Connecticut General Assembly Arts, Culture, and Tourism Caucus Summit Meeting

Synthesis Report

December 2021

Odyssey Associates

PO Box 906

North Haven, CT 06473

(475) 201-5848

odysseyassociates.llc

ODYSSEY
ASSOCIATES

Executive Summary

On December 3, 2021, the Connecticut General Assembly's bipartisan Arts, Culture, and Tourism Caucus held a summit meeting of sector representatives, interested legislators, and state agency leaders to discuss how the legislature can best support these industries in the upcoming legislative session. Several important themes emerged that can guide the caucus's agenda.

- Participants offered feedback on the consistency, sustainability, accessibility, and equity of state funding. For example, attendees discussed the inconsistency of the state marketing budget, which fortunately has been recently reinstated after funded at $1 for a number of years. In the arts and culture sector, there were comments about the lack of accessibility to funding, with the majority state arts funding going toward organizations through direct appropriations, also known as "line items."
- In addition to being a high priority, attendees felt that these funding issues are areas where there could be a great deal of collaboration between the different stakeholders. They also perceived that a consistent and sustainable funding structure could be an easy issue to address.
- Statewide marketing was identified as a high priority among attendees as well as one where there could be substantial collaboration.
- Representatives from all sectors indicated a need for training, recruiting, and retaining workers in their fields.
- Applying principles of equity, inclusion, and diversity in leadership rose as a particularly high priority.
- Because of necessity and due to the pandemic, a lot of collaboration occurred, and there was a sense that these partnerships could be further developed. In particular, participants discussed partnering together to better market each other and the state as a whole. There also seemed to be an opportunity for shared advocacy on common objectives.
- There was interest in advancing on the innovations that developed during the pandemic. In particular, developing more content for virtual and hybrid spaces became of interest.

Background and Summit Agenda

The Connecticut General Assembly's Arts, Culture, and Tourism Caucus is a bipartisan group of over 60 legislators with a shared goal to support those sectors to increase their economic and community impact throughout the state. In the fall of 2021, caucus co-chairs Senator Paul Formica and Representative Dorinda Borer along with Representative John-Michael Parker decided to organize a summit of industry leaders, state agency officials, and fellow legislators to solicit feedback on the most important challenges and opportunities facing these related sectors. Connecticut Humanities funded the gathering, and the leadership retained Odyssey Associates to facilitate. The summit occurred on Friday, December 3 at the Connecticut Science Center in Hartford.

The primary objective of the day was to create an environment in which attendees could educate legislators and agency leaders on their challenges, offer feedback on how the public sector could help, and then work to identify priorities. The ACT caucus will consider this input when the legislative session begins in February 2022, and a follow-up session is intended for spring 2022.

The agenda for the day was:

- Opening remarks from Representative Borer, Governor Ned Lamont, Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner David Lehman, and Odyssey Associates Principal Joshua Borenstein.

- A panel discussion moderated by Senator Formica including Calida Nicole Jones, Vice-President at Arts Consulting Group and President of the Connecticut Arts Alliance Board of Directors; Jason Mancini, Executive Director of Connecticut Humanities; and Stephen Coan, President and CEO of Mystic Aquarium.
- Breakout sessions lead by Representative Borer, Representative Parker, Senator Formica, Borenstein, Adriane Jefferson of the City of New Haven Department of Cultural Affairs, and Maria Miranda of Miranda Creative.
- A reconvening of all attendees with facilitators summarizing the key discussion points from their sessions.
- Closing remarks from caucus co-chairs Representative Borer and Senator Formica.

Membership of the breakout groups was planned in advance of the meeting so that there could be representation from all sectors as well as an even distribution of legislators in each breakout group. Facilitators led the sessions guided by the same protocol so that there was an opportunity for each breakout group to discuss current challenges and opportunities as well as goals for the next five years.

