

The Studio: GHAC's Donor Engagement Initiative

Discovery Summary & Project Outline

Prepared for: Greater Hartford Arts Council

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1. Executive Summary

This discovery brief synthesizes key insights from our workshop with Greater Hartford Arts Council (GHAC) stakeholders and outlines our strategic approach for developing a custom donor engagement conversational tool. The project aims to transform GHAC's understanding of their 23,000-person donor base, moving from anonymous transactions to informed, intentional relationships that strengthen the arts ecosystem across Greater Hartford and the additional 34 towns represented by GHAC.

The discovery session revealed several critical insights that will inform our approach:

1. **GHAC is at an inflection point** – ready to reimagine their role from perceived "pass-through funder" to active catalyst for the arts
2. **Donor intelligence is minimal** – despite a large database, personal connections and insights are limited to a small fraction
3. **Reactivating lapsed donors is a priority** – particularly former workplace campaign participants who may have untapped passion for the arts
4. **Messaging clarity is needed** – understanding what resonates (individual impact vs. collective good) will shape future communications
5. **Bold repositioning is timely** – GHAC's leadership transition and the volatile funding landscape create opportunity for reinvention

Our approach introduces an innovative framework – "The Studio" – reimagining the conversational tool experience as a creative collaboration rather than a transactional data collection exercise.

2. Project Vision & Goals

Project Vision

To create an engaging survey experience that positions donors as creative collaborators in shaping Greater Hartford's artistic future, generating actionable insights that help GHAC build authentic relationships and diversify their funding base.

Core Project Goals

1. **Transform Anonymous Relationships:** Convert transactional donor connections into informed, intentional partnerships
 2. **Understand Donor Motivations:** Uncover why people give, what holds them back, and what would deepen their engagement
 3. **Identify Engagement Opportunities:** Discover donors ready for board membership, volunteering, legacy giving, or arts ambassadorship
 4. **Reactivate Lapsed Donors:** Re-engage former supporters, particularly workplace campaign participants
 5. **Refine Messaging & Positioning:** Test what resonates to inform future communications and GHAC's evolving identity
 6. **Build Pipeline for Major Gifts:** Identify capacity and readiness for deeper financial commitment
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3. Discovery Insights

Current State Challenges

Challenge	Details	Implications
Limited donor knowledge	"Anonymous pool of donors... Amanda knows only a small portion after 10 years"	Need comprehensive profiling approach
Perception as "pass-through"	Seen primarily as corporate/foundation fund distributor	Must elevate direct impact stories
Workplace giving decline	Former Travelers campaign donors have lapsed	Opportunity to reactivate with new approach
Unclear value proposition	Don't know what messaging resonates with different segments	Survey must test various narratives
Reactive fundraising culture	Operating in "the old way" vs. proactive engagement	Project can catalyze cultural shift

Organizational Transformation Vision

GHAC leadership expressed readiness to "rethink everything and shake things up," including:

- Reimagining what it means to "live as an artist" in Greater Hartford
- Building entrepreneurial strategies into nonprofit operations
- Creating multi-generational artist incubators
- Developing advocacy for arts as essential (not luxury)
- Expanding partnerships beyond traditional arts sector
- Supporting for-profit arts businesses as critical ecosystem components

Key initiatives discussed:

- **Street Stages:** Artist activation program paying performers \$200/hour at businesses across towns
- **Skills Development Series:** Proposed capacity-building program with expert workshops (potential for sponsorship)

- **Regional Expansion:** Moving beyond Hartford focus to serve all 34 towns more equitably

Key Stakeholder Quotes

"We have actual insights into who they are. Turning them into intentional, lasting relationships... understanding their networks and sphere of influence."

"This is a radical act of community building, it's not charity. We are more than a pass-through... WE DO SHIT!"

"We help teach artists how to live as an artist."

"When you TRULY incorporate who they are and their backgrounds into their everyday discussions and classroom culture, they come alive."

Manufacturing Sector Model

GHAC sees opportunity to replicate Connecticut's successful "Make it in CT" manufacturing campaign for the arts sector. This model effectively communicates:

- Workforce development and pipeline creation
- Economic impact and job creation
- Business sustainability and growth
- Export of products/talent beyond state borders

Applied to the arts, this translates to:

- Artists as essential workforce
- Arts organizations as businesses (both nonprofit and for-profit)
- Creative economy as economic driver
- Talent retention as competitive advantage

"People come to work for you because there's arts and culture here... You're going to retain your employees if it's a thriving arts ecosystem."

Greater Hartford Arts Council

4. Strategic Approach: The Studio Experience

Conceptual Framework

We propose approaching this survey as a conversation rather than a traditional data collection exercise. By creating an engaging, creative experience that aligns with GHAC's mission, we aim to:

- Reduce survey fatigue through thoughtful design
- Position donors as partners in shaping GHAC's future
- Test various messaging themes to understand what resonates
- Create authentic dialogue that builds relationships

The specific creative framework and messaging will be developed during the Build phase based on the approved question framework."

