

Executive Summary, Recommendations & Resources

Kansas Music Ecosystem

Initial Draft Report



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Introduction

Kansas Creative Arts Industries Commission (KCAIC) convened in Lawrence 40 key stakeholders from across the state’s music ecosystem. Guests included musicians, industry workers, nonprofits, community leaders, government representatives, and others. The day-long convening, informed and facilitated by four national music ecosystems experts, focused on the recovery and reenvisioning of music in Kansas.

In **Part One** of this report, we first synthesize notes from the convening and from additional conversations throughout our 2-day visit to Lawrence. This section distills what we observed to be key themes and insights from across all conversations.

In **Part Two**, the resources and recommendations section, we include both ideas from convening participants and insights based on our experience supporting and participating in music ecosystems worldwide. Because KCAIC is in the early stages of this work, consider these suggestions for potential paths forward, and project ideas to inspire future work.

The most critical task for the KCAIC at this point will continue to be its on-the-ground **listening and engagement** - with those present at the convening, as well as additional music ecosystems stakeholders and communities who were not.

We include links throughout this document and several appendices with important information. This report will be brief but contain many **signposts for forward movement**. We’ll also include an editable music ecosystem spreadsheet template to catalog and track, hopefully on a continually updated basis, members of Kansas’ music ecosystem.

Part One: Overview of the Convening

The convening was divided into two parts. The first included presentations by key stakeholders and outside experts to frame a conversation about advancing music ecosystems in Kansas. The second involved small group and individual conversations, focusing on the local realities of music and potential opportunities for collaboration and advancement.

Our team of facilitators was lead by Bryce Merrill, Director of Music Programs at the Bohemian Foundation in Fort Collins, Colorado and Jesse Elliott, Director of Creative Ecosystems for the Creative Arkansas Community Hub & Exchange (CACHE)

Session 1: The Role of the State of KS in Supporting Music as a Creative Industry

- Presenter: Peter Jasso, [Kansas Creative Arts Industries Commission](#)

This session framed KCAIC as a connector, convenor and catalyst for growth of music as an important creative industry in the state.

Session 2: How Music Ecosystems Work (and Don't)

- Bryce Merrill, [Bohemian Foundation](#)
- Jesse Elliott, [CACHE](#) (Creative Arkansas Community Hub & Exchange)

This session defined what music ecosystems are and how they work as artistic geographies, places defined by the interactions of music makers, music businesses, and music fans.

Overview of the Convening

Session 3: Current Trends and Observations in Kansas Music Ecosystems

Presenters:

- Adam and Jessie Hartke - [Wave](#) + [Riverfest](#)
- David Chavez - [Ingenuity Productions](#)
- Jacki Becker - [Up to Eleven](#)
- Marty Hillard - [Ebony Tusks](#)
- Inez Robinson - [LK Ultra](#) + [LAAND](#)

This session presented views from throughout the state on topics ranging from venues and their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to engaging diverse audiences in booking and promoting to activism and all-ages venues.

Session 4: Current Trends and Observations from Elsewhere

Presenters:

- Laura Wilson - [Bohemian Foundation](#) + [National Independent Venue Foundation](#)
- V. Marc Fort - [Texas Music Office](#)
- Jesse Elliott - [CACHE](#) (Creative Arkansas Community Hub & Exchange)

This session updated attendees on the work of NIVA and NIVF after the successful passing of the Save Our Stages act and launch of the Shuttered Venues Operators Grant. An overview of how the state of Texas supports music ecosystems, particularly in smaller communities, was also presented. Finally, several resources (included in the appendix) were presented for building sustainable and regionally connected music ecosystems.

Small Groups & Practical Networking

- Prompt #1: What stood out to you in the morning's presentations? What would you add and where would you like to dig in further?
- Prompt #2: What "blue sky" ideas do you have for projects, programs, collaborations, and so on to advance Kansas music ecosystems?
- Practical Networking: Based on what you just heard, introduce yourself to at least three different people that you could help right now, in this room, in small or big ways, with their blue sky ideas.