Towards the end of the breakout sessions, each facilitator led their group in a prioritization exercise to understand if any consensus existed in terms of highest priorities, areas for collaboration among the sectors, items that would be "easy" to implement, and areas which the group felt could be distractions.

Input from the Summit Attendees

Overall, breakout sessions collected 143 challenges, goals, and opportunities across all three sectors, all of which are attached to this report as an appendix. This report notes the common themes which arose across the breakout sessions.

Highest Priorities

Odyssey took all of the suggestions and grouped them into related categories. We then compiled the votes that items received by category, listed in figure 1.

Attendees identified the following as the top five priorities:

Equitable, inclusive, and accessible funding – In the breakout sessions, attendees commented on how the grant making process needs to be more accessible and equitable. While these observations were made in relation to all sectors, there were particular remarks about arts funding in Connecticut, especially in relation to "line item" organizations that receive direct appropriations instead of participating in a competitive process. Several attendees noted that this current structure is neither equitable nor accessible. Some attendees suggested that funding programs might prioritize those organizations who have leadership that is representative of their local communities and work to remove barriers to participation.

Developing and retaining staffing – In many of the businesses and organizations in the arts, culture, and tourism sectors, training, recruiting, and retaining personnel has been a particular challenge. Several individuals expressed concerns such as lacking adequate resources to hire and train new employees, an inability to find qualified candidates for open positions, and the strain on current employees working longer hours due to staffing shortages. Attendees made suggestions, including:

- Creating a statewide job bank for these sectors to better match employers with qualified candidates.
- Making an investment in workforce development initiatives, including coordinated paid internships to train new people to enter the workforce.
- More teaching and encouragement of individuals to enter these industries.

