

Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission – Community Arts Grant

Project Description

Confabularryum is Lawrence's festival of making and creativity. The goal of the event is to showcase the incredible creativity in the Lawrence area while educating community members on the critical role creativity plays in our homes, schools and businesses. Aligned with the goals of the Lawrence Cultural Plan, Confabularryum aspires to broaden the scope of "arts and culture" to include the wider creative, entrepreneurial community. The role of creativity and nurturing a "create don't just consume" mindset is promoted at the event through a combination of hands-on activities, expert-led workshops and, new for 2017, a short speaker series on how creativity impacts our work, play and the local economy. The event brings together creatives from multiple sectors to not only embrace and experience creativity, but celebrate the skills and talents of the entire Lawrence community.

A key goal of the event is that it is free to attend and all activities are free to participants. Money should never be an obstacle to share or expand your creativity. All presenters provide time and expertise at no cost to the participants. The event hosts provide event space, staff, marketing, supplies and more as an in-kind donation. Some supplies are provided by personal donations from the event co-founders, the presenters themselves or by a few small sponsors. In 2016, through support of the City of Lawrence and the Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission, Confabularryum was able to sustain continued growth of the event. A Lawrence Community Arts Grant was able to cover the cost of an event manager, some supplies and transportation. However, the size of the event continues to grow.

Confabularryum began in 2014, as a partnership between Lawrence-based marketing agency Callahan Creek and Lawrence Public Schools. Callahan Creek Director of Social and Emerging Media, Ben Smith, had recently hosted a conference where TechShop founder Mark Hatch had presented on the growing role of the Maker Movement. He'd also recently attended a conference where renowned photographer Chase Jarvis had presented on the role creativity in education – his concluding statement being "Creativity is the solution to every problem the world has ever know. Creativity is the new literacy." Ben Smith was connected with Jerri Kemble and Patrick Kelly at Lawrence Public Schools, who shared his belief on the role making and creativity must play in a child's education. They also shared his vision for a community event to promote the role of making and creativity – designed specifically to encourage family and educator participation – and Confabularryum was born.

The event happens each summer, timed for the final Saturday before the new school year. In 2014, more than 1,500 attended the event. In 2015, the number of attendees grew to more than 5,000. Last year, with the support of the City of Lawrence and the Lawrence Arts Commission, the attendance grew to over 7,500. Attendees are primarily from the Lawrence area, however as the event grows and news travels, we have had presenters and attendees from Kansas City, Wichita, Hutchinson and other outlying areas. At this size and with this reach, the organizers feel that

Confabularryum helps to build the creative brand of Lawrence, Kansas and provides a participatory creative activity that is called for in the Lawrence Cultural Plan.

Sessions at Confabularryum cater to a diverse group of attendees. There are formal presentations and workshops catering to business owners and entrepreneurs. There are workshops and activities specifically for educators from the Lawrence School District. There are many presentations, workshops and activities designed for children aged K-12 to participate in along with their parents. Activities range from traditional arts and crafts to high tech 3D printing, robotics, coding classes virtual reality and drones, to physical activities such as dance and martial arts, and much more. These activities are designed to stimulate the creative and entrepreneurial people and organizations within the community. The common thread through all activities is they are designed to inspire creative thinking, expression or participation and to understand some of the incredible opportunities this type of creative engagement can empower. By their nature, many of the activities align with and support a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) agenda.

There are a few key differences between Confabularryum and the popular Maker Faires held nationally and regionally, including in Kansas City:

1. Confabularryum is strictly non-commercial. There are no vendors, no cost of entry, no cost to participate in any activities. The event is open to the entire community and cost must not be an obstacle to attending or participating. The only costs attendees can incur are concession purchases.
2. Maker Faire is typically focused on what you see rather than what you do. A majority of exhibitors are showcasing their creativity or selling their crafts. At Confabularryum the focus is on participation. At least 75% of all workshops and activities involve direct attendee participation. All attendees have many opportunities to participate in a hands-on way and to "make and take" at no charge. The process of making something and taking it home is a critical component of the event.
3. Confabularryum is focused on creative collaboration. All participants and presenters are encouraged to share what they have what they have created at the event and build upon others contributions. By doing so, Lawrence's creative community is expanded and deepened.

The impact of the event has been significant in a number of ways: 1) Numerous teachers within the Lawrence School District have left Confabularryum inspired to introduce new creative projects to their classrooms. Projects such as the new Makerspace at South Middle School have also been directly as a result of Confabularryum. This aligns with the Lawrence Cultural Plan to promote lifelong learning of all ages for learning in cultural and creative expression and appreciation; 2) The event has drawn an increasing amount of attention to Lawrence as a creative hub and each year online and media attention on the event has increased. With a year-on-year growth from 1,500 to 7,500 attendees the event has placed itself as potentially having a significant ongoing role in Lawrence's community events calendar. This outcome is directly related to the Lawrence Cultural Plan to build a Lawrence brand based on its creative capital; 3) Confabularryum has united many businesses and arts-related groups in the community who have come together support Confabularryum through hosting activities and workshops or donating supplies and resources. This "cross pollination" of people and organizations from multiple spheres helps strengthen the collaboration for future creative endeavors, a key element of the Lawrence Cultural Plan.

In 2016 the organizers of Confabularryum were challenged to continue support the level of growth in the event without additional funding. Thanks to the support of the City of Lawrence and the Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission, the event remained open to and inclusive to the entire community, regardless of income. A \$5,000 Community Arts Grant provided an event manager, a free shuttle service from East Lawrence and the Lied Center and materials.

The organizers are appealing to the Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission again with a hope for continued support. This request is to support the event manager, materials fees and travel expenses for a visiting speaker. Based on feedback from participants and with the reduction of the Lawrence Free State Festival, organizers have partnered with Theatre Lawrence to provide an ideas forum, or speaker series, focused on creativity and making. For 2017 the keynote speaker would be Mark Hatch, author of the Maker Movement Manifesto. Other possibilities, if funding is provided, would be web and technology disruptor Jeremy Owayang, or artist Jessica Hagy. In alignment with the principles of Confabularryum, no appearance fees would be provided. Funding is only for the speaker to travel to the event and for lodging. The free shuttle service cost would be assumed by the organizers and while the event continues to grow, the materials cost request has remained constant. The focus on providing a participatory "make and take" activity is critical.

The organizers want Confabularryum to continue to grow and be an even greater resource and showcase for the Lawrence community and strengthen Lawrence's creative capital. We appreciate the opportunity to share information about this event and hope the Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission and the Lawrence City Commission recognize how Confabularryum matches the Lawrence Cultural Plan and will provide much needed grant funding to develop and expand the event.

Timeline

December 2016 – Date and location of Confabularryum selected and confirmed

March 2016 – Secure speakers

April 2017 – Call for creatives, presenters, volunteers, makers

May 2017 – Confabularryum Cohort (Teachers) selected, Marketing for the event begins, arrangements for logistics (facilities, parking, transportation, food, signage, volunteer management) begins

June 2017 – Continue marketing, recruitment of presenters and creatives

July 2017 – Begin securing necessary materials, finalize schedule and presenters, marketing ongoing

August 2017 – Finalize volunteer schedule, coordinate event set-up, confirm all commitments

August 4 & 5, 2016 – Create and Make!