Dubuque (pop. appr. 58,000) is located on the Mississippi River in eastern Iowa and is the largest community within a 70-mile radius Tri-state area where IA, WI, and IL meet. The City organization, with roughly 900 employees and operating under a City Manager / City Council structure supported by numerous boards and commissions, has prioritized investment in the arts since the 1960’s.

This priority was formalized in 2004 by establishing the City’s 7-member Arts & Cultural Affairs Advisory Commission. In establishing this Commission, a City staffer within the City Manager’s office was assigned to support the Commission’s efforts in emerging City-administered arts and culture initiatives. As impacts became tangible and public support grew, staff responsibilities shifted to the City’s Economic Development department and a dedicated half-time position was established. In 2017, the Arts & Cultural Affairs Coordinator role was made a full-time position and now functions as the Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs within Economic Development. The full-time position is currently held by Jenni Petersen-Brant, a working artist, and supported by a paid intern, Mike Williams, who is also a working artist.

The Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs uses creative placemaking and intentional support of nonprofit arts organizations and local creatives to enhance the quality of life, steward the area’s cultural identity, and cultivate workforce development. Specifically, the office manages a rotating public art program (Art on the River), administers 2 grant programs which include Operating Support and Special Projects funding, and oversees continued implementation of the Arts & Culture Master Plan.

Milestones include 2004 Downtown Cultural Corridor designation by State, 2010 NEA Our Town funding for Arts in the District / Historic Millwork District redevelopment, 2012 participation in the Americans for the Arts’ Arts & Economic Prosperity Study IV, 2016 adoption of Arts & Culture Master Plan, 2020 funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Asphalt Art Initiative, and 2020 funding from Government Alliance on Race & Equity for Dubuque Renaissance Project.

Current / future approaches to the work include:
- Strategic planning by our Arts & Cultural Affairs Advisory Commission to establish 2022-25 action plan to maximize the impact of the arts on economy, equity, and quality of life.
- Assess and adjust strategy for Master Plan implementation.
- Explore cross-departmental and private partnership opportunities for embedding artists and the arts on the forefront of planning and projects.
- Partnership with AmeriCorps to strengthen partnerships with local nonprofits and schools to expand creative literacy and arts engagement opportunities for pre-K through teens.
- Partnership with Travel Dubuque and other stakeholders on comprehensive arts and culture-related communications campaign development and implementation.
- Secure and maximize American Rescue Plan funding to support access, impact, and equity through arts and culture.

Amended FY22 Budget: $550,628

Sources: Operating (82.8%), FY21 Carryovers (9.4%), Grants (7.8%)