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Recruit and Retain Talent

The pARTnership Movement

Make your community—and your company—more attractive to current and future employees by partnering with arts organizations to create a vibrant cultural scene

By Aaron Dalton





Detail: Barry Flanagan
"Thinker on a Rock", 1997.
Des Moines Art Center
Permanent Collections;
Gift of John and Mary
Pappajohn, 2015.4. Courtesy
of the Greater Des Moines
Convention and Visitors
Bureau.

THE BIG IDEA

Arts partnerships frequently offer companies effective and cost-efficient methods of achieving critical business goals. Americans for the Arts is producing a series of eight essays that will explore and illustrate the different types of benefits that arts partnerships can bring to your company. This particular essay makes the case that art partnerships can be a secret weapon in your arsenal to give your company and your community an edge in workforce recruitment and retention.

Many companies have trouble finding the talented employees they need. For example, in 2012, Microsoft announced that it simply could not find suitable candidates to fill thousands of open engineering, research, and development jobs. Microsoft General Counsel and Executive Vice President Brad Smith was quoted in *Computerworld* as saying, "Our nation faces the paradox of a crisis in unemployment at the same time that many companies cannot fill the jobs they have to offer."

The talent shortage could dramatically worsen in years ahead as Baby Boomers retire. In 2014, [The Conference Board](#) predicted that we were about to enter a 15-year period of tight labor markets and talent shortages in which retention rates would drop and companies would have a harder time finding the talented workers they need.

“The key for us, number one, has always been hiring very smart people.”

*Bill Gates, former
CEO of Microsoft,
co-founder of
Bill & Melinda Gates
Foundation*

If companies have trouble finding the workers they need, they will try to recruit some of your company's top performers. So you need to be thinking about ways to retain high-performing employees who are in demand and potentially fielding offers from the competition.

Poor retention rates can derail your strategy and saddle your company with heavy costs. A 2012 meta-analysis from the [Center for American Progress](#) reviewed 30 case studies in 11 research papers and concluded that turnover typically costs a little more than 20 percent of an employee's salary. For highly paid jobs and those at the senior and executive levels, the report found those turnover costs can skyrocket up to 213 percent of an employee's annual salary.

Just how widespread an issue is turnover? In 2011, 23.6 million workers representing approximately 18 percent of the U.S. workforce voluntarily quit their jobs, according to the Center for American Progress. That's a lot of turnover and a lot of costs for companies.

This essay shows how arts partnerships can boost the appeal of companies and communities in ways that can make it easier to attract and retain the talent you need to achieve success.

THE SUPPORTING DATA

So how can your company attract and retain the employees it needs to succeed? Compensation and other benefits clearly play an important role in recruitment and retention, but as Marissa Mayer, President and CEO of Yahoo! has said, “Employees, especially young people, want more than a paycheck.”

Professional development programs, work-life balance issues, and many other factors can all contribute to employee recruitment and retention, but one factor that you may not have considered is the role of art.

Specifically, we are going to show how art can make your entire community a more desirable place to live and work. Because today’s workforce is highly mobile, you’re not just competing against other companies, but also against other communities, other cities, other states, and even other countries.

In his 2012 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class, Revisited*, Dr. Richard Florida notes that members of the “*Creative Class*” (which he considers to include not just artists, but doctors, lawyers, scientists, teachers, managers, researchers, and all sorts of other people for whom creativity and independent thinking are integral parts of their job description) expressed their “desire and need to live in places that offer stimulating, creative environments. Many would not even consider taking jobs in certain cities or regions...Some told me they used location as their primary criterion in a proactive sense: they picked the place they wanted to live and then focused their job search there.”

Florida asserts that the great U.S. technology hubs of our era—Silicon Valley, Boston, Seattle, and Austin—all were “open, diverse, and culturally creative first. Then they became technologically creative, birthing high-tech firms and industries.”



40

PERCENT OF
U.S. EMPLOYERS
HAVE DIFFICULTY
FILLING JOBS

56

PERCENT OF
U.S. EMPLOYERS
BELIEVE THAT A
TALENT SHORTAGE
HAS A MEDIUM-TO-HIGH
IMPACT ON THEIR
ABILITY TO MEET
CLIENT NEEDS



*2014 ManpowerGroup
Talent shortage Survey*



Top left: Des Moines Arts Festival, Courtesy of the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau

Bottom left: Des Moines Arts Festival, Courtesy of the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau

Right: John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park, Courtesy of the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau

THE THEORY IN ACTION

If you're looking for an example of a city where companies have banded together to embrace the idea of using arts and culture to attract and retain talent—particularly young talent—you need look no further than Des Moines.

