

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Clark Hulings Fund's Virginia Art-Business Conference Hosted in Stafford County

This past month, a number of artists, business, economic development, and tourism leaders met with 50 artists from around the Fredericksburg region to identify opportunities to expand and build a regional arts economy. Hosted by Stafford County, the Clark Hulings Fund brought together its experience and expertise for a three-day program designed to foster an art economy and encourage artists as business entrepreneurs. The City of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania County and The University of Mary Washington were also sponsors of the event.

The Thriving Arts Exchange, held at Gari Melcher's Home and Studio at Belmont, focused on crafting a regional arts economy. The program, facilitated by Shem Cohen, allowed participants to share their vision, identify opportunities, and discover impediments to reaching that vision.

"Driven by artists, entrepreneurs, and the real 'stakeholders', allows this kind of activity to have real meaning to policy makers," said John Holden, Director of Stafford County Economic Development and Tourism. "This kind of activity and follow-up is what helps grow an entrepreneurial environment."

Following the strategic dialogue, artists from around the region, the state, and a handful from outside Virginia participated in a two-day arts-business training program with an emphasis on developing individualized goals, objectives, brand strategies, and marketing plans for their small businesses. For many, this was unique training not provided in traditional arts education.

With attendees ranging from UMW students to artists in their retirement years, the highly interactive program left many motivated to invigorate their creativity with business tools as well as supplying specific tools and contacts related only to the arts. Using humor and shared dialogue, the Clark Hulings Fund staff brought artists to their own conclusions including establishing a stronger regional network to share resources and information. All participants are automatically enrolled in the continuing online educational opportunities provided by the Fund to continue their education.

"This was an excellent beginning for the arts to be more included in cultural opportunities and recognition in the region," said Holden. We look forward to continuing these dialogues and strengthening the elements which make Stafford unique." Additional information on the program can be found at <https://clarkhulingsfund.org>.