Groups were intentionally selected to represent as many different occupations and backgrounds as possible, and a facilitator was present at each table. The final prompt encouraged unfacilitated individual and small group conversations.



Part Two: Key Themes, Observations, and Recommendations

Several key themes emerged from the conversations. We've organized these by strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The point of this categorization is to help identify potential action points depending on the observed needs of Kansas music ecosystems. It's worth noting, additionally, that many of these themes are present in music ecosystems all over the world, regardless of size. What will be unique to Kansas is the relevance of the action items to local music realities.



Strengths

- Collaboration Over Competition
- All-Ages Infrastructure
- Music Advocacy and Impact

Weaknesses

- Weak Ties with Government
- Minimal Contributed Revenue Directed to Kansas Music



Opportunities

- Widespread Willingness to Partner
- Historic Moment of Opportunity in Public Health & Racial Justice
- Robust Demonstration of the Value of Music

Threats

- Safety in Live Venues (Social, Emotional & Physical)
- The Local + Global Economics of Being a Musician



Strengths

#1 Collaboration Over Competition:

Kansas largely fosters collaborative music ecosystems. Collaboration within them is common, but also between different ones statewide.

Observation

Music ecosystems thrive when there is regular economic and creative exchange between different ecosystems (e.g. Lawrence and Kansas City or Wichita). Music ecosystems transcend political boundaries (cities, states, etc.) and create cultural regions, where exchange and interaction is common. For economic purposes, thinking of music ecosystems from a regional economic development lens is a good start. Given the global nature of music--both as commerce and art--it is critical to always think about both the local and global dynamics of music ecosystems.

Recommendations

Launch and maintain music ecosystem meet-ups and/or happy hours. Move them around the state or foster city/region specific-ones. See the [City of Seattle's former music/film/interactive happy hour](#), currently oriented more broadly to the creative industries. See also the [Balanced Breakfast](#) model: Convene a working group to explore her Kansas Music Day idea. Consider developing something that showcases Kansas music and venues, but also connects communities with regular and robust creative dialogue.

Consider something like the Colorado Creative Industries' supported [Detour](#) program. Explore a "heartland" collaborative with state and regional partners, such as Colorado, Oklahoma, and Tulsa. [Folk Alliance International](#) (based in Kansas City) would be a good partner to explore artist exchanges and other collaborations.

#2 All-Ages Infrastructure:

There's a robust (alcohol-free) DIY and All-Ages scene.

Observation

Music ecosystems are often bifurcated by alcohol: there are venues, for example, that sell alcohol and thus cater to 21+ musicians and there are those that don't and cater to all-ages (typically meaning 14-22). These all ages scenes are often "off the grid" or DIY, and their vitality comes from this but so too can their precariousness. House shows, for example, are often places of the most vibrant creativity; they're also places where law enforcement focus resources and, in some cases, tragic results come from a lack of safety oversight.

The paradox of these scenes is that they are at once vital and again ignored by people other than those participating in them. We have also found that youth-related projects are the easiest to fund, but not always the easiest to implement.

Recommendations

Research formally supported DIY/All Ages music projects like the [Vera Project](#), [Sound Off](#), [Sonic Spotlight](#), [Big Heavy World](#), and others to determine if there's an opportunity for something similar in KS. These projects range from venues to programs. These projects and orgs are supported by philanthropy, government and private funders, and generate earned revenue.

If there's traction in this space, consider convening an "all ages advisory group" to help develop recommendations. Also look to partners like library districts, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other community centers--particularly those that serve marginalized youth--to develop this work. The work of [Take Note Colorado](#) could also be relevant. The current [Sound + Vision](#) studio in the Lawrence public library is another excellent asset to build upon.

#3 Music Advocacy and Impact:

Vocal and successful advocates for KS music ecosystem are working on a number of fronts (e.g. NIVA, Latinx audience development, social and political impact).

Observation

Music ecosystems are impacted by non-musical, external forces such as global economic disturbances, pandemics, cultural and political shifts, and so on. Music has always responded to these forces, and contemporary musicians are finding new, creative and impactful ways to make a difference with music.

