SLC Arts
Creative Spirit
Community Arts Center

Business Plan

Project Location: 6-8 Raymond St, Potsdam, NY 13676

St. Lawrence County Arts Council, Inc. (SLC Arts)
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Organization Overview

The arts transform people and communities every day. St. Lawrence County Arts Council, Inc. (SLC Arts) is a nonprofit organization that strives to provide Local Art for Everyone. The organization started in 1972 as the Arts and Humanities Council of the St. Lawrence Valley, reincorporated in 1989 as the Tri-County Arts Council and amended in 1999 to the St. Lawrence County Arts Council. Over our nearly 50 year history, we have continued to strive to make the arts a pillar of our North Country community.

SLC Arts’ mission is to enrich the vibrancy of the North Country community by cultivating arts appreciation and inspiring creative expression. In an effort to enrich the lives of the people who live here while encouraging economic development and tourism, SLC Arts brings the arts to the community, creates and supports arts initiatives in St. Lawrence County and the surrounding region, and supports entrepreneurs in the arts field. Our multifaceted programs bring our region together, attract new people to the area, and assist local artists working across all arts disciplines.

Our office is located in Potsdam, NY, and we primarily serve St. Lawrence County by offering exhibits, classes, performances, and publications, and organizing community festivals and cultural events. SLC Arts is the chosen NYSCA State & Local Partnerships Decentralization Grant Partner for St. Lawrence, Jefferson and Lewis Counties. We distribute over $60,000 in state funds for public art projects, teaching artists, or community arts programming and offer consulting support to artists and community organizers.

SLC Arts is governed by an Executive Director and a Board of Directors who bring their diverse perspectives together each month to analyze finances, strategize about programs, and provide overall accountability for the organization. SLC Arts is funded by public and private contributions and supported by in-kind donations and volunteers from our community. We currently have one full-time director, one full-time and four part-time employees. By the
completion of the final phase of development, we intend to increase our staffing to four full-time employees, four part-time employees as well as provide opportunities for internships for local university students and community volunteers. This will improve our capacity to create meaningful programs, effective outreach, and community engagement.

Our vision is to position ourselves as the leading agency of the arts industry, and grow as a community arts resource and advocate. We know that all forms of art can become a community engagement and economic development catalyst, having the full potential to transform the North Country region into a collection of vibrant and attractive communities.
Project Overview

Creative Spirit Community Arts Center

SLC Arts is purchasing 6-8 Raymond St, an 11,283 square foot, two storefront plus basement building in downtown Potsdam that adjoins directly to the North Country Children’s Museum. The building currently houses a thrift store, up until recently The Tile Co, a tile retail store, and the Creative Spirit Katya Greer Memorial Art Gallery, built by the late owner of the Tile Co, Otto Czerepak. Otto was an inspirational community member who believed in the value of the arts. He set up the Creative Spirit Art Gallery in the basement of his building when he saw a need for a gallery and performance space for local artists. He and his business partner Laura Passmore invested time and money to showcase talented artists work throughout the building by creating an intricate mosaic tile facade on the front of the building, inviting muralists to paint expansive murals along the entire exterior of the building, installing tile flooring throughout the first floor of The Tile Co and another intricate mosaic tile floor in the gallery space in the basement. It is our intention to keep the history of the building and the memory of Otto in this space that he always dreamed would be a community arts center. We plan to organize the renovation of the 7,122 sq ft space that we will occupy in two phases over two years.

The new Arts Center will offer the community a central place for the arts in the greater North Country region. While there are some state of the art facilities available across our four neighboring college campuses, our region lacks facilities available to community members. SLC Arts has found a home in Potsdam since its inception in 1972, and we agree that Potsdam is the center of arts and culture in the region. We find that the arts offer people from all walks of life the crucial opportunity to explore creative channels, communicate innovatively and learn to value individual expression. As every part of our world evolves, the arts continue to create harmony out of dissonance, light among shadows, unity despite strife. We see that our work of supporting and creating arts initiatives in the North Country provides a transformative function in community and economic development. We are continually encouraged when
we bring the community together to explore creativity in all possible ways. We will create a welcoming sense of place throughout Potsdam and the North Country region.

We will renovate and occupy the 6 Raymond St storefront, as well as the basement of 8 Raymond St, which includes the existing gallery. The upstairs of the space will include a retail store/art gallery, class/conference room, and office spaces. The downstairs will include the existing art gallery with upgrades, a performing arts wing with dance/music rehearsal room and private practice room, and a visual arts wing with an open concept makers’ space, offering specialized equipment including drawing tables, photography lighting, ceramics wheels, and print-making equipment for artists and students. Each individual programmed space is one that is not currently available to the public in our region.
Project Plan

Creative Spirit
Community Arts Center

6-8 Raymond St, Potsdam NY 13676

Acquisition Cost: $200,000
Estimated Renovation Cost: $577,800

The construction will include various accessibility updates including adding a ramp into the thrift store, a three-stop elevator to the basement and thrift store, and multiple ADA-compliant restroom facilities. We will also need to construct additional restroom facilities and interior walls, install windows for natural light in key areas, and renovate the first floor dropped ceilings and existing walls. We will also create a unique pocket park at our back entrance that is currently a run-down one-car parking garage - this exit will also comply with code requirements. The space does not require structural renovations.

