

NEA Our Town – Dark Sky Arts & Ideas Festival Excerpt

Summary

The Dark Sky Arts & Ideas Festival (wt) deepens and inspires multidisciplinary multi-organization collaboration, creating a sustainable framework to promote a citizen-driven arts-focused celebration of community and culture. Emerging from the coronavirus pandemic, it provides a focal point to rebuild Flagstaff's creative economy in a way that is more equitable, integrated, and resilient and for that creative economy to support lasting change on topics that matter to Northern Arizona and the world such as climate change, planetary science, STEAM, and racial justice, particularly indigenous. The festival brings together world-class thinkers and creators, building community and strengthening tourism.

Description

The Dark Sky Arts & Ideas Festival (wt) is inspired by New Haven, Connecticut's International Festival of Art & Ideas and similar festivals that facilitate community discourse through interdisciplinary arts-led programming. The bulk of the project focuses on developing a replicable framework, leadership, and partnership structure for a successful inaugural event. This includes developing a durable marketing and community engagement platform that leverages the festival's brand. This activates and strengthens the relationship of the many organizations that have pledged to participate.

The festival and the exploratory process used to form it address many of Our Town's, artistic excellence, artistic merit, and strengthening community objectives.

Guided by the leadership of an experienced festival director, Our Town criteria is further addressed by:

- Producing an initial weeklong festival in Flagstaff's tourism shoulder season. This makes the festival more accessible to residents and university students and provides an opportunity for greater economic enhancement. We intend to subsequently extend the length and year-round scope of the festival.
- Developing a citizen engagement process that guides the festival's formation and priorities. This includes surveys, teaser events, and inclusive volunteer leadership. Teaser events can extend and enhance existing events such as FAC's monthly Art Walk program.
- Prioritizing the voices of BIPOC residents, particularly indigenous, and ensuring a diverse leadership team.
- Curating interdisciplinary programming inspired by Northern Arizona's people, industry, heritage, and natural setting and inviting international artists and thought leaders to co-create with local experts.
- Accessible pricing and/or free programming.
- Providing a minimum of \$80,000 in artist fees and honoraria. We hope to expand this over time and to explore ways that the festival can act as a fundraiser to regrant to local arts organizations.
- Dedicating half of the initial honoraria to local artists and presenters while providing opportunities for other international artists and thinkers to participate.
- Leveraging the enthusiasm of partner organizations to collaborate and make the arts and creative placemaking as a priority – the "Flagstaff Way."
- Dedicating volunteer leadership chairs to key festival priorities, ensuring the ultimate event remains multidisciplinary, inclusive, and sustainable. Committed chairs and partnerships already include youth, university, and government engagement, cultural equity, sustainability, and science and ideas.
- Activating sites and campuses throughout Flagstaff. Many potential sites have already been pledged in-kind by project partners.

The final festival date will be selected based on coordinating partner schedules, particularly academic calendars and other established events.

Included letters of support and partnership descriptions outline key locations and commitments.

Strengthening Communities Narrative

Striking the balance between community development and economic development through tourism, this project builds on the desire to provide a single focused event that brings art and ideas together on topics that matter to local citizens. It is the first known time that all of Flagstaff's major art, science, culture, education, government, and community institutions are coming together to advance the cause of the creative economy and arts centered community programming.

This project further strengthens our community by:

1. Demonstrating Flagstaff as a destination for artists and arts patrons.
2. Using citizen engagement to guide the festival, what the community wants to share with the world and what it wants to learn from the world.
3. Providing a framework to present and fund arts-led community engagement projects.
4. Activating public spaces and non-traditional venues.
5. Enhancing the professionalism of the creative sector through talkbacks and tailored sessions with visiting artists and thought leaders.