Examples range from songwriting as therapy for veterans with PTSD to music listening as an interactive treatment for people suffering from dementia. More and more music ecosystem members are also using their voices and platforms to advocate for their ecosystems and livelihoods (see [NIVA](#)).

Recommendations

Continuing to convene and connect music ecosystems will foster advocacy for music ecosystems; for other impacts, explore existing projects, like those mentioned by Enrique Chi ([Making Movies](#)) or Marty Hillard. Some higher profile projects directed at projects with broad-scale support could be impactful.

Also look at organizations and individuals using music to direct positive outcomes for youth. See [Youth on Record](#) in Denver, for example, of the larger field of Creative Youth Development. Also look at the Spencer Museum of Art's [Assistant Curator for Public Practice](#) role for an interesting model of art/music led community development.

Weaknesses

#1 Weak Ties with Government:

Music workers and organizations have generally not been connected with the government sector agencies and individuals whose partnerships would benefit both sides, and therefore the public at large.

Observation

More often than not, governmental organizations do little to directly engage with or support foundational elements of music ecosystems (music businesses and musicians). Government's impact is typically felt through unfriendly music policies, such as harshly enforced local sound ordinances. The "music cities" movement has shown, however, that government and music can work together to create positive outcomes for all community members. A first step in this work is often a music commission or advisory board, which represents voices from all elements of an ecosystem. This first level of relationship building often begins informally (e.g. the 2010-2015 Denver Music Task Force) and formalizes when its value is proven (e.g. the current [Denver Music Advisory Panel](#) convened formally by the City of Denver). The driving factor for building these relationships is often an "ask," but they are more successful and sustainable if they are truly relationship building. Likewise, commissions and councils also quickly fade if there's no actionable work to be directed.

Recommendations

Research the literature on establishing music commissions and working groups and consider building on this convening by establishing a network of regional music advisory groups that KCAIC can convene and facilitate. Ensure diverse participation and consider using these groups to drive a project, such as a Kansas Music Day concept or another music ecosystems convening. Denver's advisory board is the official review panel for the [Denver Music Advancement Fund](#) grant program, demonstrating another productive role of these groups. If developing music friendly state and local policies is desired, consider engaging with the [Center for Music Ecosystems](#) on developing music policy platforms. CME could also do an audit of state and local policies to identify opportunities for revisions or additions.

#2 Minimal Contributed Revenue Directed to Kansas Music

Observation

Kansas music ecosystems are not alone in this. Earned income is the revenue driver in music ecosystems--this is true even in communities with significant contributed income flowing to music ecosystems. They are commercially-oriented art communities. The strength of this is the inherent entrepreneurialism of music ecosystems (for examples see [Michael Seman](#)'s work on entrepreneurialism in punk and all ages scenes). The downside, as we know, are the deep flaws in the market economy of commercial music.

Music ecosystems globally have experimented with providing contributed revenue (e.g. grants) to music ecosystems: [Creative Career Advancement Grants](#) from Colorado Creative Industries can be used by musicians and music-based businesses for professional development reasons; venue improvement loan programs in Austin have helped music venues with sound proofing and upgrades to limit noise complaints (better sound=less noise).

Again in the youth music spaces, multi-media organizations like [Spyhop](#) in Salt Lake City and [Vera Project](#) in Seattle receive considerable contributed revenue from foundations, which in turn supports paying musicians for performances, teaching, and other creative activities. Successful investments of contributed revenue should not deflate the entrepreneurial spirit of music ecosystems but act as investments for greater artistic, social and cultural returns.

Weaknesses 2/2

Recommendations

Review KCAIC and, where applicable, existing grant programs aimed at the cultural sector for fit with music ecosystem goals. CCI's career advancement grant program was not created for music, but marketed more broadly to music ecosystems statewide. Look closely at performing arts touring grant options, as these can often support music ecosystems.

Consider a longer engagement and listening period before launching any specific granting program. Also continue to engage with corporate and philanthropic partners, even those who don't typically support the arts, to explore possible relationships. [Arts in Society](#) in Colorado, for example, is a funder collaborative that includes a health foundation and funds, among other artforms, music and social impact work. Unrestricted grants directly to individuals presents numerous challenges, and we are not aware of a successful model. [Black Fret](#) is an emerging national organization that has the most promising model of driving contributed revenue to individual artists.