Our bold, ambitious, revitalizing plan requires leadership that planning for the long-term growth for the organization. We will develop an endowment for building maintenance costs, and we will run a growth campaign to secure local support for the project and our organization. We anticipate growing our staff from two full time and four part time employees to four full time and four part time employees over the next three years. This growth will be supported by major donations, grants, and increased operating income from the store, space rental and program income. In 2021, we will increase the outreach and program coordinator positions to full time. Upon completion of phase 1, we will hire a full time store manager/volunteer coordinator to manage the store and recruit, train and manage volunteers to staff the store. Upon completion of phase 2, we will hire a part time service coordinator to manage our refreshments stations. We anticipate we will complete the project in Fall 2022.
Conceptual Floorplan
Phase 1

6 Raymond Upstairs and Exterior

Entry Retail Store and Gallery Space

Our retail store at the front of the building will offer local artists, crafters, and producers a brick and mortar opportunity to sell their work and wares, including original artwork, art prints, jewelry, greeting cards, musical recordings, and more. We will also carry professional art supplies and create a buying program once we increase our operational capacity enough to support this initiative. This will save artists visits as far as New York City and Boston to purchase the materials they need to create their art. You will be able to see the gallery as you pass the building, and the professional work will draw in visitors. As the front of the former Tile Co, the flooring in this space is currently varied tile flooring, and we anticipate keeping this unique feature of the interior of the building.

Photo credit
untitled-magazine.com
Upstairs Classroom/Meeting Room

The first floor will include an easily accessible, multi-purpose classroom. We will use this room for our multiple weekly Special Arts for Special Needs classes, a program of art and music classes for people of all ages with developmental disabilities funded by the NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. We anticipate this room will also be used for lectures, receptions, board and committee meetings, as well as birthday parties and after school programs.

Office Space

The planned office space will contain a private office for the executive director with secure file storage and open office space for remaining staff. This type of space works well for our collaborative office culture.

Pocket Park

We will remove the existing one-car garage to create a unique pocket park at our back entrance. By opening up the enclosed garage, we will be able to add windows for needed natural light in the office spaces. This park will create an unexpected, inviting park for lunches, meetings and small performances, plus it will open up more exterior wall space for murals. This park also will create code-compliant exits and simplify moving merchandise and equipment into the practice rooms, makers’ space, store, or galleries.
Phase 2

8 Raymond Basement

Downstairs Art Gallery

The 1,200 square foot basement gallery is one of our primary program spaces. The exhibit space has a beautiful and intricate mosaic tile floor throughout. This gallery will allow us to program more exhibits of work from local artists and students, and the space will function as a performance and gathering space. The existing gallery has been out of operation for at least the past 4 years but at its height was a well-known community arts space that held regular exhibit events. The space includes gallery lighting that will need upgrading. While we currently host 5 to 8 exhibits of two-dimensional artwork from local artists in our SLC Arts Gallery at the Potsdam Town Hall each year, that hallway gallery does not allow us to showcase three-dimensional artwork like sculpture and ceramics.
Performing Arts Wing

The performing arts wing will include a large rehearsal room that will be available for classes and rehearsals for dancers, actors, and musicians. The space will be able to hold a chamber orchestra, rock band, or small dance or theater troupe. We will also pursue other grants to provide professional recording equipment so groups may produce professional-quality recordings. This dedicated space will include full-length mirrors that SLC Arts already owns and a special dance floor and ballet barres that will be added during the renovation. This wing will also include a small practice room, perfect for musicians to practice or meet for lessons or small group rehearsals.

Visual Arts Wing

The visual arts wing will include a large maker’s space/classroom for visual artists. This space will include painting/drawing tables, print-making equipment donated by a local professional print maker, storage for art supplies, and more. A section of the room will be set up as a dedicated ceramics classroom. We will install an air-exchange system in this room to remove any fumes from art forms using gaseous chemicals. We plan to install a small kiln outside the building that will be easily accessible from this room by elevator or stairs. We will include a small lighting studio room with professional-quality lighting equipment and cameras that SLC Arts purchased in 2017 with community support and a local foundation grant; this lighting room will be a critical resource for visual artists to be able to professionally photograph their work. We will host our own community class programming in this space and will provide open studio hours for artists to create and explore.
Community Benefits

SLC Arts strives to make available Local Art to Everyone.