“The Des Moines business community sees the value of the arts as an economic engine. They recognize that a strong, vibrant arts culture helps to make the community more attractive, helps retain talented young people, and also helps to attract new talent to the region,” says MD Isley, the former executive director of Bravo Greater Des Moines (Bravo), a nonprofit organization that is funded by hotel/motel revenue from sixteen Central Iowa governments. Bravo serves as the region's art council and works to increase awareness, advocacy, and funding for regional arts, culture, and heritage organizations.

“In the past, Iowa used to experience the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon where some of our best and brightest local talent would leave for what they perceived as greener pastures,” says Isley. “These days, there's a lot of data that shows Des Moines has become one of the top cities in the country for young professionals.”

Over the past few years, [Des Moines has garnered national attention for all the right reasons](#). In 2015, Forbes called Des Moines the #2 Best City for Jobs. The year before,

Forbes named Des Moines the #1 Best City for Young Professionals. In 2014, Fortune named Des Moines the #1 City with an Up-and-Coming Downtown.

One of the arts organizations that has played a big role in boosting the city's appeal for young professionals is the Des Moines Social Club (DMSC), founded in 2007 by Zachary Mannheimer.

Mannheimer wanted to give young people a reason to stay in or move to Des Moines rather than heading to larger nearby cities like Minneapolis or Chicago. "A lot of people who grew up in Des Moines ended up getting bored and moving away after college," explains Mannheimer, who recognized that Des Moines was seeing a serious outflow in the demographic segment between the ages of 25 and 35. "The question was how could we reverse that to start holding onto those young people and even having an influx? The only way I think you can do that is to build an environment that catered to young creatives, and therefore to businesses."

To help generate that environment, Mannheimer created the DMSC to serve as an artistic hub for the community—developing and hosting artistic events while also undertaking a community-building mission. Today, the Des Moines Social Club produces between 700 and 800 events per year. Just a few years after its launch, DMSC reaches an annual audience of more than 240,000 people. The organization has four resident theater companies and is wrapping up an \$8 million renovation and historic preservation project on its new home—a 1930s Art Deco building that was formerly a firehouse.

On the second floor, DMSC has office space for up to four nonprofits to share resources. There are dedicated spaces for art classes, a recording studio, culinary school, circus and aerial arts room, full service restaurant, coffee shop and comic book store, art gallery, black box theater, and bar with a cabaret stage. There is also an outdoor courtyard with space for up to 1,000 people that Mannheimer expects to use as a venue for movies, concerts, and theater.

The Des Moines corporate community funded the majority of the capital campaign to move the DMSC headquarters. Why did these businesses want to support the full panoply of DMSC events—including trapeze classes, comedy revues, and Fireball (a pyrotechnics extravaganza)? "Des Moines companies have a vested interest in making this region stronger—whether to recruit talent or bring more attention to the community," says Mannheimer. "The business community does not just invest in us, it also invests in a bevy of other cultural organizations here in town. If we all work together, I think that's how we're going to make this region grow and flourish."

The push to make Des Moines cool is paying off. "We're trending up in population, down in unemployment, and up in the number of young people engaged in the civic life of Des Moines," Mannheimer says.

“It definitely feels like more young people are staying in Des Moines after they finish school,” says Mickey Davis, program manager at DMSC. “People are excited. There’s been a boom in artistic activity with organizations like the Des Moines Social Club, Des Moines Music Coalition [a nonprofit organization that produces music festivals and serves as an advocate for the Central Iowa music industry], and others. I think Des Moines benefits from the support that corporations here give to the arts—the business community has really accepted the idea that arts and creativity are crucial for attracting young people to town.”

Anita Norian, president for Kemin Industries, human nutrition and health division, headquartered in Des Moines, would agree with that assessment. She feels that having a strong arts scene and a culturally vibrant community is key to employee recruitment and retention. “Even if employees themselves are not active in the arts, one of the questions they ask when evaluating a city is whether you have a symphony, an opera, a ballet, and other types of arts activities that they or their families could experience. If you say yes, they feel good about the vibrancy of the community. They want to know it’s there and available.”

