

Building Support for Community Arts and Culture:

2018-2021 Plan  
for Cultural Development  
in Marion County

The Marion Cultural Development Corporation

July 2018

## Introduction

Marion County is at the heart of the fertile Willamette Valley and is home to a thriving agriculture industry. Traditional homeland of the Kalapuya and Mollala, the county is among the areas of earliest Euro-American settlement in Oregon. By the early 1830s, French-Canadians, family men retired from service to the fur trade, had permanently established farms in the Willamette Valley, in the area historically known as French Prairie. The first mission to Indians in the Pacific Northwest was founded on the banks of the Willamette River near Wheatland in 1834 under Methodist missionary leader Jason Lee.

In Marion County, at Champoege, the former Hudson's Bay Company men, the missionary vanguard and the first of the overland pioneers who flocked to the Willamette Valley to take up claims to the land, made the momentous decision to organize the Provisional Government of Oregon. Jesuit missionaries at St. Paul as well as Protestant missionaries founded the early educational institutions that laid a solid foundation for subsequent up-building that came with developments in commerce, industry, and transportation. Willamette University, recognized as one of the finest small independent liberal arts institutions in the nation and often described as the "oldest university in the West," is descended from one such pioneer academy.

Today, the early patterns of settlement are still evident in the county's farmsteads and market towns. The communities of Aurora and Mt. Angel, for example, are the historic centers of German-speaking settlement. In more recent times, Woodburn has become the primary area of Hispanic settlement, which began when migratory farm workers found year-round work and put down their roots. Woodburn was also the center of two waves of Russian immigration in the late twentieth century. Towns of the North Santiam River Canyon are historically tied to industry. Stayton flourished when it exploited water power for flouring and lumber mills, woolen manufacture, and other factories. Its canals and diversion ditches are features that recall the town's industrial past. The heyday of Oregon lumber company towns can be traced in Mill City.

Capitalizing on its long-standing and diverse cultural development, Marion County is host to a variety of agricultural fairs and traditional folk festivals as well as the art fairs and community celebrations that fill the summer calendar. While these events give flavor to the county's character, no fact of historical development has shaped the cultural climate more significantly than the emergence of Salem as Territorial and State capital and county seat. The capital city, with a population in 2015 around 160,000, and Eugene, alternate as the state's second and third cities. Salem is the undisputed commercial and cultural center of the county. Most of Marion County, however, reflects its agricultural origins. Of the twenty incorporated communities, sixty-five percent have populations under 3,000. A small number have populations under 500.

Since 2004, the MCDC has worked towards supporting and encouraging the people of Marion County in their efforts to make a hospitable place that "celebrates creativity, values and protects a diverse cultural heritage, supports tourism, the arts, and humanities, and inspires the artists, performers, and historians of the future."

## Overview of MCDC Activities 2005-2018

The MCDC was organized for the purpose of enhancing the development of visual arts, performance arts, narrative and literary arts, cultural tourism, heritage preservation, history and humanities in Marion County through the periodic distribution of grant monies from the Oregon Cultural Trust. Its original goals and objectives were set by its predecessor, the Marion County Cultural Coalition. Those goals were driven in a large part by the results of a county-wide survey the Coalition conducted.

The MCDC Board has worked to ensure that its goals are congruent with those of the OCT and that the programs we fund contribute to the growth and stability of cultural activities in Marion County. In 2014, we held a community meeting to review our priorities and gather feedback from prior grantees and other community groups. The consensus from that meeting was that our priorities and focus were still meeting the needs of our local cultural partners.

Two of the goals that have emerged are diversity and outreach. We have worked to recruit board members from all parts of Marion County, to ensure ethnic diversity among board members and diversity in the areas of cultural interest they represent. Our current board has representation from north Marion County, the east county, Salem and the mid-county region. We have consistent participation by board members representing MCDC and OCT at local cultural events. Board members also participate in local 'Meet the Funders' events sponsored by OCT. MCDC has helped the OCT to increase public awareness of the Trust's activities and promote donating to the Trust by helping to staff OCT information booths at cultural events throughout the county, such as the Salem Art Fair, World Beat Festival and Silverton Arts Festival.