Quality of Life

Art, in all of its manifestations, is a central part of everyone’s lives. Everyone enjoys art in their life, whether they realize it or not: movies, books, comedy, music of any genre, the lovely heart crafted on the top of your latte - art is everywhere, and art makes life more beautiful and enjoyable. We know that access to arts and cultural resources improves social and mental wellbeing in distressed communities. A National Endowment for the Arts study states, “cultural assets are part of a neighborhood ecology that promotes wellbeing.”

Community Development

Americans for the Arts agrees that “the arts build healthier, more vibrant and equitable neighborhoods. The arts break down barriers, encourage participation, and spark innovation - all necessary characteristics for a community to expand and flourish.” The arts are central to community development. The community congregates for musical performances during Summerfest, the Ives Park Concert Series, and even every Friday at Maxfield’s Restaurant. Hundreds of pictures are taken in front of the various murals we have in public areas. Dance and theatrical performances can be viewed during Fright Night or the LoKo Arts Festival. And community members can often join poetry readings in local coffee shops and libraries. We will create a central place in Potsdam to explore creative expression and celebrate the culture of our regional community all year round.
Economic Development

Establishing a downtown arts and culture district with the new arts center and the North Country Children’s Museum will encourage economic development by offering an opportunity for people to visit and enjoy the work of talented artists from near and far. We will be a primary attraction in downtown Potsdam. The catalytic nature of the arts will fill up empty storefronts by propelling future investments from philanthropists and entrepreneurs inspired to create businesses in a dynamic, creative community. There may be additional granting options for public art projects around the Village from state and private investments, but we have to build the walls before we can begin to paint them, figuratively speaking.

Entertainment and Tourism

We will help the Village of Potsdam reach its goals of establishing downtown as a destination. People go out for entertainment, so when we host exhibit openings, concerts, and classes, our event goers will be downtown and spend their money in other local businesses. We will attract visitors from around the region to our downtown for these entertainment opportunities, which will increase spending in other local establishments such as restaurants and retail stores.

Resident Recruitment and Retention

Potsdam is home to SUNY Potsdam’s Performing Arts Center, Gibson Art Gallery, Community Performance Series, and the Crane School of Music along with hundreds of visual artists, musicians, thespians, dancers, and writers. All four local universities will benefit from our new arts center by rebuilding a vibrant downtown for new students, faculty and staff. These recruits will find that their creative powers are stimulated in our community and will envision a thriving life here.

The new arts center will help retain professionals and families to the community. With our four world-class universities within a 10-mile radius, the North Country is excellent at training professionals, but we have not yet mastered the art of retaining those professionals. Part of this retention will come from creating a culture of innovation and community participation.
Job Growth and Creation

We currently have one full-time director and five part-time employees and by the completion of the final phase of development, we intend to increase our staffing to four full-time employees, four part-time employees, and an independent cleaner. This will improve our capacity to create meaningful programs, effective outreach, and community engagement.

Volunteer and Internship Opportunities

The new arts center will allow SLC Arts to establish robust volunteer positions for community members of all ages and abilities, and internships for high school and college students. We anticipate that these opportunities will open doors for disadvantaged youth in our region who likely would not have the ability to pursue work experience in the arts industry.

Arts Entrepreneur Support

This space will allow us to support the work of arts entrepreneurs in our region by not only selling their work in the store but offering space to teach in our classroom areas, create in our maker space or rehearsal rooms and showcase their work in our gallery or performance hall. Our store would help develop arts businesses by providing an equitable share of profits from sold artwork. We will also have three long-term studio rental opportunities for professional artists. The Village of Potsdam and SLC Arts have worked together on Artist Microenterprise Grant program and may explore reestablishing that program again.
North Country Arts Festival

The North Country Arts Festival brings the North Country community together to celebrate the arts. This month-long event creates a powerful, coordinated marketing effort, encouraging tourism and economic activity throughout St. Lawrence County by showcasing our arts industry, a critical component of our regional identity.

We will embrace the beauty of autumn and consolidate several existing annual programs. The festival will include multi-disciplinary arts experiences across St. Lawrence County.

Events organized by SLC Arts will include:

- Ives Park Concert Series, a collaboration with SUNY Potsdam’s LoKo Arts Festival where the winners of the LoKo Battle of the Bands in April/May will perform for this community concert in the Ives Park Gazebo, downtown Potsdam
- Porchfest, a musical event on individuals’ porches in Potsdam and Canton residential neighborhoods
- Regional Arts Celebration, which recognizes decentralization regrant recipients and arts organizations and offers a current analysis of the region’s arts industry,
- Remington Arts Festival, a Canton community event commemorating the birth of Frederic Remington, held during St Lawrence University’s Laurentian Weekend, and
- Artists’ Studio Tour in artists’ home studios across the county over several weekends, a revamp of the event that we have organized for the last 34 years.