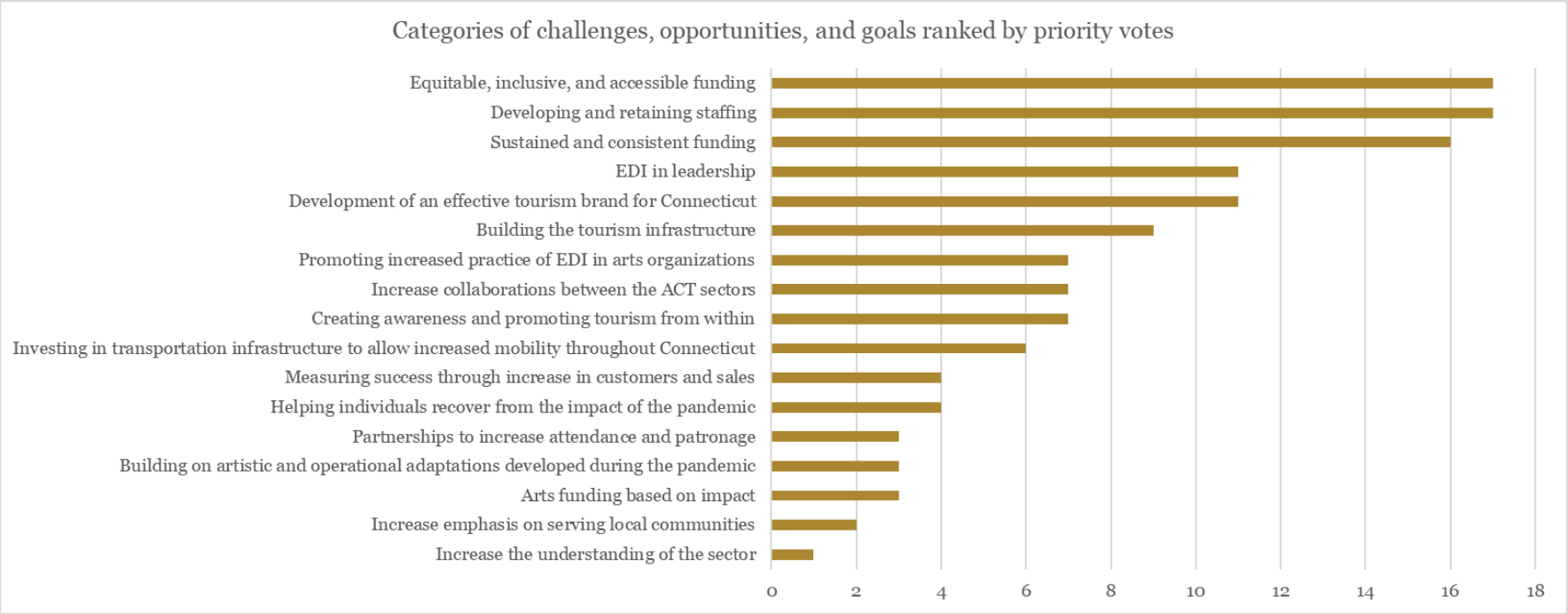

Figure 1: Categories of challenges, opportunities, and goals ranked by priority votes

Sustained and consistent funding – A topic of conversation among breakout groups was achieving more consistent state funding. The stop gap measures instituted during the pandemic were critical for survival during the course of the pandemic, but there were a lot of questions about what would happen when American Rescue Plan funding would end. As a result, long-term, sustainable funding remains uncertain. Attendees thought the State should take action to make funding of the arts, culture, and tourism sectors sustainable in the long-term.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in leadership – The panel discussion framed equity, diversity, and inclusion issues for the day, participants further discussed them throughout the breakout sessions. In one breakout group, this discussion had particular momentum, and the members of that group coalesced around achieving "leadership that looks like our communities" over the next five years.

Development of an effective tourism brand for Connecticut – The branding of Connecticut as a tourism destination became a central topic among breakout groups, with conversations about both interstate and intrastate patronage of attractions, hotels, and restaurants. There was discussion on how stakeholders could collaborate on messaging, understanding the identity and brand of the state, and marketing in such away that considers Connecticut's chief competitors for tourism and leverages our State's particular competitive advantages.

Areas for Collaboration

Attendees identified areas that would make the most sense for collaboration. After categorizing these items, five areas in particular became the most popular categories for collaboration (see figure 2).

Increase collaboration between the arts, culture, and tourism (ACT) sectors – Attendees agreed that the different industries were not working together collectively as much as they could. There were observations that the organizations and leaders of these sectors could support each other more intentionally, although there were comments that, because of the pandemic, more partnerships developed out of necessity. Participants discussed how we can broaden our minds and retain awareness of our mutual assets to further leverage them together. There was discussion on how

Figure 2: Categories of challenges, opportunities, and goals ranked by collaboration votes

collaboration on fundraising and advocacy could advance all of these fields especially by increasing available funding.

Building on operational adaptations developed during the pandemic – While the pandemic created dire circumstances for these industries, it also forced innovation, changes in how organizations do business, and caused many to reinvent products. Meeting attendees noted that, for the most part, the arts, culture, and tourism sectors experienced a good deal of success with these adaptations, and it spurred a lot of questions. How does the move to the virtual space affect the physical space? How can more hybrid opportunities be developed? How can access to businesses and organizations be increased through digital content? In addition, the popularity of the virtual content has developed a stronger sense of value for arts and cultural organizations. Advancing these innovations were identified as an area for collaboration.

Sustained and consistent funding – In addition to having been identified as a top priority, this area was marked as one for potential collaboration. Of particular note, there was interest in collaborating around funding innovative solutions to current challenges.

Share data to increase outreach and marketing – An idea that received a good deal of traction was for organizations to share data to identify opportunities for increased sales. A number of individuals thought that increased access to data would allow more informed decision making, especially around marketing tactics.

Development of an effective brand for Connecticut – Not only did this category of suggestions emerge as a top priority, but it also emerged as a popular area for collaboration among attendees.