Of course, the Shuttered Venues Operator Grants represent the largest contributed revenue investment in music ecosystems throughout the United States. Re-energize the Kansas Venues Coalition to support their advocacy efforts, or figure out if a KS member chapter of NIVA is emergent.



The Lawrence Songbook showcase at Liberty Hall / Photo by Fally Afani

Opportunities

#1 Genuine and Widespread Willingness to Partner

Observation

Many participants from distinct industry sectors expressed a willingness and interest in partnering on future opportunities. Several specific instances identified needs that could be fulfilled from partners within the convening participants. It was easy to imagine commercial ventures such as [The Bottleneck](#) renovation partnering with non-profit organizations such as [Lawrence Public Library](#) or non-commercial radio stations to the benefit of both the essential industry and the wider music ecosystem.

Recommendations

KCAIC can play a leading role in convening and providing support for efforts to bring together partners in cross-sector efforts. The Bottleneck-adjacent development project would be a prime one to explore.



#2 Historic Moment of Opportunity: Public Health and Racial Justice

Observation

Several times during the day participants expressed that these are unique times that present opportunities to rethink how music ecosystems do and do not work in Kansas. Importantly, participants noted that both the COVID-19 health pandemic and pandemic of systemic racism should be viewed as points for critical reflection.

Recommendations

This is a general finding from the convening to which it is hard to put specific recommendations. We strongly recommend thinking through issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) in any and all programming or initiatives launched. Recall that 2020 the music industry was grappling with the #metoo movement, so rethinking the social implications of all music work is likely here to stay. The health pandemic also urges us to look at music through the lens of resiliency. How resilient are our music ecosystems when disasters strike?

[Majestic Collaborations](#) in Denver is doing some of the most interesting work around the globe focusing on the intersection of the arts (and music) and resilience. For example, they're training music festival staff to become disaster first-responders, as the skill sets for each (safety and security, water and power, communications and crowd control) are similar. Resiliency, like DEIA, should be a constant in any music ecosystem work--anywhere.

#3 Robust Demonstration of the Value of Music

Observation

There was a rich conversation in the morning session about the importance of demonstrating both the economic value of music to Kansas but also its additional values. There's reliable scientific literature documenting the individual, social, economic, cultural, political, and even environmental benefits of music. There's an emerging body of work, led largely by Sound Diplomacy, on exactly how these values are created in local music ecosystems.

Recommendations

Consider taking advantage of KCAIC's position in state government to use existing data and resources to conduct a baseline economic impact study. This would not need to be expansive and highly customized, as these are most often used as advocacy tools. If a more robust study was prioritized, consider vendors such as [Sound Diplomacy](#), [Responsible Hospitality Institute](#), Dr. Michael Seman, among others.

A longer-term approach would be to cultivate relationships with colleges and universities to build up the research capacity of the state's music ecosystems. Connect with faculty at KU, UMKC and other colleges and universities to explore potential research partnerships.

Threats

#1 Safety in Live Venues (Social, Emotional, and Physical)

Observation

Participants remarked in big and small group settings on the challenges of systemic social issues related to physical safety in live music venues. From the #metoo movement that confronted the music industry, we also know that gender dynamics, including physical and emotional abuse, as well as institutional discrimination, are widespread in music.

Participants also discussed public health safety and the operational implications for venues of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. NIVA and REVS ([Reopen Every Venue Safely](#)) have produced a number of health safety guidelines documents to support the public health components. Others in the venues space, like the City of Los Angeles, are convening around other safety and venues issues, but this is an emerging field.



"Creating safe, all inclusive, all-ages spaces centered on the music and performers has to be a priority for all in the industry."

Recommendations

Support the work of the Kansas Venues Coalition and their collaborations with NIVA and NIVF. Convene Kansas venue owners and staff regularly to address safety issues. Engage with the DIY/All Ages venues, which are often informal (aka house shows), and discuss ways to promote safer shows in those environments.