Creative Partner Showcase

This exhibit includes a juried selection of 2D and 3D local artwork in a broad range of mediums. Each artist member receives space for at least one piece of artwork in the show, and they may apply to include up to five pieces. The opening event for this exhibit is a grand celebration of all of SLC Arts’ creative partners. Every other year the exhibit is held at SUNY Potsdam’s Gibson Art Gallery.
Art Markets

SLC Arts uses the term Art Market to describe an event similar to the concept of a Farmers’ Market, where each vendor has a booth space to sell their work to the public, but which is designed specifically for fine art and handcrafts. While some organizations use the term Craft Show, SLC Arts has intentionally used the term Art Market to be more inclusive of the quality and variety of artwork which is available at these shows. These are opportunities for community members to meet local artists, see their work, and purchase in person from the artists.

Gallery Exhibits at Potsdam Town Hall

In partnership with the Town of Potsdam, SLC Arts established an exhibit space in 2013 in a non-traditional venue—the Town Hall. In 2021, each of the four exhibits will have an overarching theme, and artist members in any 2D media are welcome to apply to have their work included in the group shows. Exhibit opening events provide community members with the opportunity to meet the artists in person. We will also host each of these exhibits virtually.

Arts Program Services

Special Arts for Special Needs

Special Arts is public programming for teens and adults with developmental disabilities. Tracy Wanamaker is a board-certified music therapist; she has led the workshops since they began in 2010. The current series of hands-on workshops incorporates visual arts, vocal music, percussion music, and basic movement. The Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), a New York State agency, funds workshop participation for individuals who are Family Support Services enrolled; other participants pay a $10 fee per class.
Our monthly Regional Arts Roundtable virtual meet-ups present an opportunity for artists, event planners and arts nonprofits and for-profits to connect, address challenges, share resources & best practices, and collaborate on local projects. Each meeting focuses on a specific topic and features a discussion with guest panelists, local experts primarily chosen from our arts partners around the region. Our goal is to continue to connect members of the North Country arts community and to offer a meaningful professional development opportunity to participants.

Decentralization Regrants

SLC Arts is the chosen NYSCA State & Local Partnerships Decentralization Regrant Partner for St. Lawrence, Jefferson and Lewis Counties, distributing over $60,000 in state funds for public art projects, and teaching and community arts programming and offering consulting support to artists and community organizers. Free information and training workshops are offered every spring and summer at public locations around the three counties for individuals and organizations interested in applying for these grants. One-on-one technical assistance is free to applicants. These grant opportunities are funded by the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.
Future Program/Service Opportunities

Arts Incubator - Arts Entrepreneur Support

The arts center will function as an incubator for arts entrepreneurs. Our store, maker’s space, rehearsal rooms, and gallery will allow artists of all disciplines to build their arts business by removing barriers that make starting a self-owned business unreachable for many. We will provide resources and training to help bring artists’ ideas to market. Visual artists will be able to create their work and sell it, performers will have a space to rehearse and record or hold performances. The arts center will become the central place for art creation and arts product distribution in the region.

Arts Retail Store

The arts store at the front of the building will offer an opportunity for artists to sell their work on consignment; we will earn at least at 30% commission on artwork sales. We will also sell branded merchandise and art supplies. Potsdam used to be home to an art supply store, various music stores and other artisanal galleries. The scale of our organization and diversity of revenue sources, this arts store will be significantly more sustainable than previous ventures.

Makers’ Space

The Makers’ Space will be a flexible room for visual artists to create. We will have pottery equipment, donated printmaking equipment, artwork photography and lighting equipment, as well as drawing tables and cleaning sinks. We will also hold classes in this space. We will have monthly, weekly, daily and hourly rates for the use of this space.

Rehearsal Rooms

Performing artists may rent the rehearsal space and/or small practice room for lessons, classes, or rehearsals. We will also hold classes in this space. We will have monthly, weekly, daily and hourly rates for the use of this space.
Gallery Hall/Performance Space

The existing gallery space will be modified slightly to have a more open floor plan. We will use the space for our visual art exhibits as well as ticketed performances including, but not limited to, open mics, musical concerts, small plays, and poetry readings.

Classroom

The classroom space will be used for meetings and classes. We will charge varying class fees and will allow outside organizations to rent the space for an hourly rate.

Food & Drink Sales

We plan to sell food and beverage in the store and for events, including alcoholic beverages and coffee/tea options during the day. The intention is to create a space that community members choose to spend significant time in, so we believe this vital to creating that atmosphere.
Potsdam, NY has a diverse group of inhabitants that have a wide variety of views and interests. Between the students of the local universities and staff that work at them, employees of local businesses and tourists visiting the Adirondacks, many people have a keen interest in the arts and a space that showcases the local talent of the area inspired by the Adirondacks.