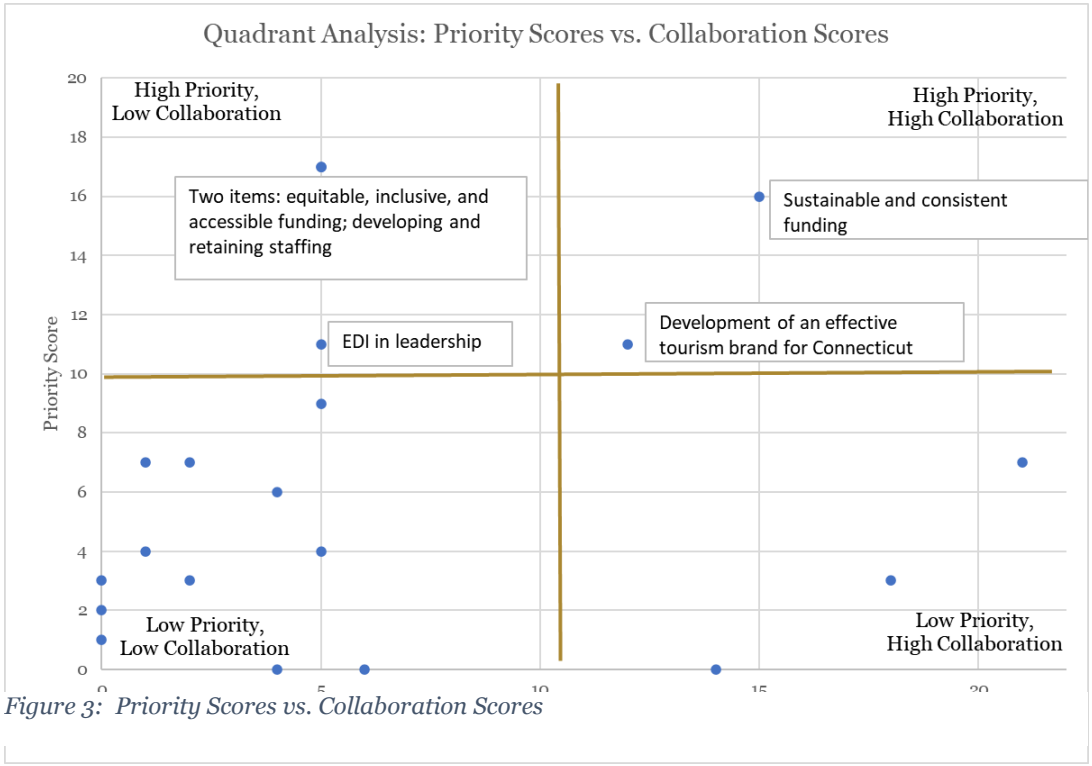

Figure 3: Priority Scores vs. Collaboration Scores

Matching Priorities versus Areas of Collaboration

Odyssey matched those categories receiving priority votes versus those items receiving collaboration votes. This quadrant analysis appears in figure 3. There are some important observations when these two sets of scores are cross-referenced to each other:

- Two of the highest priority areas – sustained and consistent funding and development of an effective tourism brand for Connecticut – are also among the areas identified for collaboration. As the legislature and state agencies look at these areas, constituents will appreciate, if not expect, to be involved in the development of these policies and appropriations usage. The State can also expect constituents to

collaborate with each other to advocate for polices and appropriations that meet their needs.

- Three areas ranked highly in terms of priority, but attendees did not vote them as crucial areas for collaboration. Interestingly, categories involving equity and inclusion did not merge as top areas for collaborations. This phenomenon may be because these conversations are prevalent in many arts and cultural organizations at the moment, and they may not be occurring to the same degree at other types of businesses and organizations. That said, it does not mean that these areas are not as important – they in fact ranked as high priorities. It suggests that State leadership may have to make a case to encourage cross-sector collaboration on these issues. It also suggests that solutions might need to be tailored to each sector, instead of one policy that could apply to arts, culture, and tourism in their totality.

