



600 NE Grand Ave.
Portland, OR 97232-2736

Council work session agenda

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

10:30 AM

Metro Regional Center, Council Chamber;
<https://zoom.us/j/615079992> (Webinar ID:
615079992) or 253-205-0468 (toll free),
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=gyNYvJE8k-olt](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyNYvJE8k-olt)

This meeting will be held electronically and in person at the Metro Regional Center Council Chamber. You can join the meeting on your computer or other device by using this link: <https://zoom.us/j/615079992> (Webinar ID: 615 079 992)

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

2. Work Session Topics:

2.1 Recognition of Transgender Day of Visibility

Community members Daphne Smith, Ivy Vanhope, and others will share remarks.

2.2 Westside Economic Alliance Industrial Land Readiness [26-6513](#)
Work Group Recommendations

Presenter(s): Elizabeth Mazzara Meyers, WEA Executive Director
Jamie Stasny, Transportation and Land Use Policy Manager
Clackamas County

Attachments: [Staff Report](#)
[Attachment 1 - WEA Recommendations Letter](#)

2.3 Integrating Arts and Planning and Exploring Metro's Role [26-6447](#)
in Supporting the Regional Arts Ecosystem

Presenter(s): Malu Wilkinson, Deputy Director, Planning Development
and Research
Dana Lucero, Principal Regional Planner
Molly Cooney-Mesker, Communications and Engagement
Manager
Lakeeyscia Griffin, Senior Public Affairs Specialist
Subashini Ganesan Forbes, Artist

Attachments: [Staff Report](#)

[Attachment 1 - Lessons from the Culture and Community Network](#)

[Attachment 2 - Our Creative Futures](#)

[Attachment 3 - Draft Resolution No. 26-5574](#)

3. **Chief Operating Officer Communication**
4. **Councilor Communication**
5. **Adjourn**

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ការគោរពសិទ្ធិពលរដ្ឋរបស់ ។ សំរាប់ព័ត៌មានអំពីកម្មវិធីសិទ្ធិពលរដ្ឋរបស់ Metro ឬដើម្បីទទួលបានការប្រឹក្សាស្តីពីការរើសអើងសូមទូរស័ព្ទទៅលេខ 503-797-1700 ។ www.oregonmetro.gov/civilrights ។ បើលោកអ្នកត្រូវការអ្នកបកប្រែភាសានៅពេលអង្គប្រជុំសាធារណៈ សូមទូរស័ព្ទមកលេខ 503-797-1700 (ម៉ោង 8 ព្រឹកដល់ម៉ោង 5 ល្ងាច ថ្ងៃច័ន្ទ) ។ ប្រសិនបើលោកអ្នក មុនថ្ងៃប្រជុំដើម្បីអាចឲ្យគេបកប្រែសម្រាប់លោកអ្នក ។

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600 NE Grand Ave.
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Agenda #: 2.2

File #: 26-6513

Agenda Date: 3/31/2026

Westside Economic Alliance Industrial Land Readiness Work Group Recommendations

Elizabeth Mazzara Meyers, WEA Executive Director

Jamie Stasny, Transportation and Land Use Policy Manager Clackamas County

WESTSIDE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE INDUSTRIAL LAND READINESS WORKGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

Date: 3/18/26
Department: Planning, Development and
Research
Meeting Date: 3/31/2026

Presenter(s), (if applicable): Elizabeth
Mazzara Myers - Westside Economic
Alliance, Jamie Stasny - Clackamas
County, Jessica Pelz - Washington County,
Steve Sieber - Trammel Crow, Gabriella
Frask - McKenzie

Prepared by: Jamie Stasny, 971-678-6406

Length: 30 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

As a follow up to the last Urban Growth Report (UGR) process, Westside Economic Alliance (WEA) Members from across the region participated in a public/private workgroup to review the methodology used by Metro to count buildable employment industrial lands and consider specific recommendations to better align the count of buildable industrial land with market realities. The group included public jurisdictional staff and leading industry experts and practitioners in the field of economic development and land development. The outcome of this work is a specific set of recommendations that will be presented to the Metro Council as part of a series of presentations on economic development in the region.

ACTION REQUESTED

This presentation is information. No action is requested at this time.

BACKGROUND

On October 1, 2025, Councilors Gonzalez, Lewis, and Simpson received a letter from WEA's industrial land readiness workgroup outlining six recommendations to the Metro Council to address industrial land readiness. All Metro Councilors were subsequently provided with the recommendations letter. On March 10, 2026, the Metro Council adopted resolution 26-5570 directing staff to create a work plan to develop and implement identified activities that support industrial land use and economic development in our region. Staff worked with WEA to include and address some of the WEA workgroup recommendations in resolution 26-5570.

Westside Economic Alliance (WEA) is a nonprofit, member-based organization that advocates for a healthy economy on the Westside of the Portland, Oregon metropolitan region. Issues of concern for WEA include land use regulations, housing, urban growth

boundary expansion, transportation funding, workforce development, and other infrastructure issues vital to economic development.

ATTACHMENTS

1. WEA Recommendations Letter



MEMORANDUM

Industrial Land Readiness Workgroup at Westside Economic Alliance

Date: February 11, 2026

WEA is pleased to bring you a summary memo resulting from months of workgroup discussion and collaboration with Metro staff. This memo is intended to be a starting point for a collaborative conversation where private sector partners can work with Metro to support a bright economic future for our region.

BACKGROUND

Metro is required to produce an updated Urban Growth Report (UGR) every six years as part of the growth management program. The UGR is used as the basis for urban growth boundary (UGB) expansion decisions. Throughout the 2024 UGR review process, participants raised concerns through various committees and Metro Council meetings about Metro's buildable lands methodology specific to counting industrial lands.

Metro's current methodology is not intended to specifically identify market-based industrial land needs for the region. The Buildable Land Inventory requires Metro to identify available lands that are currently zoned for industrial use but is not required to consider key site criteria factors based on market realities such as slope, utility infrastructure availability, and proximity to major highways.

While the UGR found that sufficient industrial lands for the next 20 years "exist" in the UGB, much of the land identified is not suitable to meet industrial development market demand due to site size, slope and other site constraints.

The most recent UGR was adopted in 2024 and used as the basis for the Sherwood West UGB expansion. In order to approve the City of Sherwood's UGB expansion request that included industrial lands, Metro staff used a targeted industry approach which showed that despite the substantial amount of industrial zoned land inside the UGB, this expansion was justified as none of those sites could meet the site needs of certain sectors.

In response to the UGR process and the concerns raised, members of MTAC asked MPAC and Metro Council to convene an Industrial Land Readiness Workgroup of industry experts to look more closely at Metro's buildable lands methodology. This memo is the result of that convening, providing background on the workgroup's discussions, goals and membership, along with recommended actions for Metro Council to consider.

WORKGROUP CONVENING

The **Industrial Land Readiness Workgroup** convened from February to September 2025. The workgroup's initial objective was to review the methodology used by Metro to count buildable employment industrial lands and present specific recommendations to better align the count of

buildable industrial land with market realities. However, upon convening, it quickly became apparent that the issues faced by the region are bigger than methodology alone and that actions should go beyond technical fixes to include more substantive changes.

The workgroup was comprised of commercial real estate brokers and developers, private sector planners, economists, and public sector partners including city, county, regional and state partners. Metro staff both participated in, and served as advisors throughout, the process. We hope this work can result in a model of what can happen when we bring together experts from across our region to a single table using a solution-oriented approach to tackle big problems.

Two goals emerged from this workgroup:

1. To help Metro create a forecast process with growth scenarios that consider economic development interventions and market demand to create more aspirational forecasts, while still meeting State requirements.
2. To encourage Metro Council to center economic development through creation of an economic development focused “table” composed of technical staff and industry experts to strategize on technical fixes to ensure that industrial land availability can meet market demands in a timely manner.

Over the course of the convening, the workgroup committed to educating ourselves about Oregon’s Statewide Land Use Planning Goal 9: Economic Development, forecasting and market analysis, and land readiness and investment needs for our region and state. It is within the context of this shared learning and the individual expertise offered by workgroup participants that we feel we can help Metro identify solutions that will unlock the potential of our region to grow a diverse and vibrant economy.

The WEA team produced a draft memo of recommendations and presented it to Metro Councilors and staff. During this series of meetings, WEA learned that Metro Council has formed an economic development working group, which includes Councilors Gonzales, Lewis and Simpson. WEA also learned that Metro staff is developing a proposal for Council consideration which includes actions that can be taken to support and enhance economic development in our region. “Job Ready Lands” will be one of their top priorities in this work.

As a result of collaboration with Metro staff and Council this memo has been updated. All of the original draft recommendations are retained but have been updated and reformatted to align and help shape the upcoming work of the Council on economic development. During this time, we also learned of the Governor’s Roadmap to Prosperity effort including the creation of an Oregon Prosperity Council. This new effort will create an elevated opportunity for this work to be integrated into future legislative action.

We are determined to help find a path forward for the region to develop a 20-year and beyond employment land supply and economic forecasting system that reflects market realities, supports economic growth, and bridges public and private sector perspectives concerning ongoing economic uncertainty. We believe our region must prioritize building a future-focused economy. In addition to forecasting updates and other measures, the public and private sectors must work together in a meaningful way.

WEA will continue to be clear that experts from the private sector are critical to the success of these efforts. We've identified the problems and provided reasonable solutions. This work needs to move in real-time and not be slowed down by years of work where the process becomes the outcome. We stand ready to work alongside Metro to help our region realize Jobs Ready Land that will benefit our workforce, our economy and our communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO METRO:

Recommendation #1: Metro Council should adopt a resolution that acknowledges a clear problem statement similar to below.

- Our existing Urban Growth Report does not tell the full story of the region's long-term land supply. Much of the industrially zoned land is inadequate or undevelopable and does not meet the needs nor the criteria of the market demand. Metro should acknowledge this issue and partner with us to develop a strategy to evolve our regional approach to more accurately reflect our "buildable" land supply and take action to ensure that we do have adequate and appropriate buildable industrial land available to support a bright economic future for our region.

Recommendation #2: Metro Council should provide additional direct support for jurisdictions.

- Allocation of funding through the 2040 Planning and Development Grants for cities to bring on full FTE or hire consultants to support planning efforts including, but not limited to, analysis of and changes to zoning, comprehensive planning, and other planning needs related to growth for the duration of their economic analysis project. This should happen by the end of 2026.
- Help jurisdictions utilize site-specific, mid-cycle industrial land UGB expansions as appropriate. No city has utilized this process since it became available in 2010. While it is encouraging that such a process exists, its under-utilization points to it either being inaccessible or not cost-effective for cities to pursue.
 - If necessary, an outside consultant should be brought in with Metro resources to work with local jurisdictions on identifying what support they need to be successful in their future planning processes.

Recommendation #3: Metro Council should consider changes to Title 11 to support efficiency and better use of public funds.

We understand that this work is connected to other elements of the UGB expansion process. In order to better streamline processes to support efficiency and use of public funds, some initial suggestions include:

- Acknowledge that the concept plan phase is required to include a robust visioning/public process, including preliminary infrastructure funding plan, preliminary transportation and utility plans, and preliminary zoning plans.

- Because the concept plan phase includes all the required elements, amend Title 11 to require that the comprehensive plan phase be focused only on implementing the approved concept plan.
- Metro could use money saved from a slimmed down comprehensive plan phase to seed an infrastructure fund (revolving loan fund) or affordable housing fund for new urban areas.

Recommendation #4: Metro Council should pursue the following recommended technical fixes to refine the counting of employment land. To be completed by the end of Q4 2026.

- Develop and adopt a Grading/Tiering System that considers, including, but not limited to, Lot size, Geometry, Slope, Natural Features, Access to Infrastructure, Contiguity with other developable parcels.
- Seek changes to state law to encourage ‘surplus’ land supply, including the surplus of certain TYPES of land as identified by market analysis and input from industry.
 - This should be completed in time for policy movement in the 2027 Legislative Session.

Recommendation #5: Metro Council should adopt a forward-looking, market-guided methodology when modeling growth.

- Future UGR economic modeling should work to predict future economic performance including results from planned economic development interventions and growth opportunities. Following DLCDC’s Goal 9 recommendation that aspirational forecasting guides the work done to prepare the Urban Growth Report.
 - When launching the Urban Growth Report process, Metro should adopt an aspirational directive when forecasting their available land supply.

Recommendation #6: Metro Council should create and staff an “implementers table” that focuses on regional economic development, specifically land availability and readiness. To be created by the end of Q1 2026.

- We recommend a **new table, to be staffed by Metro, that centers the voices of business and industry with a focus on economic development, specifically land availability and readiness.**
 - This table should include industry experts and technical staff and serve as an advisory group to MTAC, MPAC and Metro Council.
 - This table can provide insight into best practices and review best practices from other states where cities have the opportunity and resources needed to grow.
 - This table can help identify where there are gaps in staffing, revenue, and policy.
 - This table can collaborate to support bimonthly/quarterly technical work sessions around commercial real estate development topics for MPAC, MTAC, and Metro Council with private sector subject matter experts to educate on the importance and benefits and development hurdles and quality of land supply in UGB.
 - This table can identify changes to the state land use system that would support the outcomes described in this memo.

- This Table can be charged with identifying legislative and incentive gaps, workforce development needs, and regional synergies.
- This table can provide feedback and input into the Governor’s Oregon Prosperity Council & CEDS effort.

- **THE REPORT: Within one year, and then on an agreed upon periodic basis, this table should work with Metro staff to create a report that will outline economic realities and opportunities throughout the three counties.**
 - **We recommend that the first report be framed as a Regional Jobs Strategy to support future ongoing work. This strategy should be developed and adopted by the end of Q4 2026.**
 - This report should be presented to MTAC, MPAC and Metro Council and should be included as an addendum to the Urban Growth Report.
 - The report must discuss whether the current land supply meets market demands, identify if/where there is a mismatch and make recommendations to address the mismatch.
 - This report should also identify target industries, characteristics of land they require, identify locations where that land exists, and detail the improvements required to make that land development ready.
 - The report should identify technical fixes to existing Metro rules, plans or procedures for Metro Council consideration.
 - As an example, this report might echo the work done by the City of Hillsboro to provide economic projections and forecasts; it might provide lessons learned and highlight market successes and challenges; it would also be an opportunity to identify infrastructure and investment needs throughout the region.

Industrial Land Readiness Workgroup Members

NAME	ORGANIZATION	SECTOR
Elizabeth Mazzara Myers	Westside Economic Alliance	Convenor
Teddy Russell	Westside Economic Alliance	Staff
Kenneth Anderton	Port of Portland	Public Sector
Dan Dias	Hillsboro	Public Sector
Laura Edmonds	Clackamas County	Public Sector
Steve Koper	City of Tualatin	Public Sector
Steve Perkins	Clackamas County	Public Sector
Jamie Stasny	Clackamas County	Public Sector
Todd Duwe	Perlo	Private Sector
Steve Faust	3J Consulting	Private Sector
Gabriela Frask	Mackenzie	Private Sector
Jerry Johnson	Johnson Economics	Private Sector
Keith Leavitt	Confluence Strategies	Private Sector
Stu Peterson	Macadam Forbes	Private Sector
Ivy Quach	QB Fabrication & Welding	Private Sector
Kelly Ross	NAIOP/CAB	Private Sector
Steve Sieber	Trammell Crow	Private Sector
Brad Smith	Windsor Properties	Private Sector

Advisors

Eryn Kehe	Metro	Public Sector
Ted Reid	Metro	Public Sector
David Tetrick	Metro	Public Sector

Presenters

Leigh McIlvaine	DLCD	Public Sector
Gordon Howard	DLCD	Public Sector

NOTE: Metro staff attended the workshop and provided information and input but did not participate in the final drafting of the recommendations or memo. DLCD staff were invited as guest presenters and did not take part in the development of the recommendations or memo.