The Arts Council’s programming and ongoing operations provide services and products that are of interest to multiple target market segments in our area, including:

- **Artists:** Visual arts & performing arts. Artists themselves are a key target market for this expansion project. As SLC Arts will be providing services, including consignment, and rental spaces for these artists, they are some of our key constituents.
  - Professional artists in need of selling their work and professional/business learning opportunities
  - Young artists, 10-25 year olds in need of skill building, business learning or technical assistance
  - Amateur artists interested in the social aspect of arts and skill building for fun, often retired professionals

Currently the SLC Arts Council’s partner program includes approximately 100 artists of varying disciplines. We also have a patron list of approximately 150 non-artists who support the arts on an annual basis. We are developing a large list of artists in the region through a robust research plan. This new arts center will give us a great stepping point to reach back out to artists who have previously been on our membership list and who aren’t currently members, and reach younger artists who will be excited about our new services.

- **Patrons of the arts and shoppers** are a secondary market segment for our expansion project. Of our services listed above, patrons and shoppers will be the primary market for the store, exhibits, performances, and classes.
  - Ages 18-35 - would enjoy participatory programs, and would potentially buy the less expensive items
  - Ages 36-65 - tend to buy more expensive items, participatory for kids and themselves, but have less time availability
Our events reach a wide audience of both artists and community members interested in the arts. Public programs such as the Remington Arts Festival, Artist Studio tour, LoKo Downtown Festival, Ives Park Concert Series among others draw between 4,000-6,000 participants per year, not including the Potsdam Summerfest which draws a significant percent of the population of our county. We have an active class schedule and arts shows which have in the past drawn nearly 10,000 people in a year. Specific highlights include:

- Exhibit openings - the first group exhibit opening we held in January 2020 had over 100 participants which was a record for exhibit openings.
- Our Member Show usually has approximately 100 event goers.
- Special Arts classes- average 40 to 50 participants per month (upwards of 20 participants per class)
- Our Regional Arts Roundtables reach 20 to 30 participants per event
- DEC Regrants - approximately 30 applicant organizations for 2021 grants. According to grantee reports, funded programs impact over 130,000 people each year.

There are a number of people from quite a large radius that came up to Potsdam, including parents of students and family members of faculty and staff who might come from far and wide. In addition to St. Lawrence County, our services draw people from as far as Malone, Watertown, Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake.

-Age 65+ - will buy some expensive items, more passive participation.
This population is looking for easy engagement opportunities
From 2008 to 2012, when the downtown store was open and at its height, SLC Arts brought in an average of $52,229 per year in sales revenue from the store. Our historical data and anecdotal records show that there were significant marketing dollars spent during this time, but increases in marketing did not have a huge impact on sales increases, except from 2007 to 2008, indicating that the return on investment for those marketing initiatives, especially the printed newsletter, was relatively low. We plan to use free or inexpensive marketing to spread awareness of the store, and will analyze every marketing dollar to increase return on investment. Additionally, marketing strategies in general have changed significantly in the last 10 years, making social media a more key component of marketing plans for all kinds of businesses. Email content marketing also continues to be an effective low-cost marketing strategy.

According to our website analytics, our website gets approximately 3200 visitors per month, though we expect considerable growth, 68% over last month, as we expand the online webstore offerings. Our Facebook page has over 2500 followers, a 44% increase over the past year, and our posts frequently have high engagement. Our email newsletter is sent to over 1200 people, and we have a 29% open rate, 13% above industry average. While this data shows we have a solid online presence and an active group of local artists and arts-interested customers, we also know we can build our online and offline presence through an increased focus on online and social media marketing.

As the SLC Arts Council grows by providing a wider range of services to local artists and arts-interested consumers, we expect our reach into the local and broader market to grow, as there are former customers who we could reach and engage again, as well as new potential customers and artists in the wider area who may not yet know what services we provide.

Economic Impact of Event-Related Audience Spending

The arts, unlike most industries, leverage significant amounts of event-related spending by their audiences. For example, part of the arts experience may include dining out, paying for parking, shopping in local retail stores, enjoying dessert after the show, and returning home to pay the babysitter. Based on the 212,691 audience-intercept surveys conducted for this study, the typical arts attendee spends $31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission. Nationally, total event-related spending was an estimated $102.5 billion during 2015. This spending supported 2.3 million jobs, provided $46.6 billion in household income, and generated $15.7 billion in total government revenue.
We are optimizing our marketing strategy by using our diverse channels to reach our vast audience. Our marketing strategy aims to increase awareness and program reach while increasing returns on investment by analyzing the potential impact of every marketing initiative.

Our marketing strategy includes sharing and creating relevant content that will help our community better connect to and understand our work. We are constantly updating our website to be a central resource, including artist and business directories and the webstore. We use our website as the primary method of sharing the most complete and up-to-date information with our community. The most effective method for communicating with and retaining our supporters is through regular email with supporters. We distribute press releases to the local media to maintain visibility in the broader community. We use Facebook and Instagram social media platforms to promote programs and events, share content, and directly engage with individuals and other organizations across our community. We are also developing a blog with a supplementary printed letter to supporters who are not online.

