resonance in A&BC's teaching of sound business practices (e.g., marketing and strategic planning) and see their necessity for a thriving, sustainable arts organization.
- Our efforts will have a lasting impact on Chicago's creative economy, both directly (through training new arts leaders)

and indirectly (as those leaders bring new capabilities and confidence back to their organizations). Respondents felt positively about A&BC's continued legacy of enhancing Arts and Culture's credibility in, and partnership with, Chicago's business community.

These themes shaped the design of the follow-up survey to a broader audience. to understand:

- How they viewed A&BC as an organization and how they came to be affiliated with us
- How our engagement with them may have helped bring about change or growth
- Our potential to serve them, or individuals/organizations like them, in the future
- Their open-ended recommendations to A&BC

As does the dramatic arc in any story worth telling, the Impact Study results both delighted and challenged us, presenting humbling reminders of where we can be better: in particular, advocating for racial equity and challenging existing notions of what an equitable creative economy in Chicago can and should be. Our surveyed stakeholders reminded us that evolutionary change must continue, just as it has been part of our story from the beginning.

A&BC's effectiveness: Top-line takeaways

Survey respondents were asked for candid feedback about our effectiveness against our core organizational objectives and the degree to which these key themes are felt by our broader stakeholder groups. We're grateful for and humbled by both the positives and the encouragement to do better.

Capacity-building: A&BC is transforming the way we bring capacity-building to life for our arts partners. Recognizing that we are a "work in progress" in this regard, we define capacity-building as "an intentional effort to improve an organization's effectiveness and sustainability, resulting in the organization successfully executing its mission. This is achieved by understanding and addressing the underlying patterns, beliefs, and cultures that drive the organization" – and, in doing so, creating and adapting tools appropriate for its mission, goals, and people.



A&BC Luncheon with keynote Xavier Ramey, Founder of Justice Informed, at Blue Cross Blue Shield. (2019). Photo Credit: Eric Shopshire



Equity: A&BC's process for transformation challenges the status quo of inequity across Chicago neighborhoods. In the values, beliefs, policies, and practices it embodies, our process affirms that every person:

- Has the right to a creative life, and
- Deserves representation in the development of arts policy, support of artists, nurturing of accessible, thriving venues for expression, and the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources.

This includes making a specific and strong commitment to speak and act in support of people who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion.

Among all respondents:

- **97%** agreed that we effectively grow knowledge and competence in their respective professional skills (for BVAs) or leadership skills (for arts leaders and artist-entrepreneurs).
- **65%** agreed that we effectively foster connections between the arts and business communities in Chicago.
- However, only **43%** felt we effectively communicate our role in championing policies and practices of racial equity.

A&BC's Impact

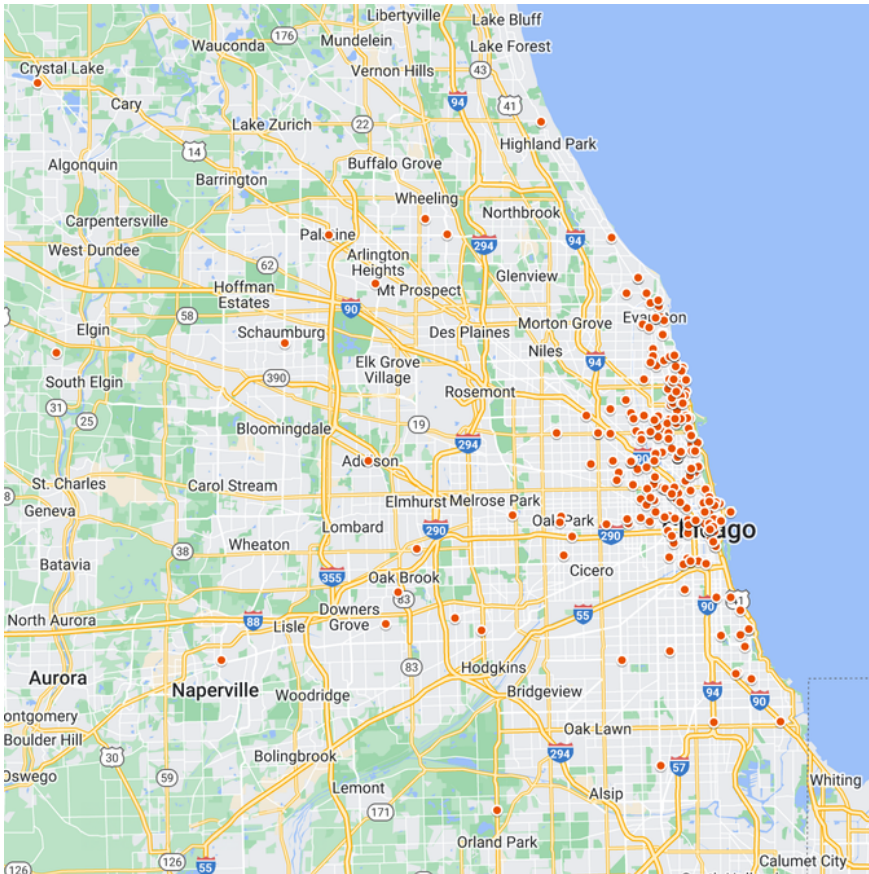


Image: Map of Chicago Metropolitan area with red pins indicating the arts organization A&BC has served since its establishment in 1985.