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Agenda #: 2.3

File #: 26-6447

Agenda Date: 3/31/2026

Integrating Arts and Planning and Exploring Metro's Role in Supporting the Regional Arts Ecosystem

Malu Wilkinson, Deputy Director, Planning Development and Research

Dana Lucero, Principal Regional Planner

Molly Cooney-Mesker, Communications and Engagement Manager

Lakeeyscia Griffin, Senior Public Affairs Specialist

Subashini Ganesan Forbes, Artist

INTEGRATING ARTS AND PLANNING AND EXPLORING METRO'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE REGIONAL ARTS ECOSYSTEM

Date: March 12, 2026
Department: Planning, Development & Research
Meeting date: March 31, 2026

Prepared by: Dana Lucero,
dana.lucero@oregonmetro.gov
Presenters:
Malu Wilkinson (deputy director)
Dana Lucero (principal regional planner)
Molly Cooney-Mesker (communications and engagement manager)
Lakeeyscia Griffin (senior public affairs specialist)
Subashini Ganesan Forbes (artist)
Length: 90 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

Metro is featured prominently in Smart Growth America's *Lessons from the Culture and Community Cohort (2025)*. "The integration of arts and culture into regional planning represents more than a new engagement technique—it reflects a fundamental shift in how planning organizations understand their role and responsibility to the communities they serve. This shift is both possible and powerful, yielding deeper community relationships, more inclusive processes, and planning outcomes that better reflect the needs and aspirations of all residents." Staff from Planning, Development & Research will share lessons learned from this national training cohort, reflect on the 3-day Future Vision artist residency and preview other arts-related Future Vision engagement efforts. They will present highlights from the 2024 regional arts strategy framework, *Our Creative Futures*, and invite Council to discuss Metro's future role in supporting the arts ecosystem in our region.

When government works with artists, it signals to communities that it is open to innovation. "...For the MPOs and regional planning agencies that undertake this work, the rewards extend beyond better engagement metrics or more diverse public meeting attendance. They include rebuilding trust with communities harmed by past planning decisions, elevating voices historically excluded from decision-making, and creating the conditions for truly collaborative, community-centered planning."

ACTION REQUESTED

Metro Council provides feedback about the recent and upcoming arts-related engagement and the integration of artists and creative practices into planning programs and projects. Council explores other roles Metro may play in supporting the regional arts ecosystem.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Through conversation and response to staff presentations, be able to provide input to Councilors Lewis and Hwang's resolution.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

- Is Council interested in exploring opportunities for Metro to support the regional arts ecosystem?
- Does the draft resolution help to clarify ways Metro can support the regional arts ecosystem and bring arts into planning work?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

Council can choose to endorse Resolution no. 26-5574 - For the purpose of affirming Metro's commitment to a vibrant and thriving regional arts community and embedding creative artistic practices as planning and engagement tools throughout Metro's work.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends Council endorse Resolution no. 26-5574

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Metro Council has been supportive of the Planning, Development & Research Department's Community Placemaking program since its inception in 2017. Council liaisons serve in an essential advisory role to the program. In 2024, Council updated the code and rules that govern the construction excise tax to ensure secure funding for these grants, the outcomes of which clearly demonstrate innovative and hyper local means of achieving community stability.

BACKGROUND

A healthy and sustainable arts and culture ecosystem is essential to our regional economy, community stability and sense of place. Metro's investment in the arts is evolving -- from facilitating the GLEAN program that supports artists who prompt people to think about consumption habits and inspire creative reuse for the region, to the concluding relationship with the regional arts venues. Meanwhile several significant arts-related opportunities in the Planning, Development and Research Department have surfaced. This year, the Community Placemaking program marks its tenth cycle of supporting artists and arts and culture efforts that strengthen people's connections to each other and places they care about. The yearlong national training cohort offered by Smart Growth America concluded by emphasizing that, because of the long investment in artists through the placemaking program, Metro is uniquely well-situated to delve into meaningful planning work that integrates artists and creative practices. Should Metro forge ahead with a robust arts, culture and planning program, it would join one of only a few regional governments innovating in this field and realizing transformative results.

Staff is piloting integrating arts and planning in aspects of the Future Vision project. The former creative Laureate of Portland is serving as the arts program manager for the project, influencing not only engagement opportunities but the lens by which planners and leaders view the foundations of the work. She developed and curated the Future 50 artist residency hosted at Metro Regional Center March 3 through 5, 2026. It was well attended by Councilors, staff, leaders of arts organizations and members of the public. Audience

members were deeply moved. The mingling of government and art, government and feelings stirred meaningful reflections on how our everyday work influence people's lives.

Metro is partnering with The Curiosity Paradox, a creative studio specializing in Access Art Design, to help advance Safe Streets for All outcomes and implement the Regional Transportation Plan. The Curiosity Paradox will help Metro and its partners increase capacity to see access not as accommodation but as a creative force that opens new possibilities. The studio will support accessible and creative engagement that centers community members disproportionately impacted by traffic deaths. Through this partnership, the project will seek new ways to partner with artists, inclusively engage community and shift traffic safety culture through a series of three community conversations in June.

Staff will share additional arts and planning efforts they hope to implement and invite Council to consider what else is possible if we lean into the power of the artists in our region and invite new, creative, human-centered ways of envisioning and conducting Metro's work.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Lessons from the Culture and Community Network
2. Our Creative Futures
3. Draft Resolution No. 26-5574

[For work session:]

- Is legislation required for Council action? Yes No
- If yes, is draft legislation attached? Yes No
- What other materials are you presenting today? See attachments

LESSONS FROM THE

CULTURE

AND

COMMUNITY

NETWORK



Smart Growth
A M E R I C A



State
Smart Transportation
Initiative

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Note from the National Association of Regional Councils



The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) is proud to support Smart Growth America's Culture and Community Network and its vision for helping regions strengthen communities through arts and cultural strategies. Regional councils are uniquely positioned to bring citizens, community leaders, and elected officials together. By incorporating staff creativity, local artists, and community organizations, the Culture and Community Network gives regional councils new tools to better facilitate public input on infrastructure planning and projects. We encourage regional councils across the country to take advantage of this opportunity to advance community-driven planning in their regions.

Acknowledgements



We envision a country where transportation, housing, and development choices create communities that are healthy, prosperous, and resilient—no matter where you live or who you are. Learn more at: www.smartgrowthamerica.org

SGA's Arts and Culture program advances racial equity and climate justice within smart growth through creative, cultural organizing and community power-building. Artists and cultural workers are essential co-leaders, partners, and instigators in this work.



This program was made possible by the generous support of **The Kresge Foundation**.

SGA also thanks the **National Association of Regional Councils** for its partnership and support of the Culture and Community Network.



The **State Smart Transportation Initiative** is a project of Smart Growth America and the High Road Strategy Center, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. SSTI convenes top officials from state transportation agencies across the U.S., builds capacity among agency staff through applied research and technical assistance, and shares knowledge and best practices with the larger transportation community.

This report was written by Eric Murphy and Marian Liou based on the experiences of Smart Growth America's Arts & Culture team, the Atlanta Regional Commission, and participants in the inaugural cohort of the Culture and Community Network (April-October 2025). Additional support was provided by Jaibin Mathew and Allentza Michel of Powerful Pathways, with editing from Eric Cova. This report was released in January 2026.

INTRODUCTION

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and regional planning agencies play a pivotal but often unseen role in shaping how communities grow. They coordinate transportation and land use planning across multiple jurisdictions, allocate federal funding, and set priorities that determine which projects move forward. Their decisions influence everything from commutes to climate resilience, making them critical points of leverage for promoting community-centered planning that delivers benefits across all of the communities they serve. Because of this unique and extensive role, MPOs are well-positioned to integrate arts and culture strategies into their work—not as an afterthought, but to fundamentally reimagine how planning is conceived and executed at a regional scale.

Transportation planning agencies must involve the public as they make their plans, both as a matter of federal requirements and good public practice. Traditional approaches to public involvement, like in-person evening meetings or surveys, often fail to engage the full breadth of community needs, experiences, and aspirations. They typically favor wealthier property owners while excluding others, resulting in limited participation. This negatively impacts those excluded communities, the agency's planning process, and outcomes for everyone.

To ensure that the whole public is involved, we need new approaches beyond the status quo. Some agencies have begun using arts and culture strategies to reach a broader audience and encourage more meaningful public involvement, focusing on historically excluded and harmed groups. Incorporating arts and culture into public participation is a broad approach rather than a particular set of techniques and can be adapted to meet a local context. Engaging with communities through the arts diverse creative and cultural expression encourages meaningful involvement because people can communicate on their own terms rather than navigating opaque, unfamiliar, or exclusionary government processes.

Arts and culture strategies can bring additional benefits to planning. Everyone *can* be creative, but planners don't always have their creative side cultivated or learn to bring their lived experiences to the table as part of professional training. A more creative and open mindset among agency staff can lead to more imaginative planning.



Street photowalk led by the Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory for Smart Growth America's Healing Our Highways program, 2024.

This report highlights innovative arts and culture strategies in community engagement within regional planning contexts, drawing from the experiences of MPOs and planning agencies across a broad spectrum of geography, experience, and institutional culture that have come together through Smart Growth America's Culture and Community Network to learn, experiment, and refine their approaches to integrating arts and culture into regional planning. It provides guidance for MPO and other planning agency staff, those working in arts and culture, equity, and community engagement, and others who support them, to fundamentally reimagine how planning is conceived and executed at a regional scale in ways that more effectively reflects communities' realities and needs.

About Smart Growth America's Culture and Community Network

From April through October 2025, Smart Growth America convened the Culture and Community Network (CCN), bringing together staff from nine metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) across the country to integrate arts, culture, and creativity into transportation and regional planning. Through peer learning, experimentation, and structured reflection, participating agencies explored how cultural and creative strategies can make planning more accessible, equitable, and community-driven.

Participating agencies included (and regions represented):

- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (Chicago, IL)
- Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (Greater Philadelphia/Southern New Jersey)
- Flint Hills Regional Council and Flint Hills Metropolitan Planning Organization (Manhattan, KS)
- Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (Grand Rapids, MI)
- Metropolitan Transportation Commission-Association of Bay Area Governments (San Francisco Bay Area, CA)
- Metro (Portland, OR)
- PlanRVA (Richmond, VA)
- R1 Planning Council (Rockford, IL)
- Southern California Association of Governments (Los Angeles, CA)

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), the MPO and regional planning agency for metropolitan Atlanta, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the regional planning agency for the Boston region, each with about a decade of arts and culture experience, also participated as guest experts and speakers. The ARC's journey from early experiments to a mature, institutionalized program without significant external funding support offers valuable lessons about what's possible when organizations commit to fundamentally reimagining community engagement. The following investigation of ARC's experience illuminates both the challenges and breakthroughs that can emerge when planning agencies center artists and cultural workers as essential partners in the planning process.

CASE STUDY:

THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURE PROGRAM AT THE ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION

Background

The Atlanta Regional Commission is the metropolitan planning organization for the 11 counties that make up the Atlanta metro area. With a broader mandate than a standalone MPO, ARC has cross-sector planning responsibilities that include community development, land use, aging, and natural resources, among others. Its greater resources, connections, and internal support across a variety of areas made it easier for the agency to add arts and culture to its portfolio more than a decade ago.

ARC's engagement with arts and culture has evolved over years and through several iterations. Perhaps most significantly, ARC has invested in this work primarily through its own internal resources—dedicated staff time, program support, and funding for artists and community-based organizations (or CBOs, local organizations led by and serving residents that focus on specific needs such as health, education, or well-being)—rather than relying on philanthropic or other external grants. In 2012, ARC absorbed the Metro Atlanta Arts and Culture Coalition and was one of the first MPOs to incorporate arts and culture into its operations under former executive director Doug Hooker. The organization's embrace of arts and culture began as an effort to promote the local arts community and was met with enthusiasm from staff.

These efforts opened doors for ARC to connect with arts leaders in its role as a regional convener, promote local artists, and encourage a collaborative ecosystem of arts and civic organizations in the area. One mural project, funded through an external fundraising campaign, helped establish a working relationship with the public art program at MARTA, Atlanta's transit agency, and introduced ARC to local artists.

ARC's involvement in arts and culture would evolve over the years from this early stage. While some artists saw the efforts as an opportunity to lift up their work, others challenged that approach and identified a disconnect from community benefit. This group saw the traditional approach to arts and culture as too superficial, potentially focused on beautification that could lead to displacement. The efforts were also not yet well integrated throughout the rest of the agency's work.



Work day with Village Skatepark ATL for ARC's Culture and Community Design program, 2024. Photos courtesy of ARC.

Meanwhile, traditional community engagement efforts were falling short at ARC. An informal internal analysis found that the overwhelming majority of agency departments used a traditional "inform" or "consult" approach to community engagement. Staff reported a lack of a unified community engagement strategy across the organization, feeling that "minimum requirements" drove engagement practices that were not part of a larger strategic vision.

"We weren't planning the way we should," said community development manager Samyukth Shenbaga. "There's enough that I have listened to and read and heard, talking with fellow planning professionals, that traditional processes aren't successful."

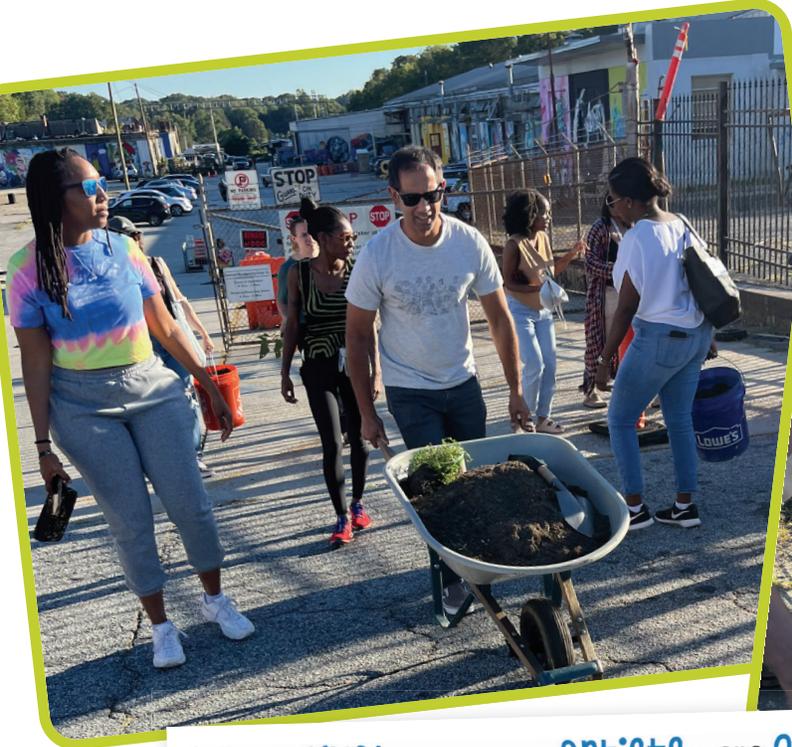
The organization pivoted in its approach to arts and culture after 2020 through a variety of changes. A change in board membership, staff personnel, and the national zeitgeist after the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests allowed ARC to develop a new focus for its arts and culture efforts.



Site visit to Ballethnic Dance Company for Atlanta Regional Commission's Arts Leaders of Metro Atlanta program, 2022.



Arts and culture efforts were moved into the Community Development department, allowing for better integration into planning efforts and the use of federal funds to support the work. Community Engagement and Arts Program Director Marian Liou (now the Director of Arts & Culture Director at Smart Growth America) was hired with a background in community advocacy work that allowed a change in focus. She sought to use arts and culture to engage more substantively with a broader range of community members and develop community engagement skills among the local arts community.



“The pivot was to say artists were core to us understanding communities. They were translators of community issues.”

- SAMYUKTH SHENBAGA
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, ARC

Photos courtesy of ARC.

Realizing ARC needed to forge new connections with communities that had been excluded from and harmed by traditional planning practices and infrastructure, the organization started to explore how art could build community power and address neighborhood and community concerns.

