



NEWS RELEASE

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MPAC board votes to ‘wind down’ organization in flagging economy

Foundations plan to redirect grant funds to arts and culture organizations

PHOENIX—Confronted with difficult economic times, for itself and the arts and culture organizations it was formed to support, the Metro Phoenix Partnership for Arts and Culture (MPAC) board of directors has voted to cease the nonprofit organization’s staffing and programmatic operations. MPAC will support the plan of its major funders to use remaining grants funds to directly assist arts and culture organizations.

For five years, MPAC has led the state in understanding the vital connection between the creative community and economic development. Formed in 2004 by grants from the Flinn Foundation and Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, MPAC has worked to promote a vibrant creative community in Maricopa County and harness arts and culture as an economic driver. The foundations supported the nonprofit organization with the goal of it achieving self-sufficiency by the conclusion of the grants, scheduled for early 2011.

The recession challenged MPAC’s economic viability and fundraising efforts, as it has done to arts and culture organizations across the nation. It ultimately thwarted plans to place a revenue-generating initiative for arts and culture on the statewide ballot—a strategy that has been successful in other major metropolitan areas during better economic times.

“Rather than continue to consume valuable grant monies, the board made the decision to wind down the organization and support the foundations’ plans to use the remaining grant funds to support arts and culture organizations directly,” said Sandra Werthman, who chairs the MPAC board of directors.

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“MPAC has made substantial progress in setting the framework for arts and culture to thrive from an economic perspective in the Phoenix area,” said Myra Millinger, MPAC president and CEO. “We just could not ignore the fiscal realities that jeopardize MPAC’s long-term existence.”

The Flinn Foundation and Piper Trust have agreed to work together in fashioning a one-time arts and culture initiative with the remaining grant funds. Plans will be announced once program details are decided in upcoming weeks.

“Like many businesses in our state, MPAC and its important work has been undermined by the perfect economic storm,” said Judy Mohraz, president and CEO of the Piper Trust. “We have worked with MPAC and have agreed that during these recessionary times, the remaining grant funds should be directed to arts and cultural organizations that are struggling to survive.”

Jack Jewett, Flinn Foundation president and CEO, agreed that redirecting the funds is an act of responsible stewardship and praised the MPAC board for its sacrificial decision. “In better economic times, MPAC would thrive and we believe would expand its mission to help to engineer a more prominent role for arts and culture in the local economy.”

MPAC was launched at the recommendation of the Maricopa Regional Arts and Culture Task Force, a panel of leaders from the corporate, arts, public, educational, and philanthropic sectors that in 2004 issued a blueprint for positioning arts and culture as a vital component of the region's economic growth.

MPAC has had three primary goals: to position the creative sector as an integral component of the regional economy; to change perceptions of the region’s creative vitality by leveraging its creative assets; and to increase funding for arts and culture.

The final goal proved to be formidable. MPAC spun off an organization to launch a statewide ballot-initiative campaign to increase the state sales tax by one-tenth of a percent, generating up to \$100 million annually for arts and culture. While initial polling showed strong voter support for the tax, the most recent polls reflected the recession impact on voters as support slipped significantly. As a result, the group decided to postpone initiative plans until 2012.

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MPAC officials are exploring options with other organizations to continue development and execution of existing programs, such as CALA (Celebración Artística de las Américas), which encourages cultural understanding between people of the Americas through the arts, and Metro Phoenix DNA, a branding initiative to elevate the region's cultural assets and identity.

About MPAC (www.mpacarts.org): MPAC is a non-profit, regional organization founded in 2004 based on the conviction that a vibrant and sustainable creative sector is fundamental to the region's ability to compete for talent and industry in a highly competitive global marketplace.

About Flinn (www.flinn.org): The Flinn Foundation is a Phoenix-based, private, nonprofit philanthropic endowment established by Dr. and Mrs. Robert S. Flinn in 1965 with the mission of improving the quality of life in Arizona. The nonprofit philanthropy supports the advancement of Arizona's bioscience sector, the Flinn Scholars Program, and MPAC.

About Piper (www.pipertrust.org): The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust is a private independent foundation dedicated to honoring Virginia Galvin Piper's philanthropic commitment to changing lives and strengthening community in Maricopa County. By investing in nonprofits and encouraging strategic planning for the future, Piper Trust strives to make Greater Phoenix a stronger, more nurturing and vibrant community. Piper Trust focuses on healthcare and medical research, children, older adults, arts and culture, education and religious organizations.

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