Since launching, A&BC has served more than 1,100 arts organizations, provided over \$14.5m in pro-bono consulting services, and trained and matched more than 1000 volunteers, including over 300 board members. This map helps to visualize some of those partnerships.

Since our founding, our work has included:

- Unique arts organizations served: 1,100+
- Board members trained and matched: 300+
- Volunteers trained and matched: 1,000+

Over the last four years (2020-2023):

- +29% (61% to 90%) engagement with leaders and staff of arts organizations across Chicago's 77 communities
- 2,200+ program program participants
- 130+ active participants in Business Volunteers for the Arts®
- A total of \$1,080,300 in pro bono services provided by Business Volunteers for the Arts®, benefitting 70+ unique arts organizations through strate.

Artist Entrepreneur Kitten Gray and musician from The Chicago Cuatro Orchestra Project. Summer Bash at the Bridgeport Arts Center. (2019)
Photo Credit: Pierre Clark.



Examples of Our Impact



Testimonials

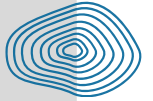


Facts

I learned a lot [of] new skills. I can offer organizations more than I thought I could. Most EDs are super-sharp people, so [I used to wonder:] 'Can I really help you?' I've gained confidence and learned that I can.

- Participant, Business Volunteers for the Arts®

In Bronzeville, we are supporting the development of the Southside Community Arts Center's strategic plan. SSCAC is the oldest African-American art center in the United States and is a Chicago Historic Landmark.



In Pilsen, we matched five new board members with High Concept Labs, which provides accessible residency programs for artists across disciplines. These board members contributed to increasing HCL's revenue by 79% between 2013- 2018



The fact that we were able to do this work with minimal cost, at a time when we were struggling financially and only beginning to secure some funding – it was invaluable to get this kind of quality help.

- Arts Organization Executive Director

[A&BC] has given me confidence. Boards have a lot of responsibility, and I feel more confident to use that influence. [I've taken my] first steps forward in becoming a more competent board member.

- Arts Organization Board Member

In Belmont Cragin, we provided direct sequenced capacity building to Aguijón Theater over an 18-month period, aiming to increase and diversify its revenue. Aguijón Theater fosters the diverse cultural excellence of Latine artists. Between 2012 and 2018, their revenue increased 64% and originated from a broader variety of sources.



In South Shore, we supported Muntu Dance Theatre—now celebrating its 51st year in operation—as one of the very first users of our smARTscope® organizational assessment. Muntu Dance Theatre performs authentic and progressive interpretations of contemporary and ancient African and African-American dance, music, and folklore.



Your guidance and programs are exceptional. You have provided a lot of useful advice and information to consider as [our organization] moves forward. I know [we] will continue to collaborate with the Arts and Business Council.

- Arts Organization Board Member



Call to Action



A&BC's Business Volunteers for the Arts® leading a Strategic Planning project at the South Side Community Art Center. (2023)

From left to right: Gaelen Pereira, Charles Jackson, Danyeah Green-Lemons, and Stefan Matti.



Natya Dance Theatre's board and staff at their retreat facilitated by Business Volunteers for the Arts®. (2023). From left to right: Chandu Vermuri, Krithika Rajagopalan, Shanthi Gaur, Hema Rajagopalan, Krithika Kumar, and Vikas Chandola.

Calls to Action

- If you're an arts and culture non-profit organization in Chicago that could benefit from our help in mapping out and achieving your goals for future growth, get in touch.
- If you're an independent or entrepreneurial creator of art and culture seeking to build your business know-how and expand your reach, let's talk.
- If you're a potential corporate partner who understands the value that a vibrant creative economy brings to Chicago and wishes to help protect it, reach out to us.
- If you're an individual interested in donating your time and expertise to support Arts and Culture non-profits in Chicago, consider joining Business Volunteers for the Arts®.
- If you're interested in making a financial investment in the creative economy by supporting A&BC's mission, consider becoming a donor.

Other Questions?

Send us an email at info@artsbiz-chicago.org

With appreciation, we acknowledge the contributions of Brendan Neuman, Stuart Barnes Jamieson, Matt Mason, and Jake Trussell in the creation of this report.