Investing resources to expand participation and build relationships with community groups and residents could ensure their needs, values, and perspectives were reflected in development plans, while rebuilding trust, increasing transparency, and creating more sustainable outcomes. The organization saw arts and culture strategies as an innovative way to expand that involvement and make it more meaningful.

"The pivot was to say artists were core to us understanding communities. They were translators of community issues," said Shenbaga.



Site visit led by We Love Buford Highway for ARC's ALMA program, 2022.

Design and implementation

At first, ARC's program lacked examples and knowledge of the work they were setting out to do. Early efforts were funded through MPO membership dues or those funds were used as matches to land state and federal grants. Without flexible arts and culture funding, the organization was entering somewhat uncharted territory.

Staff like Liou worked to connect ARC's existing arts and culture efforts—which included the Arts Leaders of Metro Atlanta (ALMA) program—with the organization's responsibilities as a regional planning organization. Using arts and culture strategies to improve community engagement would allow ARC to fund those efforts with federal transportation dollars. ARC's new approach shifted the status quo while still falling squarely within federal guidance and requirements.

Things started small, with a \$15,000 budget to pay artists, culture bearers, and community-based organizations (CBOs) participating in the organization's public involvement work. While previous organization policy was to not pay these organizations for their contributions, that changed through a significant and persistent casemaking effort. Not everyone was convinced of the connection between arts and culture strategies and planning efforts at first, including compliance staff and some external partners, but that changed as internal changemakers spent significant effort making the case for the strategy.

It took internal memos, research, and conversations by changemakers among staff and supportive leadership that emphasized the importance of paying CBOs and cultural workers for their unique expertise, which was not available in-house or through typical planning, engineering, and design consultants. As skeptics saw the undeniable results of arts and culture strategies improving the quality of public involvement, that made the case easier. Finally, an update of FHWA rules clearly allowing CBOs to be reimbursed for contributing their time and expertise cemented the change.

ALMA was an existing arts leadership program that was retooled and rebranded as



the Culture and Community Design program (and has since been rebranded again as Community-Centered Design), and brought artists and community groups together to co-design community infrastructure projects. For example, the Alif Institute created a schematic for a connection from their property to the planned Peachtree Creek Greenway that would allow them to share Arab culture and increase their presence among passersby. Needing to engage with the Georgia Department of Transportation on the project, the group reported feeling more confident in their ability to influence the Greenway's outcomes after working with the ARC and learning more about being involved in the planning process. Through the program, the Ballethnic Dance Company was able to formalize an artistic idea for wayfinding and connection to a nearby transit stop and learn to "speak in the language necessary about issues that are important to us."

Through this program, ARC developed a directory of local artists who were interested in civic work. They also created a handbook for incorporating the arts into planning efforts.

In 2023, the program continued its innovative shift toward developing community engagement skills among local artists under the organization's Director of Community Engagement and Culture, Roshani Thakore. Thakore's hire was a strategic advancement of the program because she brought her background as a social practice artist to the table. Like with Liou, community experience and connections were critical and allowed further institutional change and the ability to start planning efforts from a different place.

Recently, the program's senior planner has been hired from a CBO and draws perspective from their experiences skateboarding around and through the built environment. The rebranded program now describes itself as a place where "community organizations serving underrepresented populations collaborate with artists, local officials, and planners to design community engagement projects using arts and culture."

In one example of the CCD program's work, the African Diaspora Art Museum of Atlanta created a "One Clarkston" art activation to cultivate belonging and togetherness between American-born and foreign-born Black residents in Clarkston, Georgia, focusing on the community's youth.

ARC COO Mike Alexander highlighted the difference in approach of the program compared to traditional community engagement efforts. Rather than an evening meeting with a staff member "standing with a board saying 'here's a transportation project that's going to happen to your community,'" the program created a day-long art-focused event with the community's young people. These strategies still face challenges, but Alexander hoped that those who participated would take away that there are people who care about their community; that these innovative efforts would pay off in meaningful public involvement even years down the road; and that other organizations would start their own similar engagement efforts.

Learning, unlearning, reflecting, and evolving

ARC established connections with groups historically harmed by traditional planning processes and learned that "coalition building between marginalized communities is an opportunity" for the organization. By working with ARC, potential future partners gained the skills to engage their communities and built trust in the organization.

"Diverse voices make planning better. We believe artists bring that," said Thakore.

Through the evolution of these programs, the organization learned important lessons. First, arts and culture efforts needed support and buy-in from across the organization, often requiring groundwork to be laid first, before programs could move forward. Internal champions of the work were the engine that moved those efforts. Leadership that understood the potential of the work had to give those changemakers space to develop and test different approaches and strategies. New board members had to join, changing the composition of the board, to make the efforts possible.



“Diverse voices make planning better. We believe **artists** bring that.”

- ROSHANI THAKORE
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
AND CULTURE, ARC



Photos courtesy of ARC.

And throughout, many involved in the program needed to spend significant time making the case for these efforts to external and internal skeptics, including in formally researched memos and reports, given that the work at times had few precedents and examples to point to.

Using arts and culture strategies in community engagement work required a conscious shift to a different way of operating. That meant for the work to be successful, the organization needed

a commitment to and tolerance of change. Shenbaga said that ARC had to "get comfortable being uncomfortable" and understand that the progress of these strategies might be non-linear or "messy" – and that was okay, and to be expected.

Alexander said very wide guardrails and support for innovation were needed. "That takes patience," he said, "and that in itself is a form of innovation."

Staff found that lived experience and a community-centric, artistic mindset were crucial for the program's success. These were necessary to define and measure success differently, focusing on community outcomes. Initial success metrics included the amount of money paid to artists, the number of CBOs engaged, and increased interaction with historically marginalized and excluded groups.

Community outcomes that were less easily measured were empowerment and the ability and willingness of community groups to speak up in an informed way. Organizational indicators of success included whether agency practices were changed, whether the agency valued other ways of communication and knowledge, and openness and creativity across the agency's operations.

The ultimate indicator of success, according to Liou, is whether the community's needs are being met and community outcomes are improving.



“patience in itself is a form of innovation”

- Mike Alexander
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, ARC

ARC COO Michael Alexander (far right) at Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Summit on Arts and Culture in our Communities, hosted by the National Endowment for the Arts and the White House Domestic Policy Council, 2024.

Looking ahead

An evaluation process and constant feedback loop have been created to ensure arts and culture strategies continue to grow and iterate. Quantitative measurements, like the number of new members of the public involved, keep efforts accountable. Equally important is checking in with participants about how they feel subjectively, and whether each part of the program is accomplishing the goals established at the outset. Thakore uses an internal toolkit, in part adapted from the Center for Artistic Activism, to establish and formalize this feedback and evaluation process and to train colleagues on creative community engagement.

Several staff noted that **educational work and building support are ongoing processes involving many stakeholders**, including the local community, elected leaders, consultants, the agency's board, and others. Internal policy changes and training are cementing arts and cultural approaches throughout the organization, but the changing people in a variety of roles over time will mean that some work will likely always be involved in teaching newcomers to begin from a different place with a new mindset.

Alexander notes that engagement efforts across ARC must be coordinated with the department that houses the organization's arts and culture work. This is one way to institutionalize the changes that arts and culture strategies have brought to the organization, but more ways to formalize and institutionalize that change in culture should be explored.

While ARC's experience demonstrates what's possible with sustained commitment over more than a decade, MPOs don't need to wait years to get started. The path forward depends on where your organization is today. The following section explores three distinct entry points into this work, showing how agencies at different stages — from those with no formal program to those looking to expand existing efforts — can take meaningful next steps.



Photos courtesy of ARC.



THREE PATHWAYS

TO GETTING STARTED

Metropolitan Planning Organizations enter arts and culture work from different starting points. Understanding these pathways can help identify where your agency fits and what next steps make sense.

The experiences of Culture and Community Network participants reveal that there is no single formula for success. An MPO in the Richmond, Virginia, region found ways to experiment with creative engagement that didn't require large budgets or extensive staff capacity. A large MPO serving 5.5 million people discovered how to build on a decade of sporadic initiatives to create sustained integration. And an established program in Portland learned how to move from a single grant program to agency-wide cultural transformation.

What these diverse experiences share is a willingness to start somewhere—and a recognition that the starting point matters less than the commitment to authentic engagement and continuous learning. Whether you're starting from scratch, building on past experiments, or scaling up existing programs, these pathways offer concrete examples of how to move forward.

Pathway 1: Starting from scratch (PlanRVA, Richmond, VA)

Context: A regional planning organization serving nine localities and over a million residents with no formal arts and culture program.

How it began: Staff with non-traditional backgrounds (grassroots organizing, higher education, union organizing) and personal creative practices (quilting, arts) brought their whole selves to work. Leadership supported this authenticity and created space for experimentation.

Early steps:

- Internal survey using video (not a conventional questionnaire) to gauge staff comfort with arts and culture.
- "People's Budget" forum theatre exercise in partnership with local government.
- PlanRVA Day with maps and sticker-based activities to demystify planning.

- Zero Fare Transit campaign using storytelling as data.

Key enabler: Executive director Martha Shickle experienced how other organizations used art to spark conversations about difficult topics like redlining. "A visual display of information hits people differently than a dryly written report. It shows up differently in people's hearts."

Critical lesson: Staff emphasized that "everyone is an artist in some way" and creative engagement doesn't require professional artists—it requires openness, experimentation, and respect for community voice.



“EVERYONE IS AN **ARTIST** IN SOME WAY”
- Martha Shickle
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PLANRVA

Pathway 2: Building on periodic efforts (DVRPC, Greater Philadelphia/Southern New Jersey)

Context: An MPO serving 5.5 million people with over a decade of one-off arts initiatives but no sustained integration.

Evolution:

- **2008 and 2023:** Foundational reports examining demographics, culture, and creativity.
- **2012:** Regional forums showcasing Mural Arts Philadelphia and arts-based economic development.
- **2018-2024:** Creative demonstrations like experimental pop-ups and station art.
- **2025:** Intentional shift toward sustained integration through CCN participation.

Current experiments:

- Scale models and Matchbox cars to explain street design (described as "joyful, silly, and effective").
- Partnerships with Artworks Trenton and local cycling groups.
- "Art in Planning Workshop" showcasing staff creativity while connecting with outside artists.
- Embedding creative methods in Safe Streets for All committee.

Challenge faced: Even when past arts initiatives were successful, they often lacked the structures to sustain lessons learned and build momentum over time.

Critical lesson: Transportation Planner Jen Farris noted, "If we keep doing the same thing, we'll get the same outcome." An internal survey revealed strong staff interest in risk-taking, creating momentum for change.

Next step: Preparing specific, fundable arts and culture projects for inclusion in the FY2027 work program to move from side projects to core activities.

While agencies like PlanRVA and DVRPC demonstrate how to launch or revitalize arts and culture efforts, other MPOs face a different challenge: how to take an established program and deepen its integration across the entire organization. This requires moving beyond a single successful initiative to fundamentally shift how the agency approaches all of its community engagement work.





Pathway 3: Expanding an existing program (Metro, Portland, OR)

Context: An MPO with an established Community Placemaking grant program seeking agency-wide integration.

Foundation: Metro started with a good foundation, managing five performance arts venues in the Portland area as part of its portfolio, with staff focused on delivering arts and culture for the region. Principal planner Dana Lucero transitioned from transit work in 2017 and identified an opportunity to repurpose a dormant funding pool. The initial placemaking program launched with \$100,000 distributed across six organizations, and has grown steadily supported by the agency's equity strategy.

Since 2017, grants of \$5,000 to \$25,000 have blended community with arts and culture strategies as the program has doubled in size and still has many more applicants than it can fund.

"It came out of a desire to engage communities differently," said Deputy Director of Planning, Development and Research Malu Wilkinson. "This was a way to get community voices telling us what they wanted to invest in and giving them money to follow through."

Key shift: Moving from treating artists as vendors to engaging them as collaborators in storytelling projects, community gatherings, and creative processes. The community placemaking program has pushed the boundaries of what is possible in connecting art with local communities, supporting projects that include storytelling, community gardens, markets, history, and other elements of culture that extend beyond physical art.

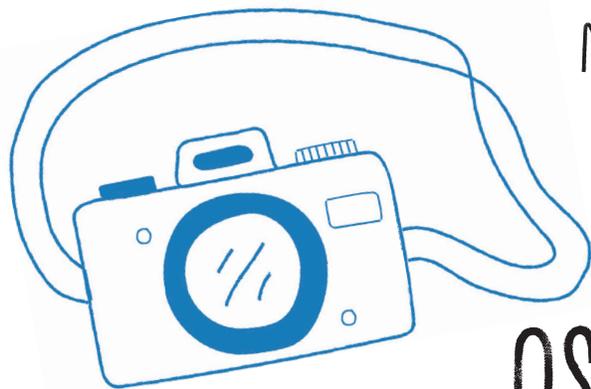
"There's a whole ecosystem of people and networks you're missing if you're not tapping into arts and culture," said Metro Councilor Christine Lewis. She said the placemaking program had helped the agency connect with leaders of community organizations that can help involve the public in projects or larger processes like Oregon Metro's 50-year Future Vision process.

Expansion underway:

- **Future Vision process:** 18-month, 50-year regional visioning effort intentionally centering artists and culture-bearers, working with the former Creative Laureate of Portland as a consultant.
- **Safe Streets for All:** Exploring "data justice" by elevating qualitative stories and lived experiences alongside technical datasets.

- **Internal cohort:** Creating an arts and culture group of staff with creative practices to meet regularly, hear from artists, and pilot experiments.
- **Broader integration:** The program has impacted how the agency approaches engagement, incorporating arts and culture more strongly into public involvement processes. Lewis noted a parks engagement session that let participants build parks with Play-Doh allowed her five-year-old to contribute. "That's how you're going to get a lot of people who aren't going to fill out a survey."

Program design lessons: Wilkinson said the organization has learned to simplify grant requirements and work closely with procurement and legal staff to make the grants easy for community organizations to apply for and manage. Many are new to the grant process and require more time and engagement for the project to run smoothly. Using funds from a construction excise tax rather than federal funds has made it easier to cut some of the strings that would normally come with similar grants. Being willing to experiment, allow some freedom, and spend the time required for success has shifted the perception of what government can do in some communities.



MOVE FROM TREATING ARTISTS AS
VENDORS
 TO ENGAGING THEM
 AS **COLLABORATORS**

Challenges and evolution: There have been obstacles, including limited staff and time. For most of its history, the community grantmaking program has been managed by a single staffer, Dana Lucero. That is now changing, with new staff coming on. "We can't have a sustainable program where all the knowledge lies in one person," said Wilkinson.

Pivotal moment: During a virtual meeting, a Community Placemaking grantee told communications manager Molly Cooney-Mesker directly: "This [process of supporting community-based organizations to implement their own ideas and projects] is what real community engagement is." That moment crystallized the need to embed creative practices throughout the agency's engagement work.

Critical lesson: Senior public affairs specialist Lakeeyscia Griffin, who brings a multidisciplinary artistic practice of photography, music, and videography to her work, explains: "These structures [of institutional processes such as grantmaking and contracting] may feel diametrically opposed to the cultivation of arts, but they're necessary so that when artists come in, they can do what they're here to do."

Takeaway: You can start from anywhere. The key is matching your approach to your agency's readiness, resources, and relationships. Small MPOs can be nimble; larger MPOs can leverage scale and resources.

These pathways illustrate that successful integration of arts and culture isn't about having the perfect conditions—it's about recognizing opportunities, supporting champions, and being willing to experiment and learn. But knowing where to start is only the beginning. The following recommendations distill lessons from across all CCN agencies to provide practical guidance for implementing arts and culture strategies, regardless of which pathway your organization takes.