5. Target Audiences & Segmentation

Primary Segments to Engage

Current Active Donors (~2,000-3,000)

- Understand motivations and deepen engagement
- Identify major gift prospects

Lapsed Donors (Past 5 years)

- Priority segment for reactivation
- Understand why they stopped giving

Workplace Campaign Alumni

- Former Travelers/corporate participants
- May have passive interest to activate

"Creative Minds" Extended Network

- Corporate employees with artistic hobbies
- Arts-curious community members
- "Secret artists" who work in corporations but play guitar, take pottery classes, or perform in bands
- Potential new donor pipeline

Key Questions We'll Answer

- Why do they give (or why did they stop)?
 - What type of impact do they care about?
 - What stories resonate with them?
 - What would deepen their connection?
 - Who has capacity for major gifts?
 - Who's ready for board/volunteer roles?
 - How can we activate their sphere of influence?
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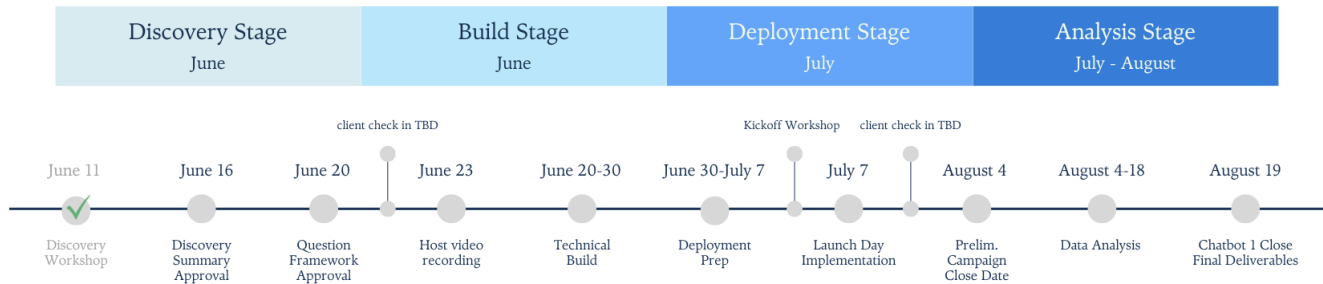
6. Implementation Plan

Preliminary Project Timeline

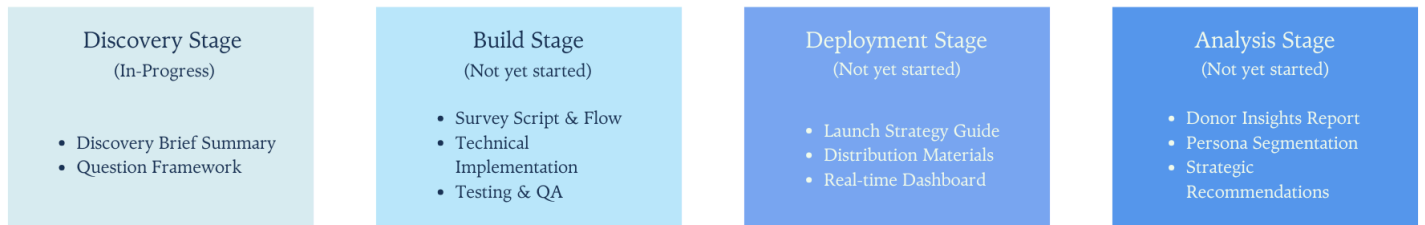
The Studio

GHAC's conversational community survey instrument

Project Implementation Timeline



Key Deliverables



Technical Approach

- **Platform:** Custom-built experience (specific platform TBD)
- **Access:** Vanity URL hosted on partner domain
- **Distribution:** Email to 10,000 targeted donors (from 23,000 database), QR codes, social media
- **Goal:** 20% response rate (2,000 participants)
- **Privacy:** Full anonymity option with opt-in for follow-up
- **Data Integration:** Data provided in raw form as csv, will explore integrating in existing tools

Potential Success Metrics

1. Response Rate
2. Completion Rate
3. Opt-in Rate
4. Segmentation Insights
5. Intent Insights

6. Actionable Insights
 7. Reactivation Pipeline
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7. Key Deliverables

Phase 1: Current Commitment (\$14,650.20)

1. Discovery Documentation ✓
2. Survey Question Framework (pending)
3. Technical Build & Deployment
4. Up to 2,000 Response Analysis
5. Insights Report with Recommendations
6. Strategic Workshop Facilitation

Future Opportunities

Based on Phase 1 learnings, GHAC may pursue:

- Targeted follow-up campaigns by segment
 - Major donor cultivation strategy
 - Board/volunteer recruitment from identified prospects
 - Refined messaging for appeals and communications
 - Development Committee engagement and ambassador activation
 - Expansion of successful programs like Street Stages to all 34 towns
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9. Next Steps

Immediate Actions

- Approve this Discovery Summary (by June 17)
- Schedule Question Framework review meeting (between July 1-9)

GHAC To Provide

- Recent appeal letters/communications
- Any existing donor segments in CRM

Our Team Will Deliver

- Question framework document (TBD)
 - Technical platform recommendation (TBD)
 - Creative concept recommendations for "Studio" experience (TBD)
 - Distribution strategy recommendations (TBD)
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10. In Conclusion

This discovery process revealed that GHAC stands at a pivotal moment – ready to transform both their donor relationships and their organizational identity. The donor engagement survey serves not just as a data collection tool but as the first step in a larger cultural shift from reactive to proactive fundraising, from anonymous transactions to creative partnerships.

By positioning this effort as "The Studio" where creative minds collaborate, we can generate the insights GHAC needs while beginning to shift perceptions of what it means to support the arts in Greater Hartford. This framework represents an innovative approach worth sharing with the broader arts field. The goal isn't just data – it's the beginning of deeper, more authentic relationships that will sustain the arts ecosystem for years to come.

We look forward to partnering with GHAC on this transformative initiative.

Signature page to follow

Agreed and Approved by:

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Signature

Amanda Roy, CEO
Greater Hartford Arts Council

Date: _____

Date

X_____

Signature

Aaron Lyles, Project Lead
PIXELLAB Photography & Design, LLC

Date: 06/16/2025

Date