"Easy" Areas to Address

Participants received voting dots to indicate areas which they felt were "easy." It is important to note that this designation indicates whether constituents *perceive* an item as easy to implement, as opposed to its actual ease. This understanding can inform the messaging of a particular category (e.g., creating sustained and consistent funding might appear easy, but it requires many stakeholders to agree on fundamentals). After grouping the individual comments into

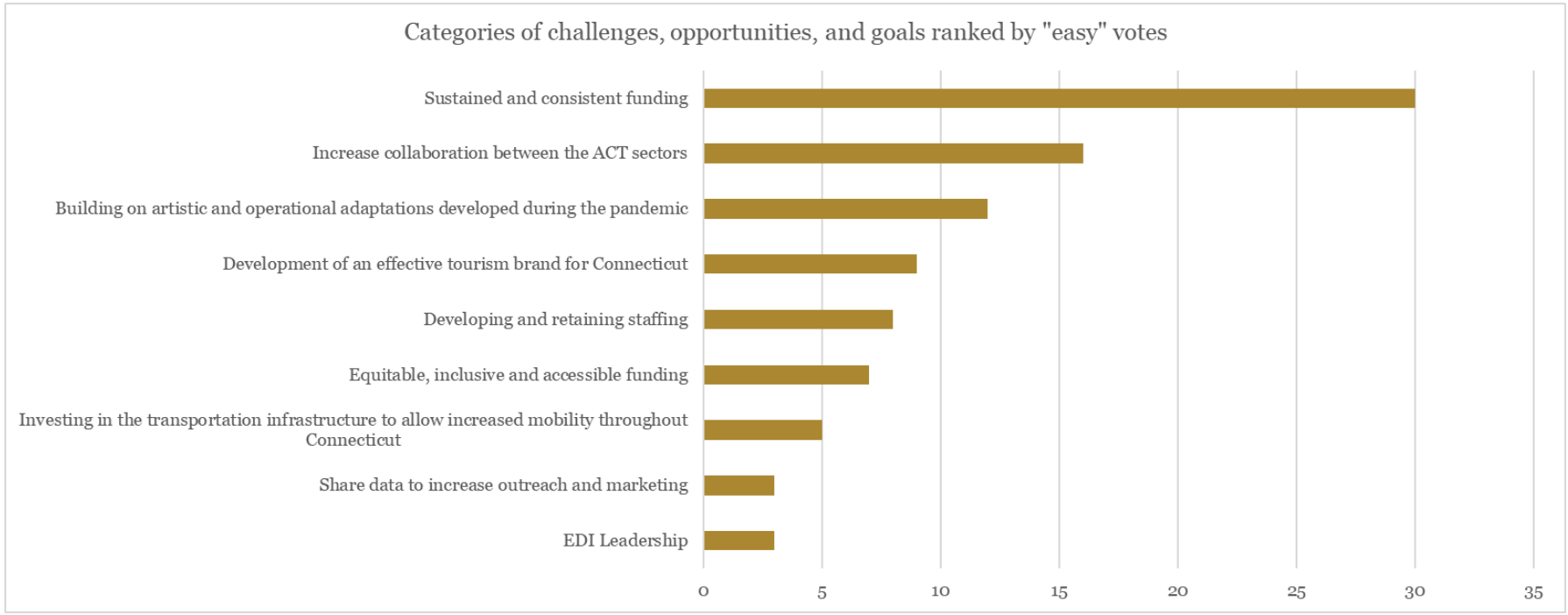

Figure 4: Categories of challenges, opportunities, and goals ranked by "easy" votes