Above: The interactive bicycle sculpture being drawn or written on by two event participants adding their own creative designs or suggested improvements about biking in East Trenton. Photo credit: Cassidy Boulan

Below: An interactive bicycle sculpture created by artist Wills Kinsley commissioned by DVRPC for a public engagement event focused on road safety and proposed traffic calming improvement in East Trenton, New Jersey. Photo credit: Jen Farris



RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR IMPLEMENTING ARTS AND CULTURE STRATEGIES

Integrating arts and culture into regional planning requires more than enthusiasm. It demands strategic thinking about organizational readiness, internal champions, funding sources, and measures of success. The recommendations that follow are drawn from the collective experience of CCN participants who navigated these challenges across diverse contexts and organizational cultures.

These recommendations are not meant to be followed in strict sequence. Instead, think of them as interconnected considerations that will need attention at different stages of your work. You may find yourself returning to questions of internal readiness even as you're implementing programs, or discovering new funding sources as you deepen relationships with external partners.



Marc Weinblatt, Founder and Co-Director, Mandala Center for Change, leads an applied theater workshop during the Culture and Community Network Seattle convening, June 2025.

Assessing internal readiness

The first critical step is honest assessment: understanding where your organization is today and what conditions need to be cultivated for this work to take root and flourish. Here are important indicators to reflect on in assessing how prepared your agency is.

Authenticity, trust, and commitment are necessary for these strategies to be effective in engaging excluded community groups, including those who have developed distrust of government agencies based on past experiences. The willingness to start with a listening stance can help establish credibility and open a pathway to trust.

Rather than public engagement being a box to check—a process where planners present project that will happen to the community—planners must center local communities in the planning process. As PlanRVA discovered, "showing up places when they don't need something" and building relationships before asking for input made a significant difference in how the community relates to and trusts the agency.



Martha Shickle, PlanRVA Executive Director: "A visual display of information hits people differently than a dryly written report. It shows up differently in people's hearts."

Risk tolerance is essential for organizations conditioned to systematic procedures and bureaucratic processes. In arts and culture efforts, progress may not be linear and may look different than leaders expect. Re-establishing trust with communities may be a bumpy road.

However, as Shickle noted, "We're in an environment where failure is not an option" as stewards of public money. Starting small and building through practice and action can help establish trust and tolerance for risk. Low-stakes experiments build confidence and evidence.

A staff self-assessment can help identify staff strengths and their roles in arts and culture efforts, as well as what can restore them and make these strategies sustainable.

Mike Alexander emphasized there must be "bureaucratic determination" in supporting arts and culture strategies, with wide guardrails and support for innovation. "You have to be willing to say, 'let's experiment with this,' and give it the space, time, and opportunity to develop, learning along the way. That takes patience. That in itself is a form of innovation."

Lived experience and a creative mindset can bring a more imaginative approach than an administrative mindset more typical found in planning agencies. Not everyone will identify as an artist, but everyone has the ability to be creative, to cultivate openness, and engage their imagination.

Examples across CCN agencies include:

- **PlanRVA:** Kristin Hott brings quilting as both personal practice and metaphor for community planning; Emily Williams leverages a background in higher education and union organizing.
- **Metro:** Lakeeyscia Griffin bridges her roles as photographer, musician, and videographer with professional work.
- **CMAF:** Elizabeth Miller began a career in the arts world working in grantmaking; Asha Barnes studied anthropology and uses poetry as artistic outlet; Sema Abulhab has long been interested in arts, languages, and design.
- **Flint Hills:** Janna Williams and Abigail Danner both have a landscape architecture background; as a city planner, Angela Schnee is interested in bringing artistic elements into transportation projects.

PlanRVA emphasizes "bringing your whole self to work" as an asset rather than something to compartmentalize. CMAF staff noted that CCN was the first

professional development opportunity that felt both national in scope and grounded in real practice, providing affirmation that others at MPOs are grappling with the same questions.

Autonomy, support, and patience are needed for staff and artists implementing these strategies so genuine connections can be forged with communities the organization may have previously had trouble reaching and supporting. Critically, arts and culture efforts will take dedicated staff and dedicated time. Setting aside space and time for something staff feel connected to and involved in will be more effective and authentic when consciously included as part of work responsibilities rather than added on top of already full plates on a volunteer basis.

Intentionality and fidelity to the ultimate purpose of integrating arts and culture within an agency's work is critical. Since this work seeks to engage communities that have been harmed by infrastructure projects and excluded from participation, an organization must identify which groups are typically not at the table during public involvement and make intentional efforts to reach and include those groups. Collecting and tracking data about who participates can help set a baseline to measure progress.

Metro faces the challenge of ensuring geographic representation across its region. While most placemaking applications come from Portland, resources must be distributed region-wide. MPO governance structures can give disproportionate power to suburban jurisdictions or state agencies, further distancing decision-making from those most impacted.

Understanding your agency's readiness is essential, but readiness alone doesn't create change. Translating assessment into action requires people—internal



Culture and Community Network participants pose during an applied theatre exercise, June 2025.



champions who can advocate for new approaches and enroll partners across the organization in this vision. The following section explores how to identify, support, and mobilize these changemakers.

Cultivating internal champions and partners

Large planning agencies often answer to a board that directs organizational activities. Allies among the highest levels of authority are necessary to advance arts and culture strategies. The same is true of allies in executive leadership, who will be in charge of giving arts and culture work the time, space, and perhaps funding to be effective.

How leadership support manifested across agencies:

- **PlanRVA:** The executive director attended art installations in the community and created space for staff to express interest before formalizing programs. The board created a dedicated engagement position in 2019, distinct from compliance-focused public participation. Local art and innovation consultancy Another Limited Rebellion hosted a "creative sprint" that let staff discover one another's creativity and talent.
- **Metro:** Leadership allowed experimentation and learning from imperfect processes, recognizing that mistakes would be made and committing to continuous improvement with each cycle or project.
- **Metro:** Leadership worked closely with procurement and legal staff to minimize restrictions and make grants accessible to community organizations new to the grant process, demonstrating willingness to experiment and allow freedom while committing the time required for success.
- **DVRPC:** Executive leadership encouraged staff participation in CCN as a strategic learning opportunity.

"Start where the soil is fertile": Metro's team learned from Seattle Director of Arts and Culture Gülgün Kayim at a CCN in-person convening to focus first on staff with a creative practice or those who are already eager to engage with arts and culture. Dana Lucero saw opportunity in her transition from a transit role to repurpose dormant funding into something meaningful.

Identify internal champions and skeptics: An organization wanting to employ arts and culture strategies will need to identify internal champions for the work and support them, and identify skeptics who may need to be brought on board before work can advance. "Just try and make sure there aren't obstacles in the way of these high-performing people," said Alexander.

Spending time power-mapping can help changemakers identify the best way to

move forward: which decision-makers need to be on board, who can support their efforts, and where to focus initial casemaking efforts.

With champions identified and leadership support secured, the next challenge emerges: how do planners and artists—professionals from different worlds with different vocabularies and ways of working—learn to collaborate effectively? This requires developing a common language and shared understanding of what arts and culture integration means in practice.

Framing the issue and developing shared language

Everyone is able to be creative, but planners don't always have their creative side cultivated as part of professional training, and artists aren't always familiar with the planning process. It is rare to have everyone on the same page and speaking the same language at the outset, so it is essential to establish a shared commitment to staying curious and open-minded. This includes being in constant communication, spending time to understand and validate others' perspectives and meanings, and being willing to make adjustments.

"Part of talking the same language is...you have to be in the environment to learn the other culture's language. Planners have to spend more time in the arts world and invite artists to spend more time in the planner's world," said former ARC executive director Doug Hooker. "There needs to be a regular, ongoing, mutual conversation and dialogue professionally and socially."

One approach Director of Community Engagement and Culture Roshani Thakore has taken at ARC is hosting planning meetings in artistic spaces to provide more exposure to a broader artistic approach. This can help build relationships and understanding, shift perspectives, and open future possibilities for local work.

Practices to establish while shifting organizational culture (revisit regularly rather than do once):

- Understand and expect that the organization is shifting its culture.
- Collaboratively define principles and values, as well as commonly agreed upon ground rules for working together.



Artist Scott Oshima leading the group in a kazoo symphony while on a tour of the Seattle Chinatown-International District, Culture and Community Network convening, June 2025.

- Take time together periodically to imagine the possibilities of these strategies.
- Bring in positive examples of successful participation and collaboration from staff's own lives as inspiration.



Grand Valley Metro Council partnered with the Earthkeepers student group for a screenprinting event around sustainability at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Participating students also received ten dollar vouchers for a campus coffee shop.

- Define (and remind each other) what the program is not: typically not merely public art and murals, not city beautification, not an effort to boost tourism.

Artists should be expected to be thought partners with planners rather than fee-for-service contractors. And planners can bring their own, often untapped, creativity to the table.

Examples of creative engagement methods:

- **DVRPC:** Scale models and Matchbox cars to explain street design changes (described as "joyful, silly, and effective").
- **Metro:** Artists leading storytelling projects and community gatherings that reframe planning issues.
- **Flint Hills:** Trivia nights at local breweries; participating in Third Thursdays arts event with mental mapping and sketching; cultural asset mapping.
- **CMAF:** Screen-printing activities where residents designed images for tote bags; zines as an engagement tool.
- **MTC-ABAG:** Photography projects highlighting human stories.



The power of informality: Flint Hills learned that trivia nights and arts festivals attract audiences that might never attend a traditional public meeting or town hall. Creative activities don't need to result in a polished product—they serve as entry points to help residents share ideas.

Periodically assessing where current practices fall short can highlight where changes need to be made. Examples might include community members



experiencing participation fatigue, language barriers, lack of understanding of opaque government processes, lack of access to decision-making, or other exclusionary experiences, depending on local context.

Understanding the theory and potential of arts and culture strategies is important, but at some point, organizations need to move from conversation to action. The question becomes: what does the first step actually look like?

Identifying and allocating internal funding sources

As pilot projects demonstrate value and organizational interest grows, questions about resources and sustainability inevitably arise. Arts and culture strategies require investment—in artist fees, staff time, and program support. Understanding funding options and how to access them becomes critical for moving from small experiments to sustained programs.

Arts and culture strategies in public involvement can be funded through federal transportation dollars, including the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program administered by FHWA and through FTA Metropolitan and Statewide Planning funds. Community-preferred engagement strategies, understanding community wants and needs, and broad community representation have been considered "features of meaningful public involvement" in USDOT guidance.

Funding models and amounts from CCN agencies:

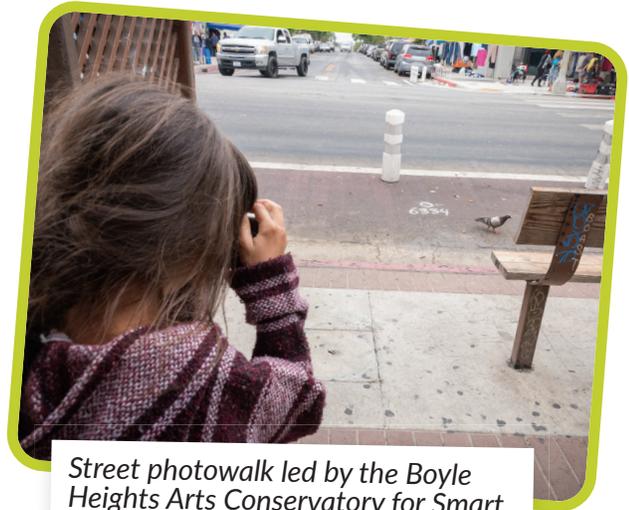
- **ARC:** Started with MPO membership dues and matching state/federal grants. Evolution of the ALMA program to Culture and Community Design was initiated with a \$15,000 budget to pay artists, culture bearers, and CBOs. Some funding comes through program registration fees.
- **Metro:** Launched Community Placemaking with \$100,000 to six organizations in 2017 by repurposing "dormant funding pool"; program has doubled in size with grants of \$5,000 to \$25,000, and still receives many more applications than it can fund. Draws from construction excise tax.
- **MTC-ABAG:** Just launched the Community Action Resource and Empowerment (CARE): Power-building and Engagement Program, which includes a \$250,000 cultural placemaking component for community-based organizations. Grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$100,000 support leadership development, multi-sector partnerships, and community-driven projects across the region.
- **PlanRVA:** Board piloted \$50/meeting stipends for transportation advisory committee members, compensating for "lived experience and expertise."

Starting without dedicated funding:

Flint Hills demonstrates that creativity in planning doesn't require large budgets or fully developed programs from the outset. Small steps using existing resources—like trivia nights at breweries or participating in existing community arts events—can spark imagination and create opportunity for more systematic integration later.

Funding challenges:

- **Restricted funding:** MPO funding comprises federal, state, and local sources, each with varying degrees of flexibility, with most being highly restrictive. As PlanRVA's Executive Director Martha Shickle notes, "We're a public entity with no nonprofit arm, so we are not eligible to go after more creative and flexible private sources."
- **Federal uncertainty:** Practitioners should pay close attention to rules and guidance about these funds in the future.



Street photowalk led by the Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory for Smart Growth America's Healing Our Highways program, 2024.

Planning ahead: Preparing for the future by setting aside independent funds for arts and culture can help make the organization more resilient to future funding changes.

Securing funding is one thing; demonstrating value is another. Planning agencies accustomed to quantitative metrics and traditional measures of success may struggle to evaluate the impact of arts and culture strategies. Yet without ways to assess progress, it's difficult to make the case for continued investment or learn what's working and what needs adjustment.

Defining and measuring progress

Measuring progress in arts and culture strategies is difficult to do with traditional methods and according to traditional metrics. Arts and culture is an expression of the heart and soul whose impact and value are felt rather than captured in a chart. That said, there are still ways to quantify impact and value on community and organizational outcomes.

Community Outcomes: Any effort to engage the public should ask whether the needs of the community, and particularly those members who have been historically excluded and harmed by transportation infrastructure, are being met, which is the ultimate measure of the agency's success.



Quantitative metrics:

- Inclusion of new participants in public involvement (can be measured with numbers).
- Who participates in planning (tracking demographics, geographies, etc).

Qualitative measures:

- Developing the community's ability to engage effectively with sometimes opaque government processes.
- Whether community knowledge of processes has increased.
- Whether community members are better able to speak up for their needs in an informed way.
- Empowerment and the ability of community groups to organize themselves.

Balancing quantitative and qualitative: MTC-ABAG's Judis Santos champions the need to make space for emotional expression in policymaking alongside data-driven analysis. This dual approach of anchoring decisions in both quantitative metrics and lived experience has the potential to change how planning conversations unfold, making them more accessible and human-centered.

Agency Outcomes:

Process changes:

- Whether agency practices and processes have shifted as a result of incorporating arts and culture strategies.
- Whether the organization is valuing other ways of communicating, knowing, and building, especially from community members not engaged in the past.
- Whether the organization has a better understanding of where there are gaps in its work and services.

Integration depth:

- Deepening integration of arts and culture strategies across the work of the entire organization.
- Identifying specific places where creative thinking has been encouraged.
- Establishing a daily, ongoing intention of starting community engagement from a different place than previously.

Structural changes:

- **ARC:** Mike Alexander now requires all engagement efforts across the agency

to coordinate with the department where arts and culture strategies are housed to integrate them throughout agency work.

- **Metro:** Creating an internal arts and culture cohort of staff to meet regularly, hear from artists, and pilot experiments.
- **DVRPC:** Internal survey revealed "strong potential for risk-taking"; preparing to embed arts and culture in the FY2027 work program.

Measuring these changes effectively may require establishing a data-driven baseline for comparison. Rather than this being a negative focus, it can be a starting point to help demonstrate the positives that new strategies may bring.

Ultimately, the measures that matter most are those that capture relationship quality and community trust. These outcomes emerge not from internal processes alone, but from sustained, authentic engagement with external partners, particularly communities that have been historically excluded from and harmed by planning processes.



Lizzi Weyant, Executive Director of Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and Samyukth Shenbaga, Managing Director, Community Development, Atlanta Regional Commission providing feedback during a workshop at the Culture and Community Network Seattle convening, June 2025.