#2 The Local + Global Economics of Being a Musician

Observation

As is usual in these convenings, many articulated the deeply flawed economics of the music industry as a core challenge to Kansas music ecosystems. Musicians rarely achieve middle class status and purchase homes; those that do work for years to accomplish even a modicum of financial stability. Venues also remarked on the extremely tight margins in live music, margins that are even more problematic with reduced venue capacities and frequent cancelations due to COVID. However, as some musicians also noted, there are many non-financial benefits to participating in music, and sometimes those are not always acknowledged. Regardless, working in the commercial music world has high risks, often low rewards, and making it big is more rare than it seems.



Kawehi / Photo by Fally Afani

Threats 2/2

Recommendations

We have not seen a broadly successful model of directly addressing the wage challenges of the music industry (e.g. subsidizing live performances). Two projects, however, should be considered.

First, is [Black Fret](#), a national organization that is cultivating charitable giving to commercial musicians. They are expanding nationally and looking at a regional or statewide effort in Colorado that could create a model for Kansas. Also look at organizations like [Gener8tor](#), [ZooLabs](#), and [Center for Cultural Innovation](#) for alternative investment models for economic development in music.

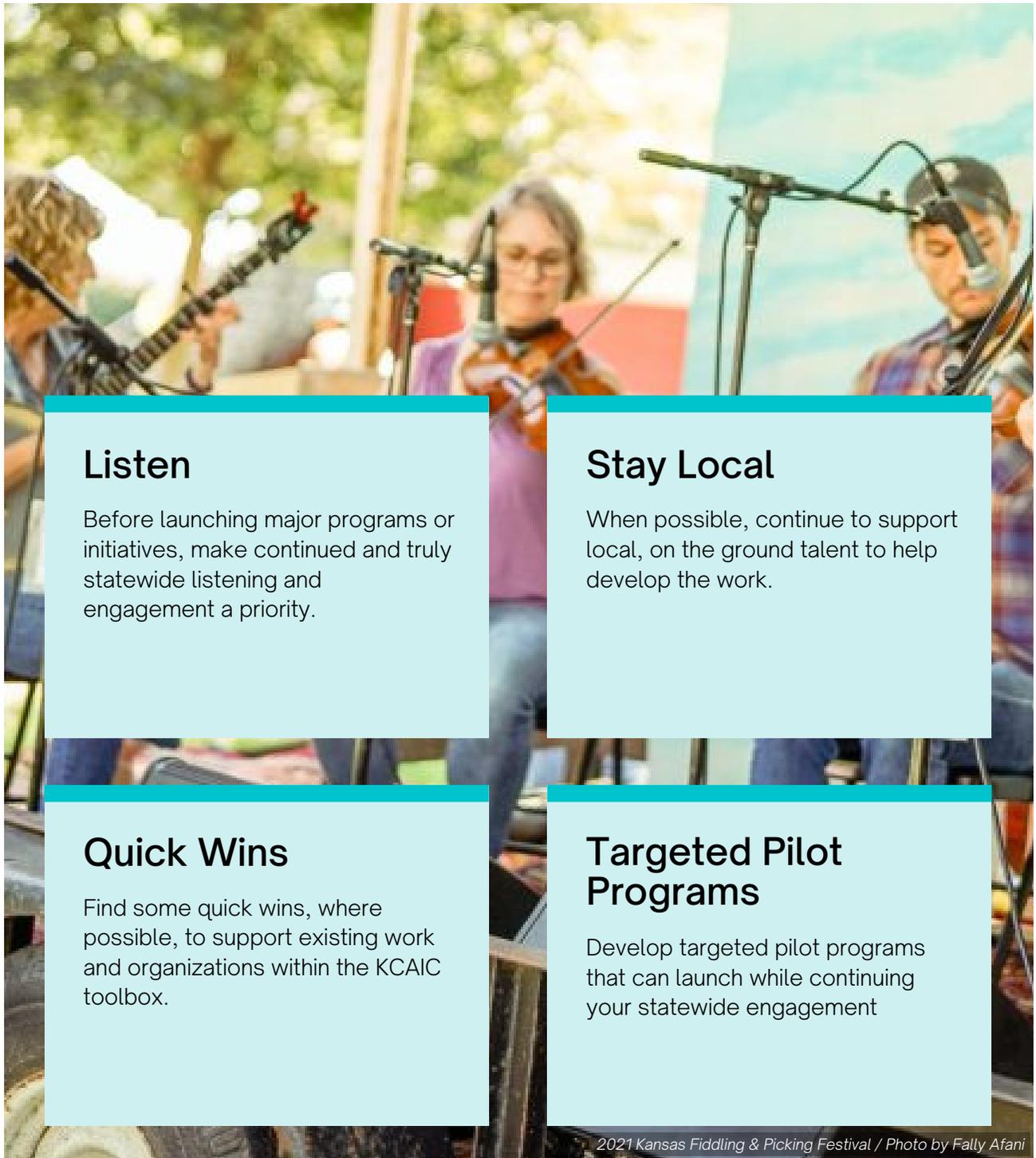
Next, organizations like the [Austin Music Foundation](#) and the [Health Alliance for Austin Musicians](#) (HAAM) address the lack of social safety nets, particularly around health care, for the music community. In Fort Collins, a local musician's association is partnering with the nonprofit [Music Minds Matter](#) and the national organization [MusiCares](#) to address mental health challenges among local musicians.