Our primary communications goals include improving SLC Art’s overall brand image, increasing brand awareness, and maintaining a broad audience appeal while also identifying and developing new strategies to attract under-engaged demographics. In light of the major organizational changes SLC Arts has undergone in the last year, it is essential for our messaging to convey that we are relevant, approachable, and inclusive of all art forms. In general, area residents are aware of the existence of SLC Arts. However, they are often unaware of the full scope of programs and opportunities we offer to the community. Due to the wide scope of our mission, the current marketing strategy is designed to appeal to a wide audience. To increase impact and promote deeper engagement we also endeavor to clearly define individual marketing segments in order to develop more appealing content and distribute it effectively.
Website

The website is our primary method of sharing the most complete and up-to-date information with our community. All marketing materials and media releases refer the reader to our website. It is also a means of collecting payment and/or information from users who wish to submit artwork, sign-up for programs, make a donation, or sign-up for our partnership program. We have started an online store, and we are working to develop artist and business directories.

E-Marketing

The most effective method for communicating with and retaining our supporters is through email. We send three e-newsletters per month that are delivered to an opt-in audience primarily consisting of donors and partners. In addition to the e-newsletter, reminders about upcoming programs are regularly emailed.

Press Releases

Distributing press releases to the local media is our primary way of maintaining visibility in the broader community. While these readers and listeners may not be directly involved in our organization, they are at least aware of our existence and that the majority of our events are free and open to the public.

Social Media

The social media platforms currently used by SLC Arts are Facebook and Instagram. Facebook is primarily used to promote programs and events, share content, and directly engage with individuals and other organizations across our community. Our Instagram content is far less promotional, but adds value to our social media presence as a way to share more visual, behind-the-scenes, content.
SLC Arts is the only arts council run by paid staff in St. Lawrence County; there are a few volunteer-run entities serving individual municipalities within the county. St. Lawrence County is geographically the largest county in New York State; located at the northern tip of the state and bordering with Canada, the county is a rural mix of farms, forests, and small towns. Almost one-third of the County falls within the Adirondack Forest Preserve—the largest publicly protected area in the contiguous U.S. Challenges in this county include: high unemployment and high poverty rates (19.2% in comparison with 15% poverty rate in NYS); lack of mass transit services (no passenger trains, and limited bus routes and direct flights); and population dispersed across a large geographic area, which is isolated from the rest of the state due to travel limitations and distance. The North Country is also one of the least racial diverse places in NYS (92% white), so our work always encourages diversity and inclusion.

The closest organizations that provide a similar range of services are the Thousand Islands Arts Center in Clayton (76 miles), the Adirondack Lakes Center for the Arts in Blue Mountain Lake (83 miles) and the all-volunteer North Country Arts Council in Watertown (71 miles). Our organizations create a network of arts services across this large geographic region, and in cases where those organizations offer unique services, some community members travel long distances to access those programs.
The other arts organizations in St. Lawrence County are presenting organizations (i.e. Ogdensburg Command Performances, Community Performance Series, Cinema 10, and the Orchestra of Northern NY), have a very specific mission focus (i.e. North Country Children’s Museum, Traditional Arts in Upstate NY and the Frederic Remington Art Museum), or operate on a much smaller scale with a less formal organizational structure (i.e. Arts Association of Northern NY in Sackets Harbor, Massena Artists’ Association and Lake St Lawrence Arts in Waddington). We act as a fiscal sponsor for the North Country Art Teachers Association and the St. Lawrence Valley International Partnership. We differ from these organizations with our broader mission, consulting services, and multi-disciplinary arts focus; we function as a central agency that offers an opportunity for collaboration among all of the arts organizations in our region.

Since 2019, we have developed stronger relationships with each of these organizations, and we are now working to include our arts partners in our new regional program, the North Country Arts Festival. We have also started a monthly roundtable series where we invite artists and arts organizers from all three counties we serve to discuss their experience in the arts industry in our region: lessons learned, challenges, successes, opportunities for collaboration, and upcoming events.
Downtown Potsdam was once a hotspot for a variety of nightlife options in the region, Potsdam residents and visitors have noted the selection of entertainment options have dwindled over the years. As we increase the entertainment opportunities downtown, there will be a catalytic economic impact on other nearby businesses.

Small to medium-sized towns all over the northeast are known for their arts scene. Potsdam has the potential to be on the map just like Burlington, VT, Woodstock, Saranac Lake, Saratoga Springs, or Ithaca, NY. We are proud of our local arts traditions, and this venue will allow us to define our local culture. The arts center will be a place designed for art that is actually conducive to experiencing art. Our region lacks a space that is devoted to creative expression, designed for people to enjoy art as the primary purpose. Artists are craving a venue to share their work. Consumers are desperate to find a place to experience art without disturbance as they are currently going to places where the art is secondary or even an intrusion to regular commerce.
We will renovate the current Tile Co space, an underutilized and partially vacant building that was once an arts hub in this location. While the space was built in the later part of the 20th century and does not represent much of the architectural charm of Potsdam, the heritage of the building will be retained by making Otto Czerepak's tile mosaic facade a more prominent feature when the storefront becomes more attractive.