Relationships and trust with external partners

"We're embracing complexity," said Alexander, discussing the work of forging connections with the Clarkston community through the One Clarkston project and other efforts at engagement through arts and culture. "We know we're going to do this, and it's starting to sink in." Though difficult at times, every year is less so.

Building relationships and rebuilding trust in the community isn't easy, and it takes time. There are no shortcuts, and the process has to be authentic. Artists and arts and culture organizations often have organic, authentic relationships in their community that can provide a trustworthy starting point for connection. It takes commitment over time to continue building those connections.



ARC found that it is easier to involve historically excluded and harmed groups when there's community infrastructure in place—like community groups with their own buildings and spaces as well as connections, social infrastructure, and networks—to help organize and gather people. The planning organization can have a role in supporting that infrastructure. Ultimately, building trust and relationships in the community require consistency, maintenance, and a commitment to reciprocity as arts and culture strategies are implemented, rather than one push with a defined ending point.

Processing learning and institutionalizing change

Establishing feedback loops: ARC's Roshani Thakore established a feedback loop based on an adapted toolkit from the Center for Artistic Activism to evaluate the effectiveness of arts and culture engagement events. Mike Alexander requires engagement efforts to coordinate with Thakore's department to see what collaboration is possible.

Making the case through storytelling: Finding ways to tell the story of the difference being made can help cement change. Documenting case studies can show how unique and important outcomes emerged, like how trust from the community made an impact on particular projects. Creating materials that tell the stories of these efforts can help with the agency's culture shift, showing that more meaningful public involvement is possible and that outcomes can change.

Ongoing education: Several staff noted that educational work and building support should be ongoing processes among many stakeholders, including the local community, elected leaders, consultants, the agency's board, and others. Turnover will mean that some work will likely always involve teaching newcomers to begin from a different place with a new mindset.

Communities of practice: Working within a community of practice can help continue to distill best practices and provide learning from others doing similar work, as well as inspiration, community, creativity, and the energy to keep it all going.

Peer networks and support

A community of practice—a group of other professionals with shared goals and similar work who come together to share with and learn from one another—can help restore staff and inject new ideas into the program to keep it fresh and vital. This is especially important for avoiding loss of inspiration or momentum down the road.

Smart Growth America's Culture and Community Network established a peer network for MPOs and provided essential support to participating MPOs in ways that went

beyond technical assistance. Learn about some of the benefits that partner organizations cited in their participation in CCN.

Key benefits cited across agencies:

- **Legitimacy and internal support:** "CCN legitimized and boosted efforts internally" (DVRPC), providing evidence to strengthen internal casemaking. CMAP noted that arts integration must be framed in ways that align with agency-wide goals, such as transparency, good governance, and data-driven planning—and CCN helped make those connections.
- **National perspective:** "Examples from peer MPOs and regional planning agencies such as Boston, Atlanta, Seattle, and the Twin Cities offer evidence" (Metro). MTC-ABAG drew inspiration from Portland's community placemaking program in designing their CARE initiative.
- **Space for reflection:** "Valuable space for reflection and connection" (PlanRVA).
- **Practical examples and inspiration:** "Not only practical examples but also inspiration" (PlanRVA). As one participant noted, "I love the case studies and the other examples from other MPOs, because I feel like it's hard to just start. But if you use other ideas as a springboard, it helps so much."
- **Permission structure:** CCN helped DVRPC build "the permission and structure needed to make creativity part of planning and engagement at every step."
- **Peer learning:** Flint Hills noted that "exposure to practices in other cities and discussion with other CCN participants has given the team permission to try, fail, and adapt."
- **Tailored support:** Smart Growth America provided office hours, technical assistance, and brainstorming sessions, helping MPOs translate ideas into action.



Culture and Community Network group photo in Seattle, June 2025.

KEY

TAKEAWAYS

WHAT WORKS

Creativity is a process, not a product: Engagement doesn't need polished visual art to be meaningful—it can serve as an entry point for sharing ideas.

Start where you are—and start in fertile soil: You can begin from nothing, build on past experiments, or expand existing programs. Small MPOs can be nimble; larger MPOs can leverage scale and resources—but organizational culture often matters more than size. Focus first on staff who already have creative practices or are eager to engage. Identify community-identified solutions and local champions.

Staff backgrounds matter: Non-traditional pathways bring valuable perspectives; cultivate staff who bring their whole selves to work. Examples from the cohort include quilting, photography, poetry, union organizing, landscape architecture, and skateboarding.

WHAT TO AVOID

Creativity as add-on: Multiple agencies noted the risk that creativity remains an add-on at the tail end of projects rather than being part of the process from the beginning.

Waiting for perfect conditions: Small MPOs with limited capacity shouldn't wait for perfect conditions. Small steps can spark imagination and broaden participation. As one CCN participant noted, "I love the case studies and the other examples from other MPOs, because I feel like it's hard to just start."

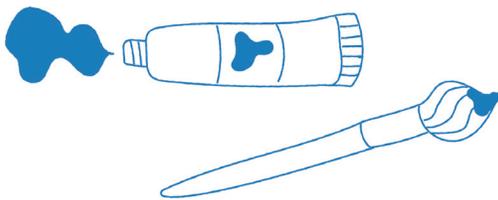
Single points of failure: Metro learned that sustainability requires distributing knowledge and capacity across multiple staff members. "We can't have a sustainable program where all the knowledge lies in one person." While dedicated champions are essential, plan for knowledge transfer from the outset.

WHAT WORKS

Don't wait for permission: Some successful experiments weren't formally approved in advance—they became celebrated by proving their value.

Artists as collaborators, not vendors—and balance quantitative and qualitative data:

This fundamental distinction transforms the nature and impact of the work. Engage artists as thought partners in co-designing solutions and processes, not just creating deliverables. Combine metrics with lived experience and emotional resonance to make planning more accessible and human-centered.



Staff backgrounds matter: Non-traditional pathways bring valuable perspectives; cultivate staff who bring their whole selves to work. Examples from the cohort include quilting, photography, poetry, union organizing, landscape architecture, and skateboarding.

WHAT TO AVOID

Saying "no" to yourself: Don't assume something won't be allowed; often, creative engagement happens by experimenting with possibilities. Some of CMAP's most successful experiments, like zines, weren't formally approved in advance.

Superficial approaches with traditional metrics: Not every use of arts and culture leads to real change. One-off projects or primarily aesthetic changes can generate temporary excitement but fail to influence decision-making. Worse, communities may become skeptical if these efforts feel symbolic or extractive.

True impact comes from deeper engagement: designing the artist's role as collaborator versus vendor, compensating artists fairly, investing in underrepresented community-based organizations, and embedding relational practices like listening, trust-building, and care into institutional processes.

Single points of failure: Metro learned that sustainability requires distributing knowledge and capacity across multiple staff members. "We can't have a sustainable program where all the knowledge lies in one person." While dedicated champions are essential, plan for knowledge transfer from the outset.

WHAT WORKS

Document and learn—and peer learning is essential: Create structures to sustain lessons learned rather than starting over each time. Build inventories of past approaches. Communities of practice provide inspiration, evidence for casemaking, and energy to persist. Using other ideas as springboards helps get creative juices flowing.

Innovation requires patience and cultural change: Non-linear progress and messiness are part of the process. Provide wide guardrails and support for experimentation. Be willing to innovate and set new precedents with respect to internal bureaucracy, procurement processes, and legal barriers.

Move from tactical to transformational: Use temporary demonstrations as learning tools, not endpoints. The goal is changing how planning happens, not just adding art to streets.

WHAT TO AVOID

Lack of documentation and learning structures: Being too interested in measuring results according to traditional practices, or staying comfortable with tactical/temporary installations without pushing for deeper institutional change, undermines arts and culture strategies. Talking the talk without challenging internal processes keeps work stuck at the surface level.

Paralyzing risk aversion: Unwillingness to upset established processes can limit effectiveness. Large planning organizations are sensibly risk-averse, but risk tolerance is necessary for these efforts to be successful. Being too interested in measuring results according to traditional practices can undermine arts and culture strategies that may not have linear progress, clear, immediate, quantifiable outputs, and may require more patience than in the past

Getting stuck in tactics: Remaining comfortable with temporary installations and visual art without evolving toward co-design, equitable systems change, and transformed internal processes limits impact and keeps work from influencing decision-making.

Innovation requires

PATIENCE

QUESTIONS

FOR

REFLECTION

The questions below are organized into five areas that correspond to key phases of implementing arts and culture strategies: understanding your starting point, assessing leadership and culture, identifying champions and opportunities, understanding community context, and envisioning change.

These questions can be used in multiple ways: as a self-assessment tool for individual staff members; as discussion prompts for team meetings or planning sessions; as a framework for conversations with leadership or board members; or as a guide for strategic planning processes. Return to them periodically as your work evolves—your answers will likely shift as you gain experience and your organizational context changes.

Understanding your starting point

- Describe your agency's institutional experience, knowledge, and growth around arts and culture and creativity. Who should you speak to in order to learn more?
- What dormant funding sources or underutilized resources might be repurposed for arts and culture work?
- What are existing arts and culture initiatives or programs with arts and culture elements that can be expanded upon or redesigned to incorporate greater artist involvement, creative approaches, or cultural engagement?
- What one-off or sporadic arts initiatives have you tried? How might you build on or learn from them?

Assessing leadership and culture

- Describe the state of your agency leadership's openness to and support for arts and culture initiatives and cross-sector collaboration with artists and cultural workers, or arts and cultural organizations in your community.
- What is the culture of creativity, openness to risk, experimentation, evolution, self-reflection, failure, transparency and accountability, learning, and unlearning across the agency? How does it vary from department to department, team to team, manager to manager?
- What does "failure" mean in your organizational culture, and how does that affect your risk tolerance?
- How is learning and culture change shared, socialized, and spread throughout the organization? Through which channels and which people?

Identifying champions and opportunities

- Who on your staff has creative practices or non-traditional backgrounds that could be assets?
- Where is "fertile soil" in your organization for starting this work?
- Who are the internal champions who could advance this work? Who are the skeptics who may need to be brought on board?
- Where is there an opportunity to incorporate creativity into already ongoing efforts rather than starting something from scratch?

Understanding community context

- How is public involvement and community engagement measured? How does your agency track who is involved in participating in planning projects? Is there other data that should or could be collected?
- Which groups are typically not at the table during public involvement in your region? What are the dividing lines in your community?
- How does your organization currently show up in communities when you're not asking for something?
- What community infrastructure exists (community groups with buildings, spaces, connections, networks) that could be partners in this work?



Photo courtesy of ARC

Envisioning change

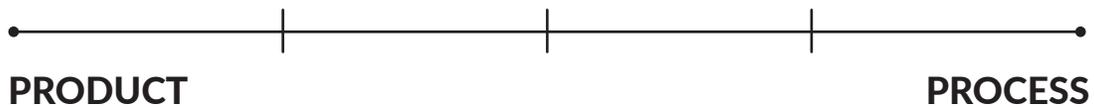
- Describe your understanding of the state of your agency's community engagement values, policies, and processes. How do or don't they embody agency values? Your personal and professional values?
- How might you draw from your experiences with arts and culture and creativity to strengthen your agency's community engagement efforts?
- What would success look like for arts and culture integration at your agency in one year? Three years? Five years?

EXERCISE

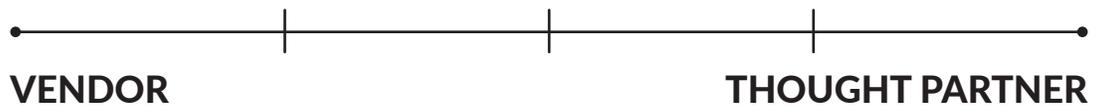
To figure out your organization's starting point, review the questions outlined in the previous section and then use the scales below to mark where you believe your organization lies along the scale at present.

After completing the exercise, designate a timeframe in the dedicated space below to re-evaluate your progress and see where your organization was able to improve.

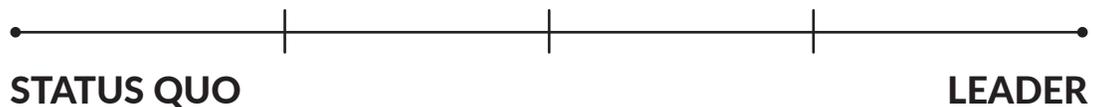
ART



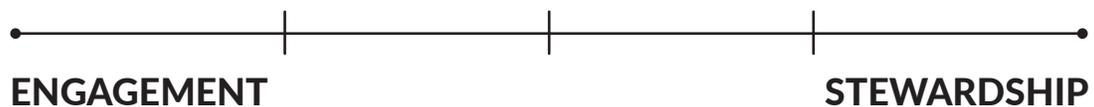
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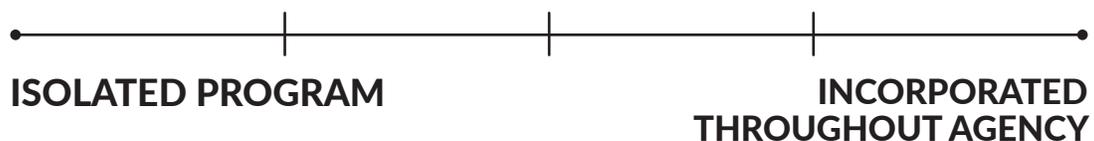
AGENCY



COMMUNITY



INTEGRATION



Re-evaluation date: _____

CONCLUSION

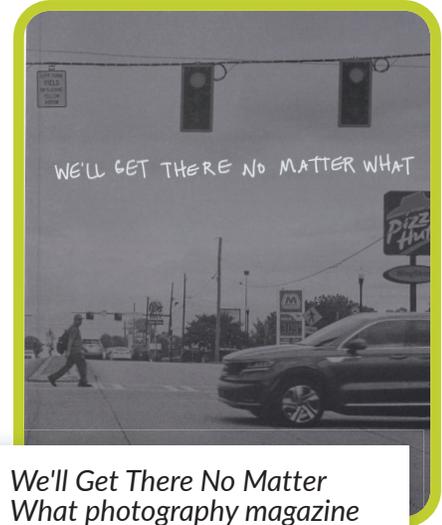
The integration of arts and culture into regional planning represents more than a new engagement technique—it reflects a fundamental shift in how planning organizations understand their role and responsibility to the communities they serve. The experiences documented in this report demonstrate that this shift is both possible and powerful, yielding deeper community relationships, more inclusive processes, and planning outcomes that better reflect the needs and aspirations of all residents.

Such a shift requires patience, risk tolerance, authentic commitment, and sustained effort. It demands that organizations “get comfortable being uncomfortable,” as ARC’s Samyukth Shenbaga noted, and embrace non-linear progress and messy processes. But for the MPOs and regional planning agencies that undertake this work, the rewards extend beyond better engagement metrics or more diverse public meeting attendance. They include rebuilding trust with communities harmed by past planning decisions, elevating voices historically excluded from decision-making, and creating the conditions for truly collaborative, community-centered planning.

As Deputy Director Malu Wilkinson of Metro observed, incorporating arts and culture provides “a way to get community voices telling us what they wanted to invest in and giving them money to follow through.” This shift from agencies imposing their vision to communities shaping their own futures represents the deepest promise of integrating arts and culture into regional planning.

Whether your organization is just beginning to explore this work or seeking to deepen existing efforts, the experiences shared in this report offer both inspiration and practical guidance. The most important step is to begin wherever you are, with whatever resources you have, in whatever way aligns with your organizational culture and community context. As countless CCN participants learned, you don’t need perfect conditions or complete certainty. You need curiosity, commitment, and a willingness to learn alongside the communities you serve.

The future of regional planning depends not only on data and engineering, but also on creativity, culture, and human connection. **By embracing arts and culture, MPOs can design engagement that reflects their communities, build trust for long-term collaboration, and create more resilient regions. At Smart Growth America, we see MPOs as essential to this transformation and are committed to supporting them as they lead the way.**



We'll Get There No Matter What photography magazine produced by Captura ATL with a Smart Growth America Healing Our Highways grant, 2025.