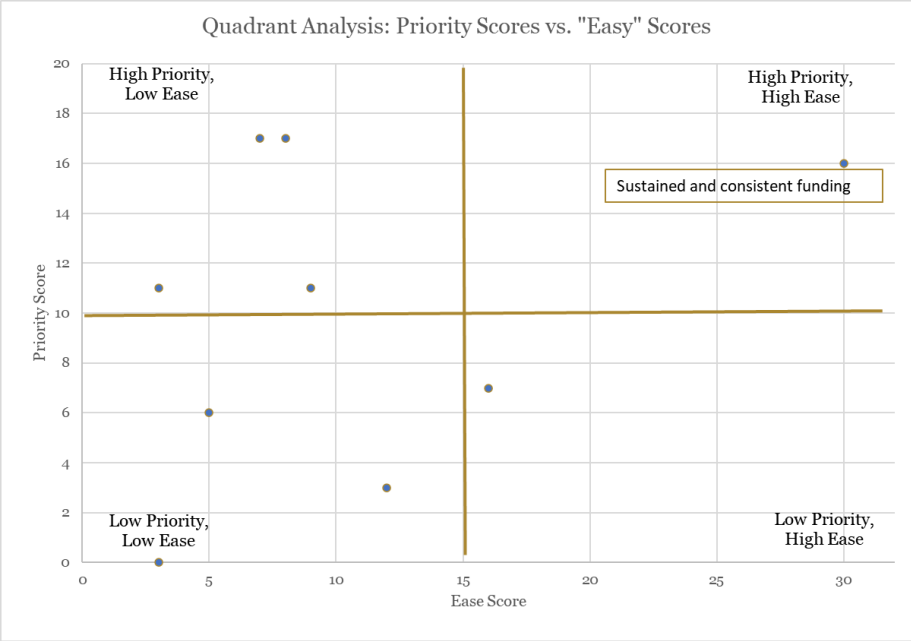

Figure 5: Priority Scores vs. "Easy" Scores

categories, the items in figure 4 were the ones that received the most votes. Of these, three categories stood out from the others.

Sustained and consistent funding – Votes on the "ease" of this group of tasks were substantial. In particular, the maintenance of funding for five years received votes as being easy to implement.

Increase collaboration between ACT sectors – Constituents indicated that encouraging this kind of partnership would be easy. Specifically, participants felt that collaborations could be incentivized, and that organizations and businesses could co-market and share resources. These collaborations could also extend to organizations that are adjacent to the arts, culture, and tourism industries, such as higher education and sporting events.

Building on artistic and operational adaptations developed during the pandemic – Several suggestions were considered easy to implement, including encouraging more hybrid opportunities, stimulating innovation in physical spaces, and offering consulting support to help organizations seize some of these opportunities.

Comparing Priorities vs. Ease

Figure 5 shows a quadrant analysis of categories of priorities cross-referenced with ease. Only one category of challenges, opportunities, and goals – sustained and consistent funding –ranked as both a high priority and "easy." All other high priorities were not perceived to be easy to implement.

Distractions

Participants had an opportunity to indicate distractions within the challenges, opportunities, and goals. They are listed in figure 6.

Most of the items which participants flagged as distractions are circumstances that are out of the control of the field, e.g., "people don't feel comfortable returning," or "new norms are complicated and costly." However, "defining equity, race, and economics in the arts," was seen as a distraction by members of one particular breakout group. That said, it offers some insight that some constituents do not see issues around equity and race as central; therefore, policies that address equity in arts, culture, and tourism will need explanation, if not justification, given this sentiment.

Observations and Recommendations

One of the notable aspects of the convening was that it was an opportunity for the Department of Economic and Community Development, which oversees programs in support of arts, culture, and tourism, and the legislative caucus to discuss these issues together. A stronger partnership and alignment between DECD and the legislature would bolster all of these sectors throughout the state.

It is also important to note that the integration of these sectors could develop into a "virtuous cycle." Visitors (both from Connecticut and outside the state) attend attractions (including arts and culture organizations), eat at restaurants, and stay at hotels. Those activities generate tax dollars, which can then be used to reinvest in statewide marketing as well as the ongoing sustainability of cultural attractions. Those attractions, in turn, generate more events to encourage attendance, which then stimulates more visitation. Along those lines, considering how those tax revenues could advance statewide and visitation could have a positive impact on the State's economic and community development.