Why would a prospective employee ask about arts and culture even if she didn’t go to the opera every week? “It’s like shopping for a car,” explains Norian. “Some people will look at cars and ask whether the car has a sunroof and heated seats. If the car has those amenities, they figure it will have everything else they want. Similarly, many prospective employees will think that if your city has a ballet and good museums and theater that it will probably have a long list of other things that they value.”

Michelle Book, director of community and academic relations at agrosience company DuPont Pioneer, agrees that Des Moines’ arts and culture scene is “critically important” to her company’s efforts to recruit and retain talent. “When we’re recruiting people to Des Moines, some people still think they are going to get off the airplane and see nothing but cornfields, so it’s even more important that we impress them with our arts and culture offerings.”

Book says that the highly educated workers whom DuPont Pioneer seeks to recruit often come from places with rich cultural traditions, so as a result, they have certain baseline expectations about the arts and entertainment opportunities that a community should offer. “In the same way that they are looking for good grocery stores and safe communities, they want to see a vibrant arts and culture scene,” she explains. “That’s not to say that they will necessarily attend the symphony every week, but they want to know that on any given day, they can leave their house and find something artistic or cultural to do. Fortunately, Des Moines’ artistic calendar is full practically every day of the year.”



PAPPAJOHN SCULPTURE PARK BOWLS THEM OVER

Entrepreneur and philanthropist John Pappajohn and his wife Mary have also played an important part in raising Des Moines' artistic profile. The Pappajohns spearheaded the creation of the Pappajohn Sculpture Park in downtown Des Moines. Having been ranked among the top art collectors in the world, the Pappajohns were able to fill the sculpture park with pieces from their own collection.

The City of Des Moines obtained a 100-year lease on a 4.4-acre parcel of land in a prominent part of town; Pappajohn gave more than two dozen sculptures by world-class artists to the Des Moines Arts Center (DMAC); local business leaders raised \$6.5 million from business, foundations, and individuals to landscape the park; and DMAC Director Jeff Fleming curated the placement of the sculptures within the park.

"It's really created a phenomenon," says Pappajohn. "People don't have to buy a ticket or even go through a gate, they can enter anywhere along the park. And that accessibility has made all the difference. I drive by the park every time I go to work or drive home, and it is often full of people. In the springs and summers, sometimes you'll

Left: Yoshitomo Nara "White Ghost", 2010. Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Purchased with funds from John and Mary Pappajohn, 2011.5.

Photo Credit: Rich Sanders, Des Moines.

Right: Juame Plensa "Nomade", 2007. Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of John and Mary Pappajohn, 2015.3.

Photo: Connie Wilson.

see three or four weddings taking place the same day in the park. It has become a magnet and a real focal point for Des Moines.”

It seems clear that the sculpture park, open since September 2009, has been a big hit for Des Moines residents, but can a sculpture park really help companies attract talent from other parts of the country or the world? “It’s already happening,” replies Pappajohn. “When people come to Des Moines on job interviews, many of them are bowled over by the fact that we have a sculpture park. Des Moines is a surprising place in the amount of art it contains—not just the park, but the symphony or the Art Center with architecture from three of the most well-known architects of the 20th century [Eliel Saarinen, I. M. Pei, and Richard Meier]. These are the types of things that have really helped us in recruiting employees from other towns, other states, and other countries.”

PRINCIPAL FINANCIAL GROUP PLAYS A MAJOR ROLE

There are other corporations in Des Moines that recognize that the arts can help with recruitment and retention. Consider the Principal Financial Group, which started assembling its own art collection back in the 1960s under the guidance of a CEO named John Taylor.

“Those of us who followed Taylor in the CEO role continued that tradition because we saw the value it provided in terms of attracting employees and fostering innovation,” says J. Barry Griswell, a former Chairman and CEO at Principal who also served as CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines.

When Principal brings in potential new employees, part of the interview process involves giving candidates a tour of the headquarters building, including portions of the art collection. “I remember one young woman who said that when she came to interview, she saw a couple of pieces we have by [renowned pop-artist] Roy Lichtenstein,” recalls Griswell. “She told me that Lichtenstein piece was one of the things that made her want to work for Principal. The Creative Class people that you are trying to attract want to know whether your company is progressive and innovative—and one of the ways they make that decision is by assessing your facilities, including the art inside your building.”