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INTERVIEWS

Atlanta Regional Commission

- Michael Alexander, Chief Operating Officer, February 2025.
- Haley Berry, Financial Services Administrator, January 2025.
- Doug Hooker, former Executive Director, February 2025.
- Marian Liou, former Community Engagement & Arts Program Director, currently Director of Arts & Culture at Smart Growth America, January 2025..
- Samyukth Shenbaga, Managing Director, Community Development, January 2025.
- Roshani Thakore, Director, Community Engagement and Culture, January 2025.

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

- Cassidy Boulan, Associate Manager, Office of Transit, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Planning, July 2025.
- Lillian Drake, Public Participation Planner, July 2025.
- Jen Farris, Transportation Planner, July 2025.
- William Laidlaw, Accounting Manager, October 2025.

Metro

- Molly Cooney-Mesker, Planning, Development, and Research Communications and Engagement Manager, September 2025.
- Lakeeyscia Griffin, Senior Public Affairs Specialist, September 2025.
- Duncan Hwang, Metro Councilor, October 2025.
- Christine Lewis, Metro Councilor, October 2025.
- Dana Lucero, Principal Planner and Community Placemaking Grant Manager, September 2025.
- Malu Wilkinson, Planning, Development, and Research Deputy Director, October 2025.

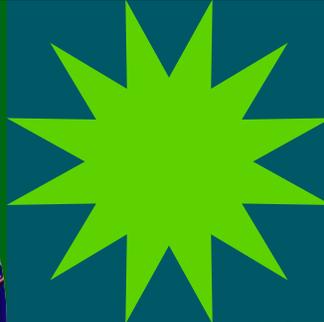
PlanRVA

- Kristin Hott, Engagement Coordinator, June and August 2025.
- Martha Shickle, Executive Director, October 2025.
- Emily Williams, Grants Specialist, June and August 2025.

OUR CREATIVE FUTURE

A regional framework to advance arts & culture for all

Portland Metro Region including Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties



A Cultural Plan for
Portland's Tri-county Region



*“Art isn’t just a tool to help us cope;
it’s a way to tell the stories of our lives
and what we understand.”*

— Houseless Youth Discussion Participant

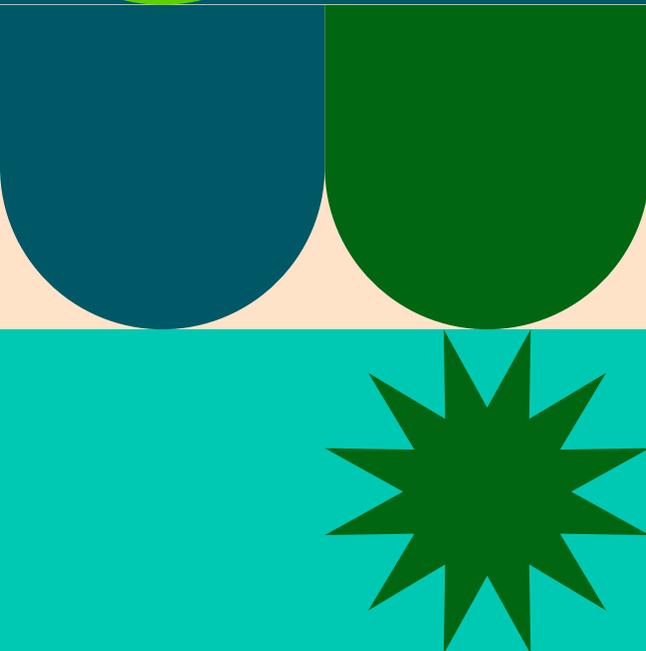


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“I remember I didn’t feel so proud to be a part of art groups such as Ballet Folklórico because I was embarrassed to be different as a kid, although I really liked ballet. What we need to do is say this is your culture and you need to embrace it. Being a youth is hard, but it’s even harder being a youth in a different culture.”

— Latino Community Conversation Participant



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Land Acknowledgment

The tri-county Portland area rests on traditional village sites of the Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Bands of Chinook, Tualatin, Kalapuya, Molalla, and many other Tribes who made their homes along the Columbia River.

We recognize that the tri-county region today is a community of many diverse Native peoples who continue to live, work, and contribute to the dynamic fabric of our shared world. We respectfully acknowledge and honor all Indigenous communities—past, present, future—and are grateful for their ongoing and vibrant presence.

We also acknowledge that the reverberations of systemic policies of genocide, relocation, and assimilation still impact Native American families today. Recognizing that acknowledgment without action is meaningless, contributors to this plan endeavored to include Indigenous input and perspective in its development, and to root our recommendations in principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion aimed at arresting and remedying the legacy of exclusion and oppression.

We respect the work of Indigenous leaders and families, and pledge to make ongoing efforts to recognize, include, and uplift their knowledge, creativity, and resilience.



Our Creative Future Steering Committee

The Steering Committee represented the voice of the community and assisted greatly in advising the planning effort, assisting with and leading engagement efforts, and co-creating the plan with the consultant team. The committee met 12 times over 15 months.

Trieste Andrews, *Oregon City Arts Commission*

Nicole Bradin, *Explore Tualatin Valley*

Julie Bunker, *Milestone Initiatives*

Joe Cantrell, *Artist*

Gus Castaneda, *Aloft Hotels*

Corinn deTorres, *Chapel Theatre*

Jerry Foster, *PassinArt*

Subashini Ganesan-Forbes, *New Expressive Works*

John Goodwin, *Portland Art Museum*

Kimberly Howard Wade, *Caldera Arts*

Joaquin Lopez, *Creative Laureate of Portland*

Jaimie Lorenzini, *City of Happy Valley*

Barbara Mason, *Artist*

Jeremy Okai Davis, *Artist*

Sushmita Poddar, *Small business Owner*

Sankar Raman, *The Immigrant Story*

Barbara Steinfeld, *Consultant*

Karis Stoudamire-Phillips, *MERC Commission*

Toni Tabora-Roberts, *Consultant*

Tonisha Toler, *Collins Foundation*

Tammy Jo Wilson, *Art in Oregon*

Committee members were nominated by officials from participating jurisdictions, including Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties; the cities of Beaverton, Hillsboro, and Portland; the Metro regional government; and the Regional Arts & Culture Council (RACC). They represent diverse backgrounds, races, ethnicities, cultural practices, and ways of knowing (e.g., disability; Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, and People of Color; LGBTQIA+ identities; and veteran communities). They also represent multiple sectors of the community, including arts, culture, creative economy, education, business, social justice, “unlikely allies,” and others.



Project Management Team

Dianne Alves, Executive Director, Clackamas County Arts Alliance

Laura Becker, Arts Program Manager, City of Beaverton

Cynthia Castro, Chief of Staff, Commissioner Sharon Meieran, Multnomah County

Jeff Hawthorne, Arts Program Manager, City of Portland

Stephan Herrera, Arts Policy Advisor and Council Liaison, City of Portland

Michele McCall-Wallace, Cultural Arts Manager, City of Hillsboro

Mario Mesquita, Manager of Advocacy and Engagement, RACC

Cristina Nieves, Policy Director, Commissioner Sharon Meieran, Multnomah County

Nancy Nye, Senior Manager for Arts, Culture and Events, City of Hillsboro

Raziah Roushan, Executive Director, Tualatin Valley Creates, Washington County

Robyn Williams, Executive Director, Portland's 5 Centers for the Arts, Metro

Consultant Team

Cultural Planning Group

Martin Cohen

Linda Flynn, Ph.D.

Marlena Reese McKnight, Ed.D.

David Plettner-Saunders

Metropolitan Group

Eric Block

Nicole Adams

LaShawn McCarthy Jr.

Michael Alexander, Ret., Urban League of Portland

Kathleen Holt, Holt Strategies

Funders

This effort would not be possible without support from the following generous funders:

City of Beaverton

City of Hillsboro

City of Portland

Clackamas County

Metro

The James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation

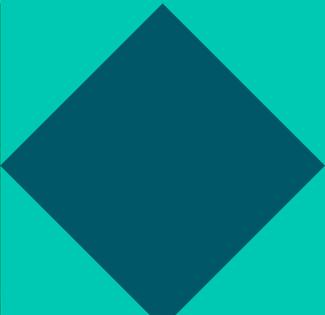
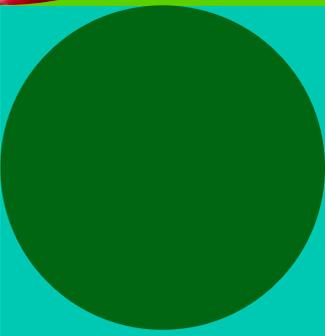
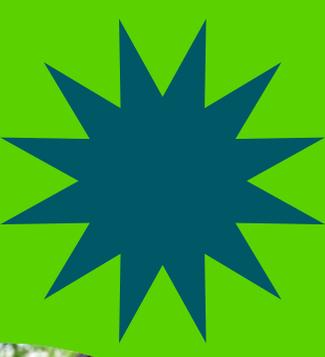
Multnomah County

Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District

Tualatin Valley Creates

Washington County





“My vision: arts are integrated into all aspects of life and community, not just in arts spaces. Funded by government, buy-in from small business and corporations.”

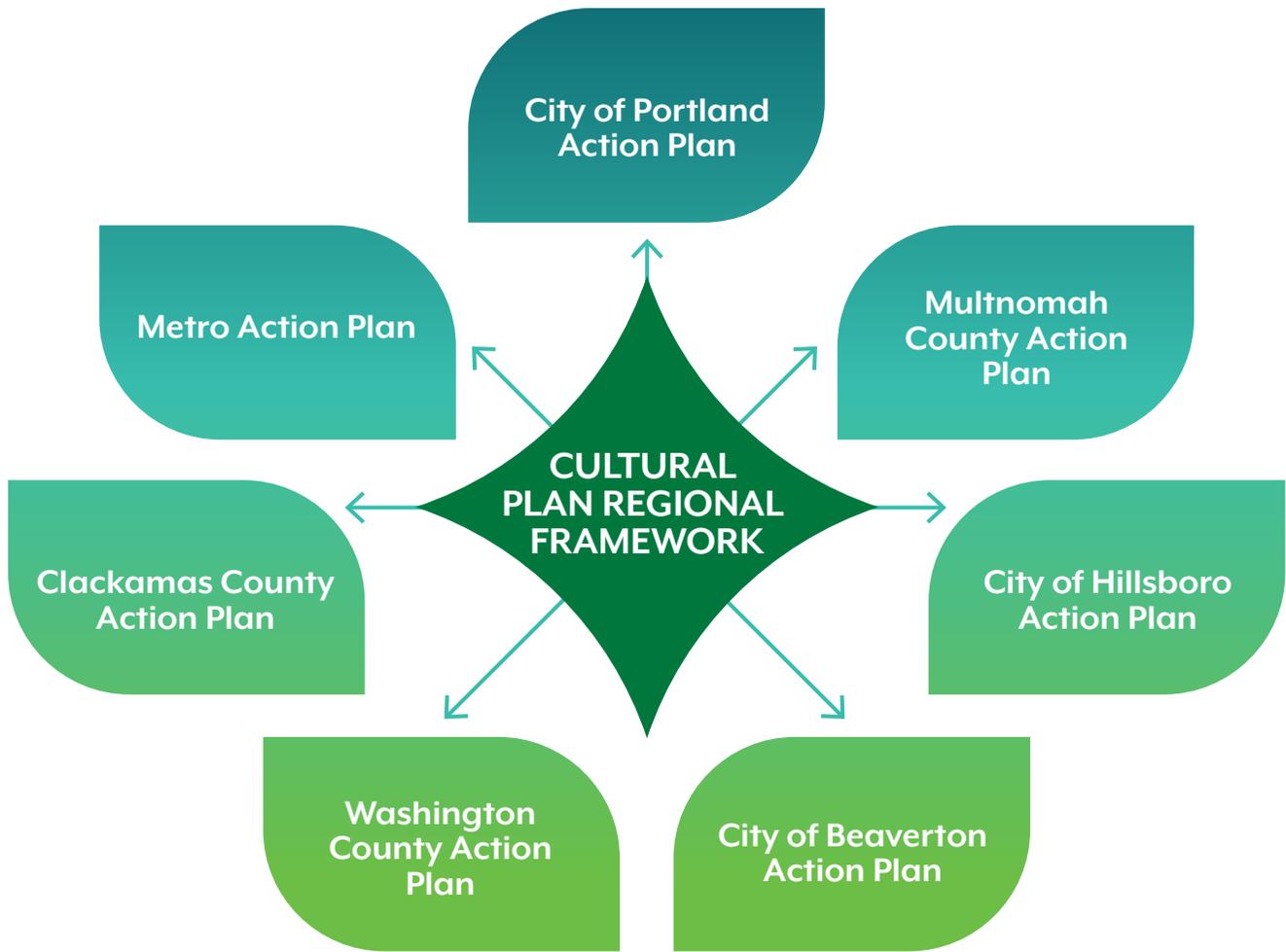
— Clackamas County Community Conversation Participant



ABOUT THIS PLAN

Our Creative Future is a regional framework to advance arts and culture throughout the tri-county Portland area. There are seven local governments currently participating and creating action plans based on the regional framework. Other cities, towns, communities, and individuals are invited to use the framework as a resource.

Regional Cultural Plan Framework



All communities have access to the framework to adapt to their community



Our Creative Future is a community-led vision for arts and culture in the tri-county region.

The expression of arts and culture around us is vital to what makes our region great. It gathers us as a community, gives us a new perspective on our neighbors, and helps heal and address our region's most critical issues. What was true in 2009 when the last regional plan was created is even more evident 15 years later. The arts are an integral part of our everyday lives.

This plan, Our Creative Future, is a regional framework that is positioned to realize the community's shared vision, and that every community may use to advance arts and culture for their residents.

From the murals that rose up during the social justice movement to the poetry and essays that were written to preserve this moment in history, we turned to art as an expression of beauty and pain. As our community navigated loneliness and isolation throughout the pandemic, the festivals and performances in our outdoor spaces brought us together safely. We are now turning to cultural events and creative businesses to revitalize our post-pandemic economy, and we are investing in arts-based programs to help individuals heal from the traumas of racism and homelessness.

All community members rely on our arts and culture system in big and small ways to make our home a joyful, vibrant, and resilient place to live. Our region's leaders partnered with community members to answer a central question: "What do we want our future cultural life to look like for the people who live here?"

During the planning process, the steering committee served as the community voice.

Together, we reached over 3,500 people across 50 listening sessions, 40+ interviews, and two regional surveys. We spoke with artists of all disciplines, culture bearers, creatives, arts and cultural nonprofits, creative businesses, donors, audience members, aspiring professionals, students, amateurs, and others who enjoy arts and culture in all forms.

What we heard was clear. Arts and culture are fundamental to the livability and health of each community. We see the work of artists, creatives, culture bearers, and cultural nonprofits as:

- Essential to the region's economic vitality
- Critical to promoting a sense of well-being and belonging
- Assisting with our most pressing community issues, such as homelessness, urban vitality, mental health, transportation, affordable housing, public safety, and more

It is clear that artists and cultural nonprofits make a tangible difference in people's lives while supporting government priorities. The arts and cultural community are part of the solution to create impact!

The community-based steering committee reviewed the connections and conversations and created a shared vision for arts and culture:

A tri-county region where every resident can access relevant and dynamic arts, culture, and creative experiences as an essential part of our lives.



The foundation of that vision is a healthy arts and cultural community supported by our governments, community leaders, artists, creatives, culture bearers, and each of you.

We are working with community and government partners to fully resource this plan and advance the community's vision. As part of this work, the steering committee created a set of shared goals with strategies to be tailored to each jurisdiction. Our goals are to:

- Build towards an inclusive arts and cultural community that reflects, serves, and welcomes all
- Forge purposeful connection and coordination within the arts and cultural community

- Empower the arts and cultural community with sufficient, sustainable funding and other resources
- Drive economic growth through the arts and cultural community
- Utilize the arts and cultural community as a vital partner in the health and development of every community

These goals and strategies will help us meet the needs of our local communities while providing powerful ways for us to partner as a region.