There are numerous examples of small and large projects that address the general lack of safety support structures in music and many are relevant to Kansas. Some will take considerable resources to develop and others, like Music Minds Matter, could take hold quickly.

Finally, before creating new social services for musicians, look toward existing social service partners who could expand their support for musicians and music workers simply based on their income levels. SNAP food benefits, for example, are accessible to music and creative workers. Most of these workers just aren't aware of how to access them or cannot get past the stigma of needing help.

General Reflections Overview

We recognize that KCAIC is in the early stages of engagement and strategy development for Kansas music ecosystems. As such, here are a few things to consider in this early stage of strategy development:



Listen

Before launching major programs or initiatives, make continued and truly statewide listening and engagement a priority.

Stay Local

When possible, continue to support local, on the ground talent to help develop the work.

Quick Wins

Find some quick wins, where possible, to support existing work and organizations within the KCAIC toolbox.

Targeted Pilot Programs

Develop targeted pilot programs that can launch while continuing your statewide engagement

2021 Kansas Fiddling & Picking Festival / Photo by Fally Afani

General Reflections: #1 Listen

Before launching major programs or initiatives, make continued and truly statewide listening and engagement a priority.



The Kansas Music Ecosystem convening is part of a wider strategic plan under development with input from key members across the music, arts and entertainment sectors.

Consider a variety of listening strategies targeted to different crucial stakeholder demographics: convenings, happy hours, focus groups, individual conversations, and surveys all lend huge insight, especially when cross-referenced with each other.

You'll never be done with this work, and continuing it will be key to any public sector-led work.

General Reflections: #2 Stay Local

When possible, continue to support local, on the ground talent to help develop the work.

Outside consultants can add depth or context, but the hardest and most lasting work will be done by people on the ground. It goes without saying that drawing from the existing talent pool in Kansas creative ecosystems is key here.

Stakeholders investing in music ecosystems/cities work benefit most when they foster and support local talent to develop, implement and maintain strategic support.



General Reflections: #3 Quick Wins

Find some quick wins, where possible, to support existing work and organizations within the KCAIC toolbox.

For example, if KCAIC has a mechanism to support performing arts touring, consider how to expand participation by musicians and presenters beyond the nonprofit sector.

Don't pass up opportunities to invest small dollars in your ecosystems: this is a deeply entrepreneurial group that can generate significant returns with limited investments. A performance grant of \$500-1000 may not mean much to some, but to those most active in your ecosystems, that amount is substantial.



Kansas Touring Roster

KCAIC maintains an approved Touring Roster of Kansas-based touring companies and artists. Touring artists offer public performances as well as optional services that may include workshops, education components, residencies or short performances.

General Reflections: #4 Targeted Pilot Programs

Develop targeted pilot programs that can launch while continuing your statewide engagement.

