Our Belief

Creativity helps humanity thrive.

Our Vision

AIR ignites creative economies worldwide by unlocking community genius.

Our Mission

The AIR Institute provides rural and under-resourced communities with programming that inspires new connections and ignites the creative economy. Creative people expand business skills, businesspeople get more creative; they learn to collaborate, adapt, and thrive together.

Our Values

The AIR Institute is built upon values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We believe diversity of people, opinions, and experiences, at decision-making tables, make communities and economies stronger. We believe that historical and current inequities must be addressed and remedied. We work to ensure that our communities have full access to essential education, tools, and resources that build self-determination, resilience, cultural equity, and creativity. We practice and teach consensus-based collaboration. We believe every community is unique and should define its own measure of success: quality of life, economic stability, individual accessibility, and opportunity.

ABOUT AIR

2020 was a transformational year for the AIR Institute. Due to growth in demand and need for flexibility and leadership development, AIR moved its headquarters to Frederick, Maryland, formed an independent independent, non-profit corporation, and seated a national Board of Directors. The AIR Institute was federally recognized as a 501C3 nonprofit organization in July 2020.

In the first year, the Board and Staff crafted and approved new Mission, Vision, and Values for the organization and worked in small teams to focus on three experiments designed to lead into our values and lean toward our vision. In 2021 we are executing three pilot programs that evolve AIR's existing work. AIR will be training Kentucky SBDC coaches with an eye for replicating the model of service to state SBDCs nationwide. In partnership with the National Coalition for Arts' Preparedness & Emergency Response (NCAPER) and the United States Regional Arts Organizations (RAOs), AIR will be training twelve facilitators across the country, two in each RAO service area, to be Crisis and Mitigation Coaches for deployment to communities experiencing natural or human-made crisis or disasters. With AIR state affiliate leadership from the Ohio Arts Council and Virginia Tech, twelve teachers and informal educators from Ohio and Virginia will be trained to facilitate and pilot AIR programs for high school age students.

Leadership

Beth Flowers
Executive Director,
AIR Institute
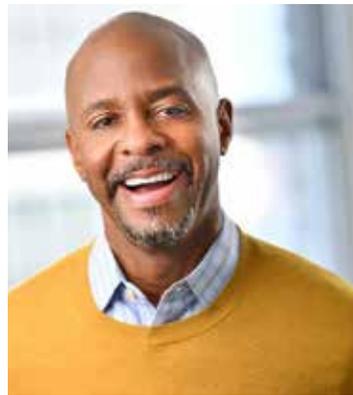
Torrie Allen
President & CEO,
Arts Midwest

Donna Collins
Executive Director,
Ohio Arts Council

Jim Grace
Executive Director,
Arts & Business Council,
Greater Boston

Kristina Joyce
President & CEO,
Kentucky SBDC

Delaney Keating
Executive Director,
StartUp Colorado

Grow Your Creative Economy

The AIR Institute uses a systemic approach for our programs and our facilitation methodology. We work hard to raise the value of the arts and creativity by working directly in existing educational, economic development, and governmental systems. We have strong partnerships with higher education institutions like Virginia Tech and state agencies like the Ohio Arts Council and the Kentucky Small Business Development Center.

Our methodology is deeply rooted in local control and access, so we utilize a train-the trainer model for ensuring that our programs can be used and practiced across the country. Our creative economy growth methodology uses a three-pronged, iterative cycle: gather often, learn, and do. We believe that when people move to action together, even small actions, that relationships, ownership, and learning become deeper and real change is possible.

AIR Programs Inspire
- **Hope**
- **Empathy**
- **Self-reliance**
- **New Leaders**
- **Local Investment**
- **Diverse Economy**

Gather Often

Learn

Do

AIR Workshops & Programs

The suite of AIR programs work together to reinforce the creative economy growth model. We recommend that communities assess local desire for prioritizing their creative economy as an economic development strategy by hosting an Art Builds Business Builds Art Workshop first. Once a community knows it wants to focus on their creative economy, the Shift Workshop and Evolve Program can be offered annually to grow a local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The reason all this is possible is because of our localized approach to delivering the programs. AIR works with state-wide agencies or institutions to train local facilitators who can provide a personal connection and give participants confidence that they can learn, connect, change and succeed.

AIR programs were designed using adult learning best practices so the workshops are very interactive and focused on doing skill building, rather than listening to talking heads. Facilitators help ensure that the participants practice and gain self efficacy in collaboration, listening, design thinking, and business planning.

It is an acquired skill to learn to facilitate without teaching or leading or providing an "answer." All of our facilitators work hard to master this skill and to share tools with participants so that communities have more people ready to be open for a truly local, collaborative process and creative ecosystem.