We believe that the transformative nature of this new arts center project will open up new doors for the arts industry in Northern New York. The catalytic nature of the arts will fill up empty storefronts by propelling future investments from philanthropists and entrepreneurs inspired to create businesses in a dynamic, creative community. SLC Arts is a NYS Council on the Arts partner and receives multi-year grants to support our regular operations, but as we grow, we will increase our customer reach and donor base, and we will have more capacity to apply for additional grant opportunities that will bring local, state and federal monies into our region to support the people who live, work, play and learn here.

Potsdam, NY (Photo by John Marino)
The arts industry across the country deliberately focuses on creative placemaking. The National Endowment for the Arts defines creative placemaking as “the use of arts and culture by diverse partners to strategically shape the physical and social character of a place in order to spur economic development, promote enduring social change and improve the physical environment.” The arts are a central part of community life, and SLC Arts is the most applicable partner to help in that development.

The creation of this new arts center will not only establish a downtown arts and culture district with our community partner and new neighbor the North Country Children’s Museum, but it will offer an arts-focused community center for the whole region that will attract residents and visitors to downtown Potsdam.

This community and commercial center will be a place where community members will come to develop their own creative endeavors and share their work with residents and tourists. Our region lacks a space for a variety of events, so we will offer opportunities to use the space for gatherings, weddings, birthday parties, and other events.

The new arts center will also be an educational hub. Community members will be supported by a community organization with a physical space to teach and take classes and workshops focused on creative expression. Further, artists of all disciplines will have opportunities to collaborate and access to practice and studio space, a resource that is desperately lacking in the North Country.

The arts center will offer a new option for people of all ages to enjoy the arts at any time. Our programming will include a retail store and galleries with extensive open hours for passersby, a flexible studio in our performance rehearsal room and makers’ space for professionals and amateurs alike, and regular evening performances for night owls to enjoy including music, theater, poetry, and comedy.
The Village of Potsdam and SLC Arts share similar values and goals. We believe the Creative Spirit Community Arts Center project fulfills portions of each goal laid out by the Village of Potsdam. As we are a regional arts organization, we also like to “think globally and act locally” as Governor Andrew Cuomo stated in his 2020 State of the State address.

The Village of Potsdam highlights the importance of arts and culture for the community in its 2012-2022 Comprehensive Plan Economic Development Section ED-12 stating, “The Village should strive to make Potsdam the center for the arts in Northern New York State by:

A. Supporting efforts to create a Multi-Arts Center in the Village.
B. Coordinating with local arts organizations and the universities to promote arts events that occur on campus.
C. Developing arts festivals.
D. Developing financial and technical assistance products to assist artists, craftspeople and arts-related businesses in the Village.”
We will address each of these goals:

A. A Multi-Arts Center in the Village

The new arts center is our number one priority and clearly the top priority for this aspect of the Village’s comprehensive plan.

B. Coordinating College and Community

While we will continue our regular promotion of on-campus events, as well as host community arts events on campus, one of the more revolutionary benefits of the Arts Center will be the creation of a downtown venue for campus arts and performances. This holds the dual benefit of bringing the college population downtown while also bringing the local community to support campus arts. This will function as a bridge between these two communities that coexist but often seem separate.

C. Developing Arts Festivals

In Fall 2021, SLC Arts will debut the North Country Arts Festival, bringing the North Country community together to celebrate the arts. This month-long event creates a powerful, coordinated marketing effort, encouraging tourism and economic activity throughout St. Lawrence County by showcasing our arts industry, a critical component of our regional identity.

While our programming and many of our events serve a greater population than just Potsdam, we believe that reaching out to the regional community drives more excitement for the arts, attracting more potential visitors to our organization’s headquarters. We look forward to the opportunity to host more arts festival events, like art walks or poetry slams, in Potsdam once we create this new arts center.
D. Developing financial and technical assistance products to assist artists, craftspeople and arts-related businesses in the Village.

Our retail store will create a new option for artists to sell and showcase their work in Potsdam. There is currently no store within a 10 mile radius of Potsdam that sells wares from local artists of any genre or medium. We will use a portion of our retail store and create a buying club to sell professional art supplies, a resource that has been lacking since the local craft supply store closed.

As we increase our capacity and reach, we anticipate creating more technical assistance programs for arts entrepreneurs including professional development and business planning consulting and workshops. We also plan to host a regional arts symposium to bring the arts community of Northern New York to learn and discuss the industry regionally and nationally.
Revenue Projections

Our projected budget includes various assumptions based on previous sales data. SLC Arts ran a Market St retail store from November 2005 to August 2013. From 2006 to 2012, the average annual sales revenue was $46,630.