Educational and all-ages elements of music ecosystems are often easiest to support, because they're either run by grant-eligible nonprofits or can develop partnerships with nonprofit providers. Libraries and all ages/DIY groups can create partnerships, for example, that are easy to support.

Beyond funding, consider your existing policies—including how and to whom you make grants—could be made more “music friendly.” Sometimes what’s most valuable is small changes to policies that only cost staff time and political capital.



Lawrence All-Ages Noise Destination (LAAND) is non-profit co-op creating an open, supportive, and culturally vibrant space to foster a DIT (do-it-together) community in Lawrence, KS

Participant Ideas

Taken directly from workshop notes

Department of Music:
WPA-style unit to employ
musicians

Organize: working
together - unionize -
modernize & digitize

50% representation of
women in the industry: across
the board, addressing issues
that make women drop out of
music

Audience education
program: artists connected
through value standards

Network across
region to partner
artists for touring

Unemployment system for
artists: French program for
reference based on hours of
public creative work

Umbrella org for all other
orgs: activate/coordinate
ppl already serving on
boards, etc

Mentorship groups
focused on young
people

Audience development:
media support for local
artists, elevate local
artists within media

Promoters exchanging
shows: bring more artists
from afar, packaged as a
group

Mobile merch shop:
company takes care of
organizing, inventory, etc

Live music specific income
sources for artists from
local government

Identifying and
celebrating Kansas
brand of strong local
(underground) scene

More operational
support: less project
specific grants

Brunch shows: morning
focus for live music

Festival mentorship:
convening for organizers
to share best practices,
etc.

Kansas Music
Week: celebrating
venues

More musicians in govt.
bring proactive about
advocacy

% for art: support for
orgs and organizers of
public art

Government or civic
liaison to assist,
translate, facilitate
local laws & policies

Stop loss program:
insurance program for
shows to encourage less
market-driven booking,
more experimental shows

Resources: National Network

Touring and engaging with other music ecosystems, particularly those with obvious connections (regional) or in similar approaches to development (e.g. statewide) will be helpful.

Below are a few communities we recommend touring and/or connecting with. We are happy to facilitate introductions wherever helpful:

- Northwest Arkansas: Fayetteville, Bentonville, Springdale, Rogers
- Macon, GA
- Boise, ID
- Fort Collins, CO
- Tulsa, OK
- Oklahoma City, OK
- Texas's [Music Friendly Communities](#) initiative (via guest V. Marc Fort)

There are a number of consultants in the music cities/music ecosystems space who could be helpful at some point. Below are a few resources or connections to consider:

- Shain Shapiro ([Center for Music Ecosystems](#)) - music policy expert. He also specializes in research and strategy development.
- Michael Bracy ([Music Policy Forum](#) + [Reopen Every Venue Safely](#)) - expert on federal cultural and music policy.
- Laura Wilson ([Bohemian Foundation](#) + [National Independent Venue Foundation](#)) - emergin expert in venue advocacy, safety, and live workforce development.
- Margaret Hunt ([Colorado Creative Industries](#)) - significant experience developing and advocating for statewide music ecosystems.
- Ryan Stubbs ([National Assembly of State Arts Agencies](#)) - with a different lens, experience developing and advocating for statewide music ecosystems.
- V. Marc Fort ([Texas Music Office](#)) - attended KS convening and has experience in music cities marketing and statewide music community development.