Recently, Principal invested \$20 million and partnered with the city, the state of Iowa, other corporations, and private donors to build a \$70 million riverwalk trail system called [The Principal Riverwalk](#). Over a mile long, the riverwalk includes an ice-skating rink, fountains, and lots of art installations along the trail. Griswell says that the riverwalk has ended up spurring development along the river and serving as the catalyst for the revival of downtown Des Moines.

Yet another Des Moines company, EMC Insurance Companies, runs a visual arts competition called [Art EMC](#) for current and former Iowa residents. Winners are selected by EMC employees, then displayed at EMC headquarters before being sent on tour of all 16 EMC branch offices. EMC also provides support for the Des Moines Symphony and the Civic Center through its corporate Foundation, sponsors outdoor music concerts, and contributes to capital campaigns, such as a current effort to remodel the home of Des Moines Community Playhouse, one of the oldest continuously operating community theaters in the country.

What are the business benefits of all these investments in the Des Moines arts scene? “We owe it to our employees to help make the city an interesting and creative place to live,” says Sean Pelletier, assistant vice president for government affairs and head of the EMC Foundation. “Des Moines used to have a reputation among outsiders as a small town with not much to do for fun. Having artistic amenities like the Pappajohn Sculpture Park and the Social Club does great things for the city’s reputation and helps make Des Moines a better place to live, which in turn helps us attract quality employees, especially young people.”

EMC Insurance visual arts competition, Art EMC

THE TAKEAWAYS

Companies like The Principal Financial Group and EMC are not outliers when it comes to support for the arts in Greater Des Moines. In fact, the Greater Des Moines Partnership, Central Iowa's regional economic and community development organization, has collaborated with its regional partners to develop and begin implementing a vision plan called **Capital Crossroads** that emphasizes long-term dedication to building arts and cultural assets.

“ Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life. ”

Pablo Picasso

“A region cannot be world-class without a comprehensive, consistent, and fiscally aggressive commitment to the arts as a critical driver of economic, community, tourism, and quality of life development,” states the vision plan. Building on the success of Bravo Greater Des Moines, the plan contains ideas on creating arts districts throughout Greater Des Moines and taking steps to increase space for arts performance, education and incubation.

“Arts and culture are a key component of our place-making strategy,” says Jay Byers, CEO of the Greater Des Moines Partnership. “For a region our size, we are already able to fight above our weight in terms of what we can offer through our Des Moines Performing Arts Broadway series at the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines, the collections at the Des Moines Art Center, the Science Center of Iowa, our expanding Blank Park Zoo, a world-class sculpture park, our recently renovated Des Moines Botanical Garden, the Des Moines Social Club, and much more. There is a strong passion for the arts among a broad swath of the business community who are committed to working hand-in-hand to ensure that Greater Des Moines has a best-in-class arts scene.”

Why do passions run so strong in the Greater Des Moines business community about supporting the arts? “There are lots of factors that affect development, but quality of life—including arts and culture—is a big part of the decisions that both companies and individuals make when deciding where to locate,” says Byers. “When you look at the entire equation, in terms of population growth, job growth, city rankings, corporate expansions, and relocations over the past three years, we are definitely doing something right.”

THE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How to use artistic partnerships to improve employee attraction and retention in your community:

- Evaluate the arts scene in your community. How many performances, gallery shows, concerts, and exhibits are taking place this weekend?
- What steps have you taken to promote the arts organizations and cultural events in your community to prospective and current employees? Can you encourage your HR staff to promote arts and culture happenings on the corporate intranet and reward employees by purchasing tickets for them to such events?
- How does your arts scene compare to your neighboring communities and/or the ones with which you compete most often for talent and/or new business?
- Try to find ways to measure the extent to which your community's arts scene impacts your ability to attract and retain employees. For employees who relocated to your area, did they see the arts scene as a positive or negative factor in their decision?
- Collaborate with the chamber of commerce and other businesses to promote your communities arts scene. How can you work together to strengthen the local arts scene and help all local businesses compete for talent against other communities?
- Could you set up a formal or informal process for continuing to monitor perceptions of the arts scene among current or prospective employees? As the arts scene improves, try to measure the impact on your attraction and retention goals.

Americans for the Arts is the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts in America. With more than 50 years of service, we are dedicated to representing and serving local communities and creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts.



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