

# Wisconsin will try to improve cultural programs

Barbara Lawton says arts plays large role in state's economy, could be used to attract, retain educated workforce

BY RICHIE RATHSACK  
State Reporter

Wisconsin is looking to strengthen the state of its arts programs, and it will start planning how this week.

The Wisconsin Arts Board's annual town hall meeting to discuss changes to the grant program will take place Thursday in Madison, along with WAB's New Economy Funding initiative. The board will also receive public input about its goals.

Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton, who chairs WAB, said she views the meetings as a way to help the public understand the goals of the board.

"As we look at a shift to a creative economy, the Wisconsin Arts Board plays an increasing role," Lawton said. "If Wisconsin is going to grow, we need to attract and retain a workforce."

According to Lawton, many people lament Wisconsin's

impending workforce crisis. One of WAB's goals is to increase the number of college degrees within the labor force by attracting workers to the state, in addition to keeping

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decide first where they want to live," Lawton said. "They are attracted to communities with a strong cultural heartbeat."

Lawton said a survey the board conducted indicated there is significant economic activity being created by the arts in the state.

"We have tended to undervalue the role that arts play in our state," Lawton said. "Just the nonprofit organizations and their audiences who answered the survey generate \$418 million and create 15,000 full-time jobs in Wisconsin."

Karin Wolf, the arts program director for the city of Madison, is co-sponsoring the WAB Madison meeting. As part of the Madison Arts Commission, she is involved with the WAB's re-granting program — totaling more than \$60,000 per year.

Wolf added the economic growth from arts is not limited to businesses involved with art.

"A lot of times if you go out, you might go to dinner, pay to park," Wolf said. "That revenue is spread out through the local economy."

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The WAB encourages members of the public to attend the meetings in hopes of making them advocates for what the board is doing, Lawton said.

"It is time for us to empower this group that has already received national attention to see the state thrive," Lawton said. "A lot of young people leave the state looking for exciting opportunities — we need to have those exciting opportunities here."

Some of the changes to be discussed in the meetings involve the granting process, Lawton said, and the format of the process will be different as the board is trying to make the program more efficient.

The meetings also offer a chance for people who received grants to meet with WAB to learn how to use money more efficiently.

The Madison town hall meeting will be held Thursday at 10 a.m. in the Madison Municipal Building. Other meetings will be held throughout the state in Milwaukee, Sturgeon Bay, Appleton, Eau Claire, Spooner and Mineral Point.

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