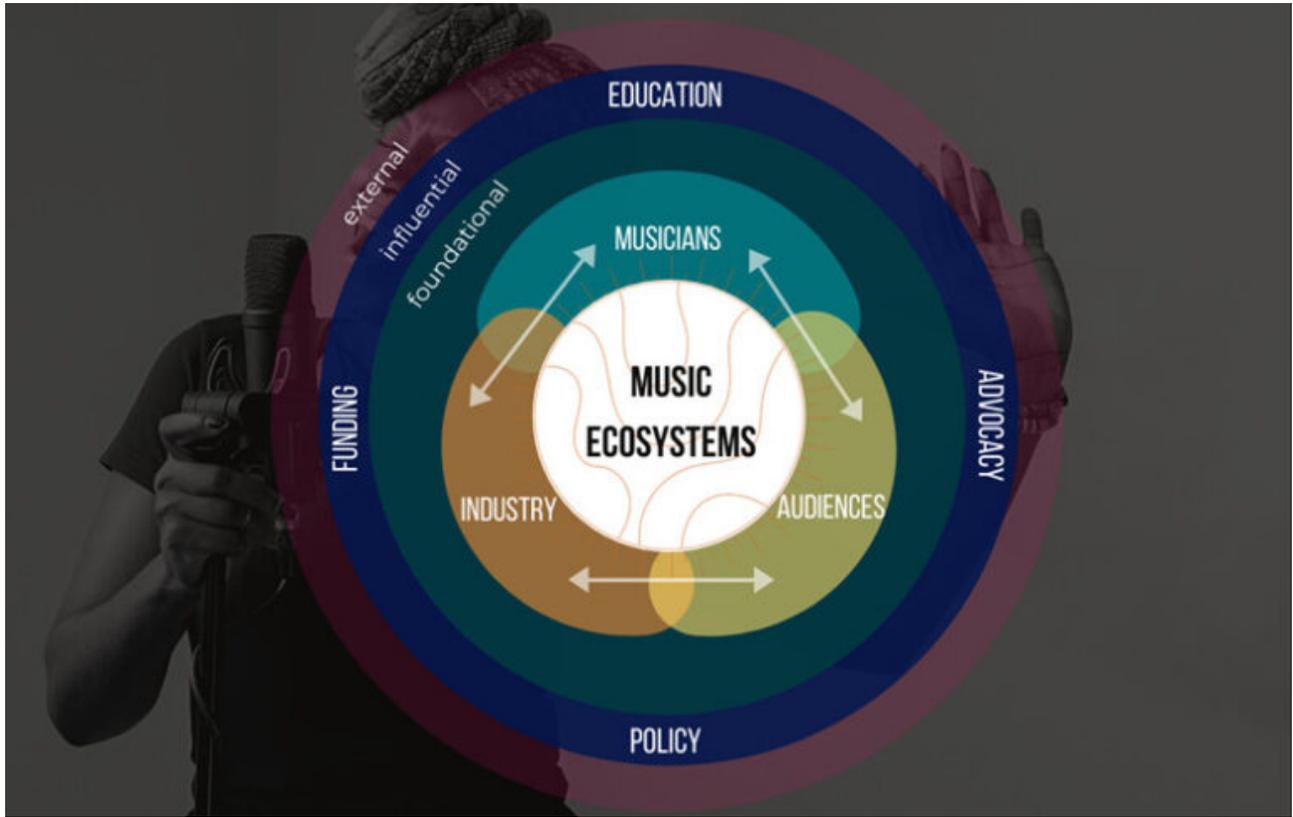
Resources (continued)

Below are also a number of resources that were mentioned during the convening:

- Touring and Presenting Organizations
 - [Mid-America Arts Alliance](#)
 - [WESTAF](#)
 - [South Arts](#)
- [Artist Campaign School](#) (national nonprofit trains artists to hold elected office)
- [Future of Music Coalition](#) (especially [revenue streams project](#))
- [How Music Works](#) (by David Byrne)
- [Music Policy Forum](#) (Michael Bracy)
- [Water and Music](#) (Cherie Hu)
- [Center for Cultural Innovation](#) (Angie Kim)
- [Mastering of a Music City](#) (Amy Terrill)
- [Center for Music Ecosystems](#) (Shain Shapiro)
- [Sound Diplomacy](#) (Kate Durio)
- [The Music District](#) (Bryce Merrill)
- [CACHE](#) (Jesse Elliott)
- [Bohemian Foundation](#) (Bryce Merrill)
- [George F Kaiser Foundation](#)
- [National Independent Venue Association and Foundation](#) (Laura Wilson)



Making Movies / Photo by Fally Afani



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 Local Music

We thank you for
 your interest in
 supporting the
 Kansas music
 ecosystem.

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