ABBBA Workshop
90 – 120 minutes
Up to 50 people

- Creative economy
- Community development
- Design thinking empathy exercise

Shift Workshop
18 hours
12 – 36 participants

- Design thinking & business planning
- Small facilitated teams
- Teams create implementable projects – raise value of arts and businesses

Evolve Program
6 – 9 months
Up to 15 in cohort

- Participants work on their creative venture, nonprofit, or program
- Design thinking & Lean Startup
- Prototyping & real-time feedback
- Mastermind team

Creativity is the engine behind every pursuit that has changed the world.

What if more members of our society started working on developing their creativity? And then applied that creativity to everything they do. What new ventures would be started? What revolutionary ideas would emerge?

The world would be different, not just for the artists—but for all of us.

It sounds so simple. And, yet, so much of our society is broken into silos, dividing those who are "creative" and those who aren't.

What if people from all walks of the community came together to focus on what was possible, using their imagination and creativity to:

- pursue their artistic passions,
- improve the way businesses work,
- create jobs,
- solve social problems, and
- break down barriers and make community connections.

The AIR Institute is an empowering ecosystem that provides artists, businesses, and communities the tools, resources, and support to learn, connect, and, ultimately, succeed. AIR merges the creativity of the arts with the innovation of business to raise the value of arts and creativity in all of our communities.

AIR: Weaving Creativity, Community, and Economic Sustainability

While we often think of our world as interconnected by technology, the truth is that many segments of our society are increasingly isolated from each other. This is as true in our local communities as it is on the national political stage. Groups like artists and businesspeople don't mix too often.

Businesspeople connect with other businesspeople. Artists and other creatives connect with their own kind. They make wonderful things happen in their respective communities. But what if their power was melded together?

AIR workshops are the place where that melding happens.

It's a forum for anyone to develop their creative side and a place where any creative person can learn business skills. But that's just the beginning. What's electric is when they work together to bring creative, sustainable solutions to the community in the form of open dialogue, economic development, and sheer joy.

The Elements of AIR

While our ambitions are regional, the AIR program is grounded in solid tools that bring real, tangible value to participants. We have devoted significant time and investment into making sure that our methods are the best practices for collaborations, adult education, and community and economic development.

Unlike other professional development programs, AIR is a transformative experience for participants. It's totally unique in bringing together emerging artists, professional artists, and business professionals for a sustained experience.

AIR is more than a workshop, more than a website, more than a way businesspeople and creative types share skills. It's a model for communities who want to build economic sustainability into their communities in a whole new way.

AIR is designed to help you and your community experiment with new ways of thinking and being. We hope you can use our content to challenge your mental models about art, creativity, business, and value.

We are closer than ever before to solving our ills—we have the technology to nourish humanity and the planet, cure disease, increase education, and give all people a path to security and freedom that will foster greater prosperity and harmony for us all.

The question is whether we will do it. Will we come together as a planet to share our experiences and make a better world? We think that art and the spark and iteration of creativity can do just that.

Appalachian Creative Economies Network Summit; Berea, KY

SHIFT WORKSHOP CURRICULUM

We did the heavy lifting for you.

We spent more than two years developing and piloting curriculum that hundreds of folks helped get right. We used design thinking and super-fast prototyping to fail quickly and nail the programs. Now artists are quitting their day jobs, reporting higher revenues than ever in their careers, and businesspeople want this artist-created curriculum because it works.

Of course in 2020, COVID-19 impacted everything we do. AIR leaned into the moment and transformed all our programming to online and hybrid experiences. We piloted, tested, and refined our methods. We used our values, our culture, and our curriculum to design not just new delivery methods, but to refine our programs to be even more accessible and impactful for the communities we serve. We are grateful for the incredible people who participated in hours of experiments and programming.

Online and Hybrid Curriculum Redesign Pilots & Programs

Online Art Builds Business Builds Art Workshops - Friends of Southwest Virginia; Pikeville, KY

Online Evolve Programs - Nelsonville & Logan, Ohio; Patrick & Henry Counties, VA

Zoom Trainings – Artists Thrive Conference; Ohio Arts Council; Kentucky Arts Council; Kentucky SBDC; Grow Appalachia

Online Shift Workshop Pilot - Appalachian Region

Online Facilitator Training Pilot - Appalachian Region

Special thanks to:

Cristina Benedetti, Ali Blair, Madelyn Brewer, Ruthie Caldwell, Kitty Dougoud, Robert Donnan, Ruth Dudding, Shannon Ford, Dana Hantel, Vallorie Henderson, Susan Johnstad, Renee Margocee, Melissa Moody, Emily Moses, Emily Mayo, Janet Newcomb, Heather Pontonio, Jessie Powers, Emily Prince, Domenica Queen, Mary Reed, Jennifer Reis, Leslie Schaller, Cat Sheridan, Idalina Walker, Julie Walters Steele, Dan Vorisek, Betsy Whaley, Leigh Ann Wilder, Kandi Workman, Sarah Wray, and Barbara Wyckoff

Regional Online Facilitator Training Pilot

THE COMPETENCIES

We used public meetings, surveys, and our Curriculum Committee to identify the specific skills and tools needed in order to achieve our curriculum goals and overarching vision. Every exercise, the content we present, and the materials you will use are designed to help you achieve these goals. You'll notice that every section includes which competencies are being addressed so you can follow along and see where you may need additional learning or practice.