MCDC awarded its first grants in May 2004. That year, MCDC received \$11,947 from OCT. It awarded grants totaling \$9,750 to 10 organizations that year. MCDC received \$43,238 from OCT for 2018 grant awards and distributed those funds to 24 organizations. In the years since 2004, MCDC has awarded a total of \$405,166 with 245 grants to 109 different organizations. MCDC operating expenses are minimal as we have no paid staff or physical office. After moving to on-line applications and final reports we have eliminated copy costs, leaving filing an annual reports with the state and IRS, maintaining a web presence and holding a modest reception for grantees as our operating costs. Money left over after those expenses is put towards the following year's grant cycle.

Grantees must be 501(c) 3 organizations, or if an individual applies for funding, that person must be sponsored by a non-profit cultural organization. All grant activities must be located in Marion County. The amount of funds MCDC receives from OCT fluctuates from year to year. The board continues to maintain a \$2,000 cap on the amount of money that will be awarded to applicant organizations in order to maximize its impact among a diverse set of grant applicants. The minimum request should be no less than \$500.

MCDC is proud of its achievements in awarding grants. We feel that we have made a significant difference in the cultural heritage of Marion County. Small grants that might seem insignificant in the world of big-budget enterprises have made a very real difference in the cultural life of our communities.

## **Marion County Cultural Development Corporation Plan**

The MCDC was organized as an independent, non-profit, public benefit corporation for the purpose of enhancing the development of visual arts, performance arts, narrative and literary arts, cultural tourism, heritage preservation, history and humanities in Marion County, Oregon, through the periodic distribution of grant monies from the Oregon Cultural Trust.

*Changes in this plan: When Marion County Cultural Development was originally organized, a county-wide inventory of cultural organizations was conducted. Given that MCDC has no paid staff, this inventory slowly became unreliable in content and unsustainable in practice. In the 14 years since MCDC began, technological advances have given most organizations the ability to provide their own online presence. Therefore, the MCDC Board has voted to cease our online inventory.*

The corporation fulfills the above function by:

1. Reviewing and updating this plan every 4 years.
2. Awarding grants to qualified applicants with funds from the Oregon Cultural Trust.
3. Supporting those cultural activities that meet the goals of the corporation as stated in the action plan.
4. Serving as an advocate and forum for needs and issues related to arts, heritage and humanities.

### **PRIORITY 1:**

***Increase access to and awareness of Marion County's cultural assets and their value through increased public support and appreciation.***

#### **Goals:**

- Encourage information sharing, cooperative/coordinated advertising and promotion of cultural events within Marion County.
- Encourage partnerships between local cultural groups and their parallel or allied organizations to share information, expertise, services and strengthen programs.
- Fund projects that promote increased access to and awareness of Marion County cultural assets.

### **PRIORITY 2:**

***Strengthen Communities by upholding diverse cultural traditions and the distinctive character of cities, small towns and neighborhoods throughout Marion County.***

#### **Goals:**

- Promote mutual understanding among cultural groups by developing avenues of communication and information sharing.
- Raise pride in individual cultural identity by supporting festivals and other events that celebrate the county's small towns and ethnic communities.
- Strive for participation in the mainstream cultural opportunities of Marion County by a more diverse segment of the population.
- Promote documentary projects, traveling exhibitions, and touring performances that focus on

- diverse ethnic groups.
- Encourage cultural programs that reach rural Marion County communities.

**PRIORITY 3:**

*Inspire youth to engage in creative expression and heritage activities and support their efforts to develop cultural awareness and proficiency.*

**Goals:**

- Increase the number of youth participants in arts, heritage and humanities programs both in and outside of the school setting.
- Support non-profit cultural organizations that provide equitable opportunities to youth.
- Support non-profit organizations that sponsor artist-in-residence programs, traveling performers or heritage interpreters.

**BENCHMARKS:**

- Projects funded:
  - in urban and rural communities
  - that target youth
  - that target underserved populations and areas of Marion County
  - that support equity and access for all residents of Marion County
- MCDC Board members attend funded projects as possible.
- MCDC Board promotes and advocates for OCT as possible.
- MCDC Board solicits community feedback via online surveys or meetings every 4 years to gather feedback and involve cultural non-profits in review of this plan.