This work is a call to action for our local governments, community leaders, and the arts and cultural community to continue to work together to build a sustainable, vibrant future. Our Creative Future awaits!

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Ways to help implement this plan in addition to local government action:

ADVOCATE

- Participate in and support advocacy for funding, programs, and change in your community.
- Participate in and support advocacy for implementation of the recommendations of this plan.

PARTICIPATE

- Participate in directories, information sharing, networks, calendars, and joint marketing.
- Attend community convenings and stay connected.

LEAD

- Take a community leadership role—serving on a committee, board, commission, or advocacy group, or running for office.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIES AND TOWNS

Ways to advance arts and culture in your community:

- Choose among the plan's recommendations and take action on something important in your community.
- Reach out to the network of local arts agencies for information and assistance. Consider joining that network.





“[Our community] wants more diverse cultural activities. We lack the resources and person power to do the events. There is no public space, for example, to do youth ceramic classes and other spaces. We need a larger space for a variety of artists.”

— Mayor of Smaller Washington County City

VISION STATEMENT

The community's definition of future success for arts and culture, based on community engagement and formulated by the Steering Committee

We envision a tri-county region where all of us have access to relevant and dynamic arts, culture, and creative experiences as an essential part of our lives.

In support of this vision, we commit to:

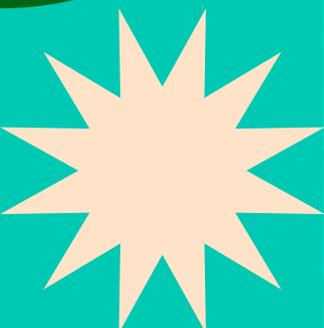
- Diversity in arts, culture, and creativity:** Uplift and support a wide range of artistic, cultural, and creative practices, disciplines, and activities from diverse artists, creators, organizations, groups, and businesses.
- Financial and resource investment:** Funding, resources, and economic policies are abundant, diverse, easily accessible, and sustainable.
- Access for all communities:** Every person and community is able to participate in relevant arts, culture, and creative expressions, inclusive of diverse geographies, socioeconomics, identities, and abilities.
- Strong and supportive relationships:** Artists, culture bearers, and creatives—as well as funders, supporters, and partners—will communicate, collaborate, promote, and support each other.
- Resilient communities:** The expression of diverse arts, culture, and creative practices encourages understanding, healing, and relationships between people and groups of different geographies, socioeconomics, identities, and abilities.





“I want the arts scene in Washington County, and Beaverton specifically, to be more representative of the demographics of the community, and for the arts to be more interwoven into daily commerce.”

— Community Survey Respondent



THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Project Management Team (“PMT,” representatives from local governments and RACC) and Steering Committee (community members nominated by the PMT) launched a process in the fall of 2022 to identify priority stakeholders, communities for engagement, and areas of inquiry.

Overarching Goals

1. Engage with members of diverse communities in the region
2. Co-create an inclusive approach to engagement that serves the needs of the region and that is flexible and responsive
3. Create and disseminate compelling communications that spur interest, involvement, and transparency

Convenings for community engagement occurred from November 2022 through June 2023, with regular meetings to identify and address any gaps. The Steering Committee and PMT members actively assisted in arranging, and in some cases led, discussion sessions.

What We Asked

1. Where are the opportunities for this plan to help your community thrive?
2. In thinking about the future of this region, what do you want to be different from today? What is working? What is not working?
3. What are the top 2–3 priorities you would want the plan to address/accomplish?
4. What is the definition of success for this plan?



Community Engagement

The team adopted an engagement commitment for the planning process. This commitment was revisited in every Steering Committee meeting and planning session.

Our Engagement Commitment

We will center our thinking of transformation around meaningful community engagement and exploration.

We commit to work that serves the diverse needs of BIPOC and underrecognized communities.

We will listen for community voices and stories.

Our approach is rooted in respect and driven by equitable principles.

Engagement Sessions

Adults Who are Recently Houseless
 African American/Black Artists and Creatives
 Artists and Creatives
 Arts and Cultural Organizations #1
 Arts and Cultural Organizations #2
 Asian American Listening Session
 Beaverton City Councilors
 Beaverton Diversity Advisory Board & Arts Commission Members
 BIPOC Tri-county Community Conversation #1
 BIPOC Tri-county Community Conversation #2
 Clackamas County Arts and Cultural Organizations
 Clackamas County Community Conversation
 Contemporary Arts #1
 Contemporary Arts #2
 Corporate Arts Funders
 County Cultural Coalitions
 Creative Economy, Economic Development, Tourism & Travel

Dance Community Discussion Group
 East Multnomah/East Portland Community Conversation
 Estacada Community Conversation
 Events Action Table
 Film & Media Community
 Foster Program Young Adults
 Foundation Arts Funders #1
 Foundation Arts Funders #2
 Immigrant & Refugee Artists
 Indigenous Arts and Cultural Community
 Large Arts Institutions
 Latino Community Conversation
 Music Community
 Open Virtual Artists and Creatives
 Open Virtual Arts and Cultural Organizations
 Open Virtual Community Conversation
 Queer Artists of Color
 Student Artists
 Tri-county Libraries
 Tri-county Teaching Artists
 Urban League Seniors Center
 Washington County Business & Chambers
 Washington County City Managers Network
 Washington County Community Conversation #1
 Washington County Community Conversation #2
 Washington County Community Event Organizers/
 Tourism Leaders
 Washington County Mayors Network
 Westside Architecture/Real Estate Development
 Westside Arts and Cultural Organizations
 Westside Electeds/Government
 Westside Mayors
 Westside Neighborhood Association & Community Planning Organization Chairs
 Youth Discussion
Plus approximately 40 key person interviews, presentations and discussions

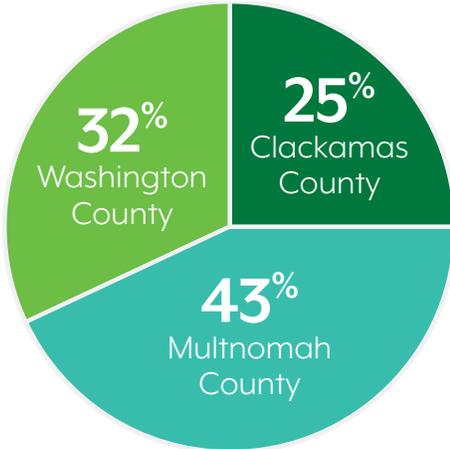


Complementary Research

All research reports are available on the [Our Creative Future website](#).

Statistically Valid Public Opinion Survey

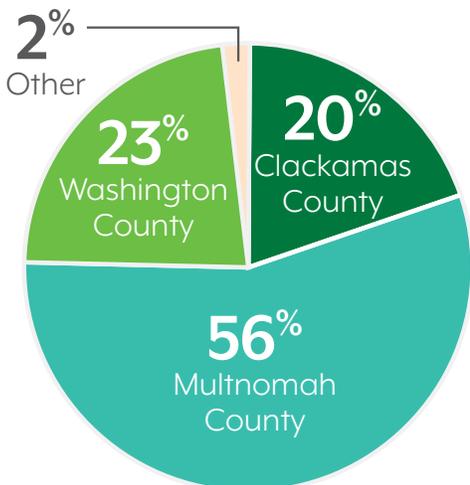
705 completed



Base sample of $n=603$ residents, with an oversample of an additional $n=102$ people of color; overall credibility interval of $\pm 3\%$

Open Call Community Survey

1,479 completed



Survey was open to all and distributed through individual emails, mailing lists, and social media platforms. Requests include the forwarding of the survey to other channels and individuals.

Open community survey respondents are significantly more connected to the arts and creative sector than respondents of the statistically valid survey

Arts Grantmaking Review and Summary

Analysis of grant data for a five-year period from the nine largest public and private arts funders in the tri-county region

Arts Funding Models Report

A scan of a range of approaches to arts funding across the United States, with potential lessons for the tri-county region

Arts Demand Study

Assessment of the amount, demographics, and location of arts activity among the tri-county population

Creative Economy Portrait

A portrait of the creative industries and employment in the tri-county region

“We want to integrate and infuse all cultures in arts opportunities across our county and beyond. We want to share and build on our experiences.”

— Community Survey Respondent



WHAT WE LEARNED

Community engagement and other research conducted for Our Creative Future elicited clear messages across the three counties. Many of these messages echo findings from the past two cultural plans in 1992 and 2009, underscoring the imperative to act on continuing needs and opportunities.

1. Throughout the region, residents highly value arts and culture for themselves and their communities. About two-thirds participate actively. They prioritize equity, accessibility, inclusion, and funding for arts and culture.

Note: all survey figures cited are from the statistically valid survey.

- **Residents across all three counties support government spending on arts and culture even among those who participate less often in arts activities.** 80% somewhat or strongly support an increase in dedicated government funding. Consistently, within each county, we see high levels of support community-wide, across all levels of participation in the arts.
- **Residents want the cultural plan to prioritize equitable access to arts opportunities, support for artists and arts and cultural organizations, sharing cultural experiences through inclusive events, and dedicated funding for the arts.** This is true in each of the three counties and across different population groups—people of color, artists, and low-income residents.
- **Participants in the planning process want to see more equitable support for BIPOC, queer, and immigrant artists through recognition of their contributions, inclusion in decision making and partnerships, and funding.**
- **Residents believe arts and culture are vital to the community, the economy, and their families, although this is not reflected in government spending in the arts.**
- **They actively participate in arts and culture.** 74% have participated at least once in the past six months and 64% at least three times a year.
- **They generally like the quality of what's offered.** 71% rate offerings in their community as excellent or good.
- **They face barriers to arts participation.** The primary barriers are cost, lack of awareness of opportunities, and inconvenient schedules and locations. Underrecognized communities often face greater barriers to accessing arts and culture for themselves and their children.
- **Most have a personal creative practice.** 62% describe themselves as artists, craftspersons, or creative workers. Two-thirds of this group do art as a hobby or leisure activity.



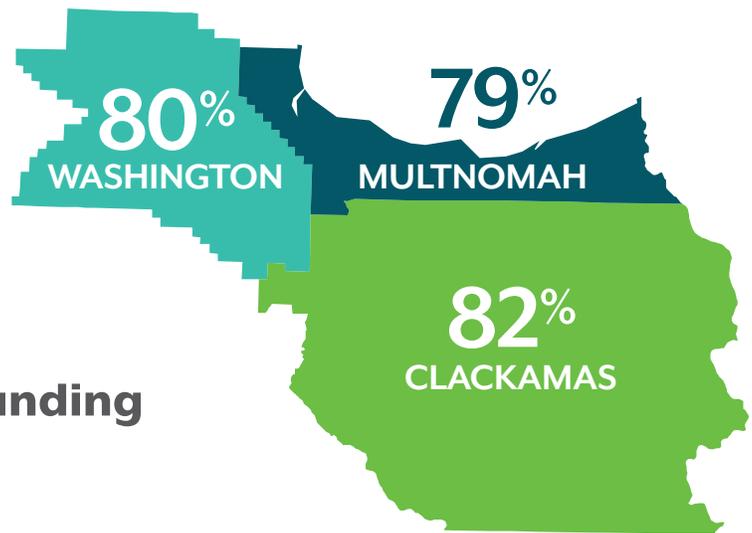
- **It's important to provide support for culturally relevant offerings for communities.** Echoing familiar patterns of arts attendance, people who participate less in mainstream arts activities are more likely to have lower incomes and educational levels and speak a language other than English at home. This underscores the need to first direct funding to artists and organizations in these communities. It also highlights the need to be inclusive, provide culturally relevant offerings, and address barriers in a thoughtful and nuanced manner.
- **There is a critical need for new messaging about the value of the arts.** Despite strong measures of community support, the arts and culture community and its funders believe education is needed about the role and value of the arts. They recommend a communitywide campaign to promote arts and culture throughout the region and galvanize public will for greater support.

Across the region,

80%

of tri-county residents

support dedicated arts funding



PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

Most residents agree that artistic, cultural, and creative communities are beneficial to themselves, their families, and their local communities.

"Having opportunities to enjoy the arts and creative learning is essential to me and my family."



TRI-COUNTY RESIDENTS:

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree

"Our arts, cultural, and creative communities help fuel creativity and innovation crucial for our economy."

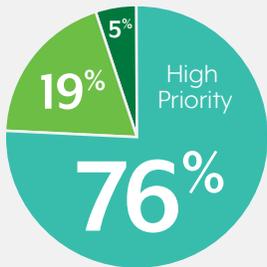


74% of tri-county residents have participated in at least one arts/cultural event in the past six months.

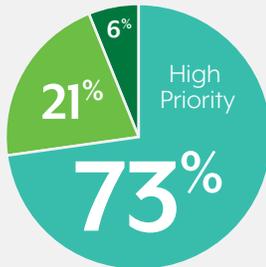
RESIDENTS' PRIORITIES

for Arts and Culture

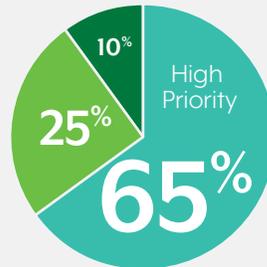
High Priority Lower Priority Not a Priority



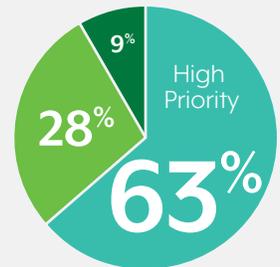
Making the arts and creative opportunities more accessible to everyone



Ensuring all communities have equitable access to creative activities and opportunities



Providing more inclusive events for all residents to share cultural experiences



Providing dedicated funding for the arts

Q17. The tri-county arts and cultural plan is intended to enhance the quality of life for residents. Thinking about long-term priorities the plan should focus on, please rate the following.



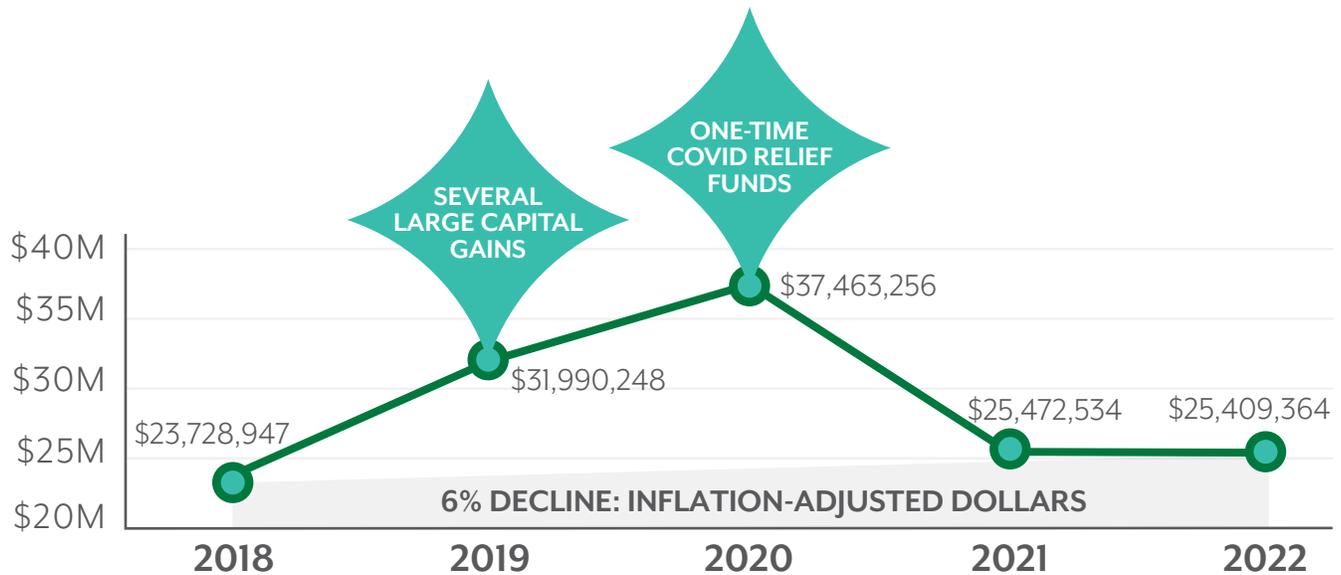
2. The arts and cultural community faces multiple and worsening challenges, and the reputation of our tri-county region as a creative hub and desirable place to live has diminished.