Given the number of comments made about the need for sustained, consistent, equitable, and accessible revenues, the legislature, in partnership with DECD, may need to examine how to revise it. The model that mostly closely resembles Connecticut's is the Massachusetts Cultural Council's Cultural Investment Portfolio, in which arts organizations receive ongoing general operating support similar to Connecticut's line items but evaluated and managed by peers and professional staff. MCC also offers a "Gateway" program to create an opportunity for new organizations to join the portfolio in an equitable manner. Another model is the Minnesota State Arts Board, which provides four-year operating grants that allow arts and cultural organizations to count on funding and encourage advance planning. A final model is the Maryland State Arts Council, which has recently restated its vision to yield a greater variety of funded projects, to eliminate biases in the grant making process, and to expand the deliberations about rigor beyond current conventions or Western traditions.

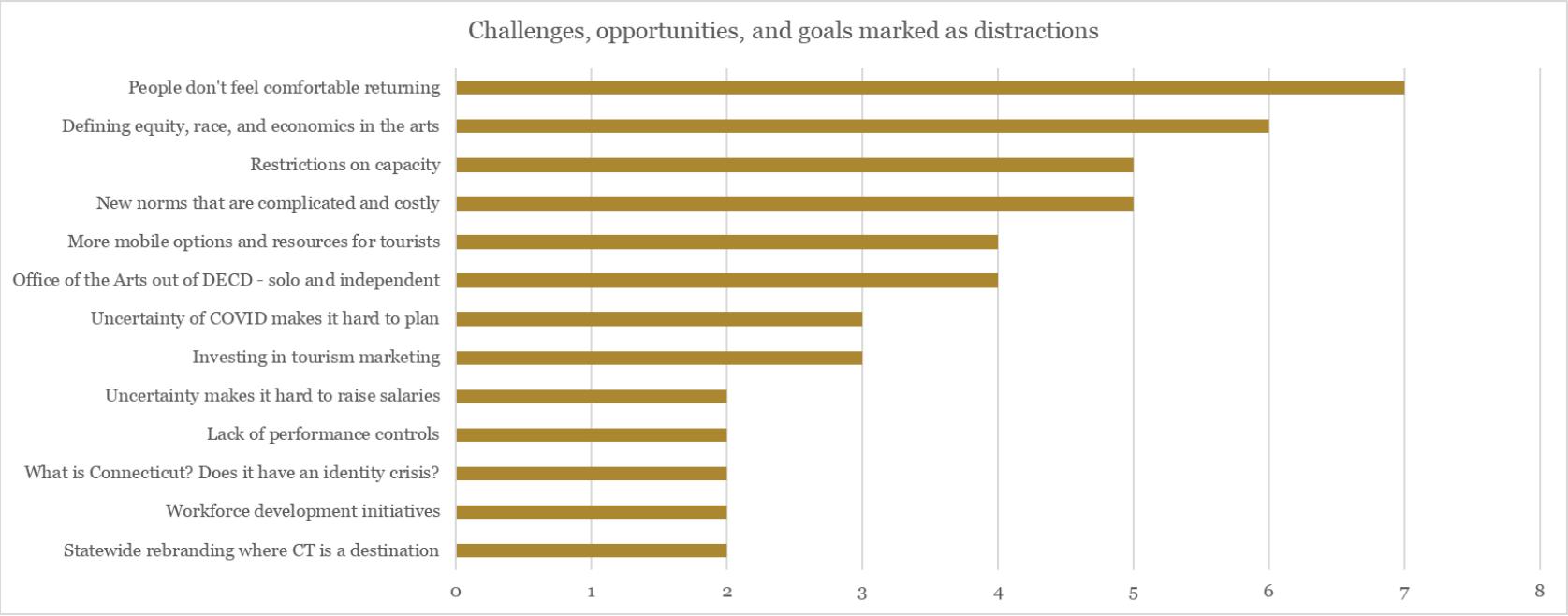

Figure 6: Challenges, opportunities, and goals noted as distractions