The Key Competencies:

The Paradigm Shift
Can articulate new vision for arts and creativity that includes increased community value for creatives and innovation. Can plan new career paths for creatives and uses creativity to help innovate businesses and solve community issues and problems.

Business Planning
Able to write and implement a business plan, including visioning, defining success, identifying audience and customers, marketing and operations strategies, testing and refining, and creating a viable revenue model.

Design thinking, planning, and management
Ability to use design-thinking process to visualize, plan, and implement a project to successful completion, on time and on budget. Be able to create, develop and articulate a project concept.

Access between Community & Creatives
Community members and creatives know how to find each other and work together well.

Collaboration
Develops cooperation and teamwork while participating in a group, working toward mutually beneficial solutions. Is able to accommodate the different ways creativity manifests itself—visioning, nnovating, experimenting, etc., when working with otherson creative projects.

Creative Thinking
To be able to synthesize solutions—combining of separate elements or substances to form a coherent whole. Able to solve problems iteratively within the context of design thinking.

Additional Key Competencies: Communication, Marketing, Social Media, Mentoring, Using Technology, Revenue & Fund Development, Sales, Finance & Bookkeeping, Interactive Arts Experiences & Exposure, Human Resources, Emotional Intelligence, Legal, and Board & Advisor Development

Orangeburg, SC Art Builds Business Builds Art Workshop

WORKSHOP FACILITATION & METHODOLOGY

In the next three days, you will be experimenting with new ways of thinking and being. AIR Certified Facilitators will help you and your collaboration team learn and grow. Facilitators will use various techniques to address all learning styles (auditory, visual, and tactile) with a combination of mini lectures, demonstrations, practices, and debriefs. Some of the activities will take place with the entire group; others will focus on small groups; some will be partnered, and some, like the personal action plan, will focus on the individual participant.

AIR Certified Facilitators have a thorough understanding of group dynamics and adult learning principles, as well as experience in instruction and presentation, facilitation, and coaching. AIR Facilitators will help you work as a constructive and cohesive team and ensure that you have a productive team experience. AIR Facilitators will serve as leaders, referees, and as neutral conveners for you and your team.

Your Facilitator will manage the format and process of team work sessions. They will help your team make decisions using a fair, safe, and creative process. Your Facilitator will help your team develop so you can ultimately work without facilitation.

Facilitators May
- Intervene if the discussion starts to fragment,
- Identify and intervene in dysfunctional group issues,
- Prevent dominance and employ tools to include everyone,
- Summarize discussions and conversations, and
- Bring closure to the session with an end result or action.

AIR Ground Rules

The basics:
- Listen well
- Be kind
- Have fun
- Be creative
- Share freely

The specifics:
- Silence phones and devices.
- Everyone participates; no one dominates.
- No interrupting or side conversations.
- We begin and end on time.
- Information can be shared with others unless a member asks for confidentiality.
- Consensus for team desicsions.

Consensus

Everyone holds a piece of the truth

During the Shift Workshop each team will use consensus to collaborate. Consensus is more congenial than direct voting. It allow for conflict without winners and losers. A group reaches consensus when it finally agrees on a choice and each group member can say

- I believe that others understand my point of view;
- I believe I understand others' point of view;
- Whether I prefer this decision or not, I support it—and will not undermine it — because it was arrived at openly and fairly, and is the best solution for us at this time.

Facilitation Tools

Round

A Round is a chance for every team member to speak in order of seating arrangement. A Round is different from a discussion. During a Round

- only one person talks at a time;
- contributions happen in order, rather than randomly;

Popcorn

If you are brainstorming, it may be better for people to speak when an idea comes to mind.

Thumbs

Your Facilitator will check for consensus throughout the weekend. Besides a verbal check, another quick way to measure consensus is to do a show of thumbs.

- Thumbs Up (support)
- Thumbs Sideways (neutral)
- Thumbs Down (against)

Anonymous Thumbs

Sometimes it's hard to get a true read of the direction your team wants to go. Some people don't like being negative or sharing when there is conflict. Your facilitator may ask everyone to cover their eyes and then use the thumbs tool. Only the facilitator will know what everyone thinks. Then they can share the results without revealing how people voted.

Ohio & West Virginia Facilitator Training