Additionally, during this same time period, the average annual program income was $16,721 with a peak of $32,879 in 2011. We anticipate our updated program plan alongside the earned income program opportunities planned for this arts center will exceed our averages upon completion of the project.

Capital Campaign

Leading up to the purchase of the building, we will secure approximately $75,000 in cash to complete the purchase. We plan to raise the full $200,000 purchase price of the building throughout the renovation period to provide our organization the opportunity to pay off our loan in full upon completion of our renovations if we are in the position to do so upon completion of the renovations. This will allow our organization to shy away from long-term debt and ease our cash flow to support our programming, future endowment growth, and possible additional expansion.

Earned Income and Revenue Opportunities

As described in the previous planned spaces, the new arts center will offer significant new revenue opportunities to strengthen our organization’s operations. We will be able to increase revenue from artwork, merchandise, and supply retail sales, refreshment sales during events, as well as concert ticket sales and class fees. Additionally, we will offer space rentals for all of the possible space within the building, including the classroom and gallery, and offer affordable yet lucrative paid use opportunities for the Makers Space and Rehearsal Room.
Personnel

Staff

Maggie McKenna
Executive Director (full-time)

Jenna Clute
Programs Coordinator (full-time)

Naomi Pitkin
Outreach Coordinator (full-time)

Alicia Murphy
Grants Coordinator (part-time)

Catherine LaPointe-Vollmer
Graphic Designer (part-time)

Steven Sauter
Operations Assistant (part-time)

2021 Board of Directors

Kayla French
President

Jim Murray
Vice President

Kathleen Mahoney Ruiz
Secretary

Ashtin Singh
Treasurer

Board Members
John Berbrich - David Crowell - Megan Riedl - Robert Docker
We Have A Proven Track Record

The St. Lawrence County Arts Council was re-incorporated in 1999 and had its first paid director in the early 2000s. SLC Arts had a successful storefront in downtown Potsdam until 2013. The space was small and limiting, with a primary focus on visual arts. With the recession, the storefront became difficult to sustain, so SLC Arts closed the doors but continued all of its important work of creating opportunities for the community to experience the arts.

Since 2008, SLC Arts has maintained the status as the State and Local Partner for St. Lawrence, Jefferson and Lewis Counties for the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA). The state agency calls us the “mini NYSCA” of those three counties and increasingly supports our organization’s operations. Because of this status, we receive general operating support and over $60,000 in state funds each year to redistribute to artists and arts organizers across our 3-county territory. This annual project, funded with a 3-year grant commitment, is a huge undertaking that we have successfully completed every year since 2008.

Until December 2019, SLC Arts occupied approximately 4,000 square feet of space in Old Snell Hall and managed community rentals in various facilities. Old Snell Hall needed to be vacated for upcoming renovations. Our staff has the capacity and knowledge to effectively administer the space rental program we will run in this new arts center.

With our current staffing of only 3.3 FTE across six employees, university interns, and a volunteer board of directors, SLC Arts manages a major regional festival, displays multiple exhibits each year, hosts regular classes, workshops, and events, runs NYSCA’s decentralization regrant program, creates virtual content, regularly runs fundraising programs, and maintains all media communications. Once we have increased our capacity to 6 FTE, we will have much more capacity to not only manage the new arts center but fill our calendar of events to draw people to the center even more.

This downtown community arts center alongside our growing programming will fill the known needs of our community and increase the demand for the arts, directly impacting our donor and grant support potential. We will attract new artists, volunteers and donors, and increase donor retention rates to support the arts center’s goals.
This arts center will allow us to increase program and services offerings dramatically. Our intention is to shift our business model and alter the income ratio by with increased earned income and decreased reliance on contributed income and grants for general operating expenses. Earned income sources include sales from the store, ticketed events, food and beverage sales, space use rentals, and class tuition fees. We are working towards the arts center being as self-sustaining as possible, with the revenue generated from these programs and services nearly fully covering operating expenses as well as building upkeep. We do not expect to completely move away from grants and contributions.

We intend to increase our staff to manage the space and additional programs. We will expand hours of part time staff to full time as soon as possible, and we will hire a full time store manager, part time bar manager. We will evaluate additional staff needs annually as we assess our financial growth each year.

Following the completion of the renovations, we will work towards building an endowment to cover staff salaries, to the greatest extent possible, through an endowment contribution campaign over the course of three to five years. This will allow us to use our resources to improve our programs more directly.

After we have secured the future financial stability of our organization, we plan to explore two other growth strategies, though we have not yet developed a robust strategy to reach these goals. We will eventually plan to expand into the upstairs 8 Raymond St space, currently occupied by the thrift store. This could allow us additional store or gallery space as well as a large space for a dedicated performance hall as well as private artist workshops. We will also explore the possibility of developing artist residency programs, which are common around the country and often offer notoriety for an arts organization and a region as an arts hub, as well as additional income potential through grants and residency fees.

We have the plan, enthusiasm, and expertise to take on this project and grow SLC Arts. We hope you will join us!