- **There is a crisis in affordability.** Costs of living and working space and of doing business have risen significantly.
- **There is a shortage of arts spaces.** Existing spaces are often not known, too expensive, unsuitable, or unavailable. Currently, there is no inventory of available spaces in the region. Few new spaces are being developed, and there is a perception that there are regulatory barriers to facility/space development. There is a need for all types of arts-focused spaces: performance, exhibition, rehearsal, education, studio, retail, live-work, office, production, and maker spaces.
- **Urban problems and changing audience behaviors are discouraging arts participation.** These include increased reluctance to come downtown, concerns about safety, changing and less predictable audience preferences, homelessness, and other urban conditions.
- **Individual artists and creatives face significant challenges with affordable housing and space.** These include spaces across the board to make, exhibit, perform, and sell their work. Artists are moving out of the city and the area due to financial challenges.
- **There are ongoing inequities in resources available to artists, nonprofits, and creative businesses in BIPOC and other underrecognized communities.** The majority of arts grants now go to a small number of large-budget organizations. Individual artists and smaller-budget organizations face barriers in accessing available resources, yet they often are a direct way to benefit diverse communities.
- **Thirty years of plans and studies have documented how arts and culture has been underresourced.** Conditions are now worsened by overall economic and societal factors. Total arts grants have declined by 6% over the past five years in inflation-adjusted dollars, while costs have risen by 13% during that period.
- **The arts and cultural community needs specific supports.** More than additional funding is needed to better enable the power of the arts to benefit communities. Nonprofits, artists, and creatives seek greater connections, networking, services, work opportunities, respect, partnership, leadership, advocacy, and other supports. Despite challenges, they are already doing the work and lack the infrastructure to amplify their impact.



FIVE-YEAR OVERVIEW—TOTAL ARTS AND CULTURE GRANTS

Covers grants to nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and individual artists by the nine largest public and private arts funders in the Portland tri-county region.



3. Arts and culture play multiple roles benefiting our communities.

- **People recognize that arts and culture reflect and promote equity** in our communities and are a powerful tool to bring people together, bridging differences.
- **Beyond arts appreciation, people recognize and value the role of arts and culture in non-arts areas of community life**—education, social services, health care, downtown vibrancy, affordable housing, transportation, public safety, and many more.
- **There is a desire to invest more in arts and culture as an instrument of civic life.** There can be many more opportunities for artists to work in local government and bring creative approaches to mental health, houselessness, fostering youth, placemaking, civic dialogue, and other endeavors. The arts and culture community places a strong value on service to the community.

4. Arts and culture drive growth in the region's economy and generate a high rate of return on public investment. There are multiple opportunities for targeted investment and further growth.

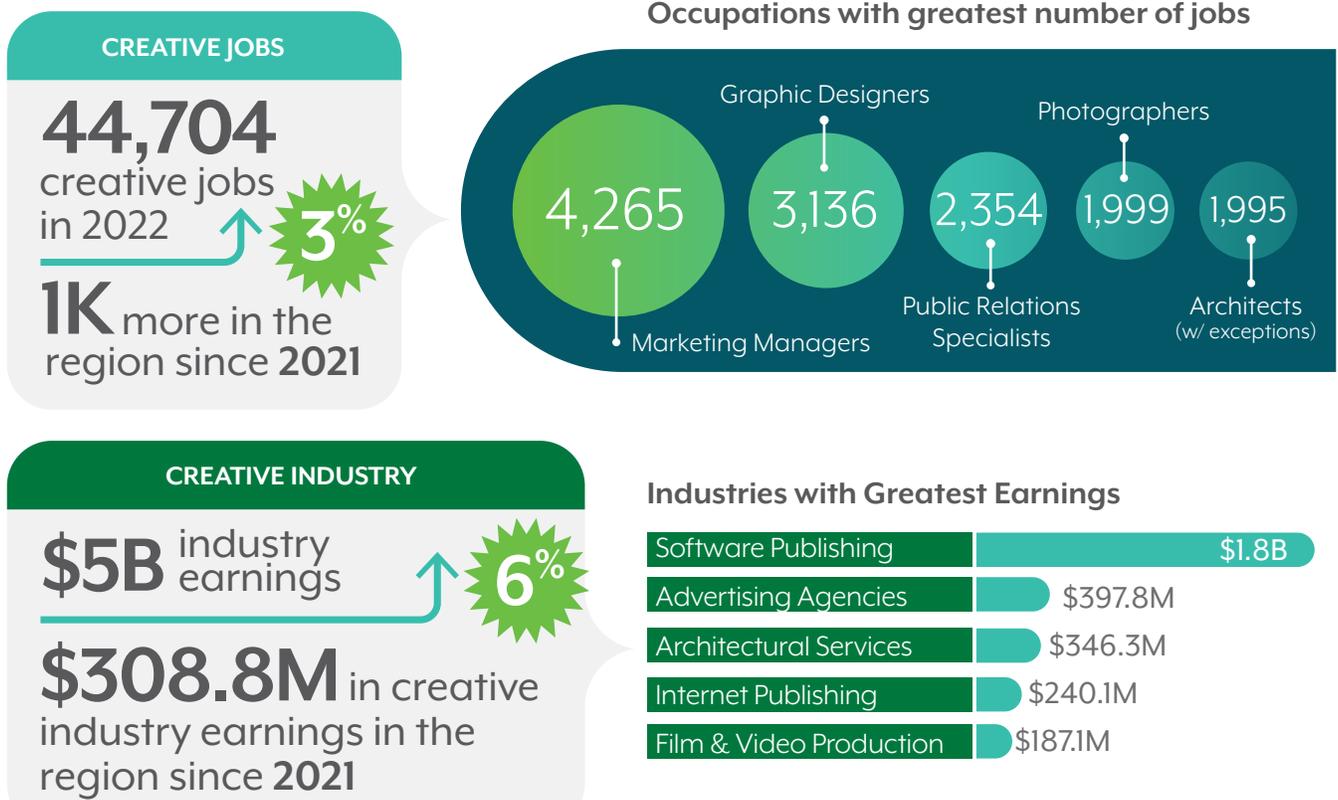
- **The tri-county creative economy generated total 2022 earnings of \$5 billion** and supported nearly 45,000 full-time jobs in industries including software, advertising, architecture, internet publishing, and film and video production.
- **Total creative economy earnings grew 18% between 2020 and 2022.** Total employment grew by 10% in the same time period.
- **Our nonprofit arts and culture generated \$459 million in economic impact in 2022,** despite challenges and while transitioning out of the pandemic. This supported about 6,900 full-time jobs.
- **Our nonprofit arts and culture generated \$10.5 million** in city and county taxes in 2022 and served a total audience of about 5.2 million people.
- **Investing strategically in arts and culture can drive growth and increase vibrancy.** There are successful local examples of economic development supports in arts and culture that point the way—financial investments, permit assistance, convenings, and partnerships in subsectors such as music, film/media, and events.



IN 2022, OUR NONPROFIT ARTS AND CULTURE GENERATED...

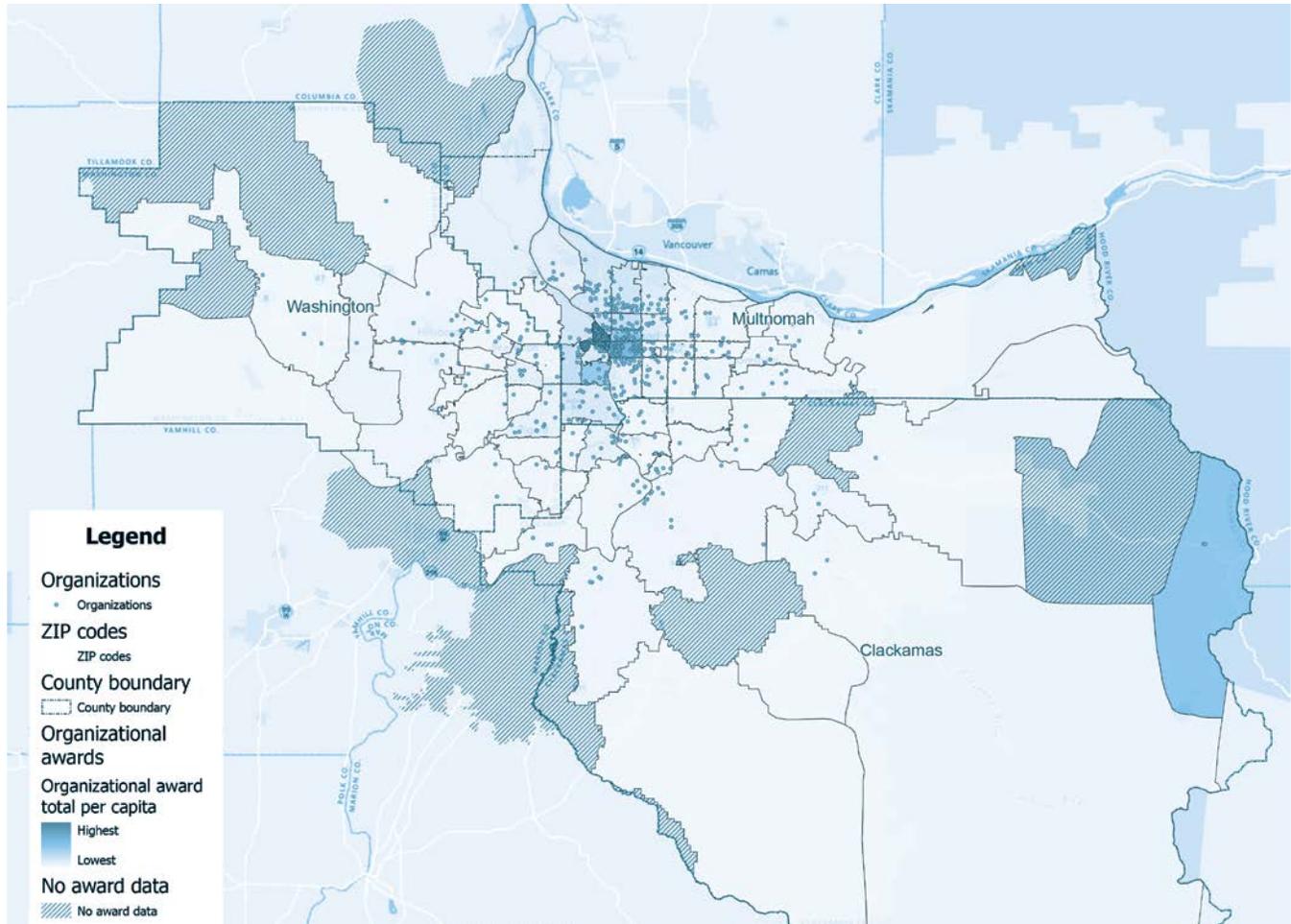


IN 2022, OUR FULL CREATIVE ECONOMY, INCLUDING BOTH NON-PROFIT AND FOR-PROFIT CREATIVE BUSINESSES, GENERATED:



Opportunities for Investment in Smaller Cities and Unincorporated Areas of the Region

Organizational Grants

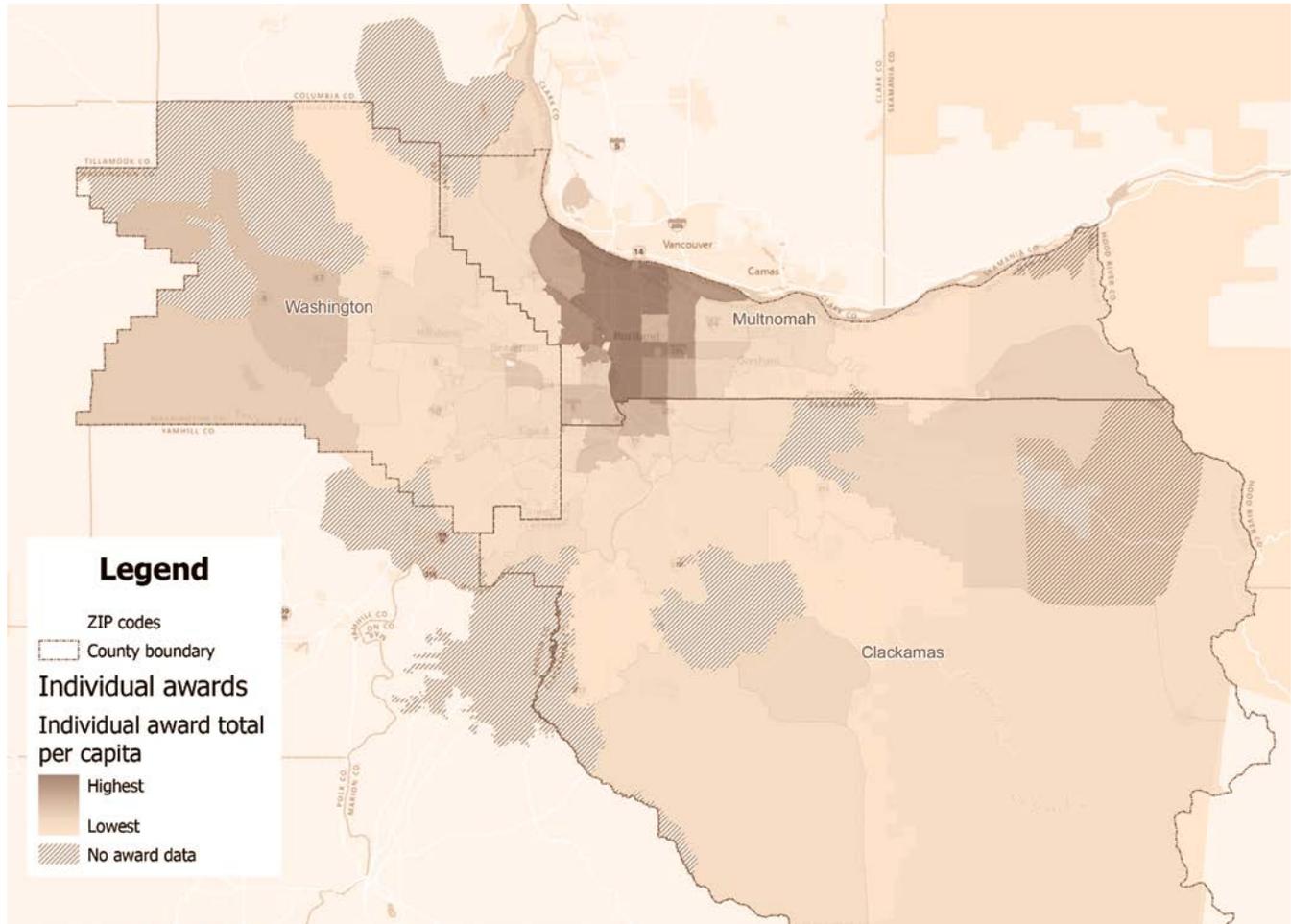


This map shows the concentration of nonprofit arts grantees* in Portland and nearby urban areas. It also illustrates the opportunity to target investment in the smaller cities and unincorporated areas of the region. This aligns with the needs assessment and vision of Our Creative Future. It is important to note that the data shows the location of the grantee but not necessarily the programs funded, so some services to smaller communities and geographic areas may not be fully represented.

**All nonprofit arts and cultural organizations receiving grants from the nine largest public and private arts funders in the tri-county region between 2018 and 2022. The funders were: Collins Foundation, Lamfrom Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, Miller Foundation, Murdock Trust, Oregon Arts Commission, Oregon Community Foundation, Oregon Cultural Trust, and RACC.*

[Link to Arts Grants Review](#)

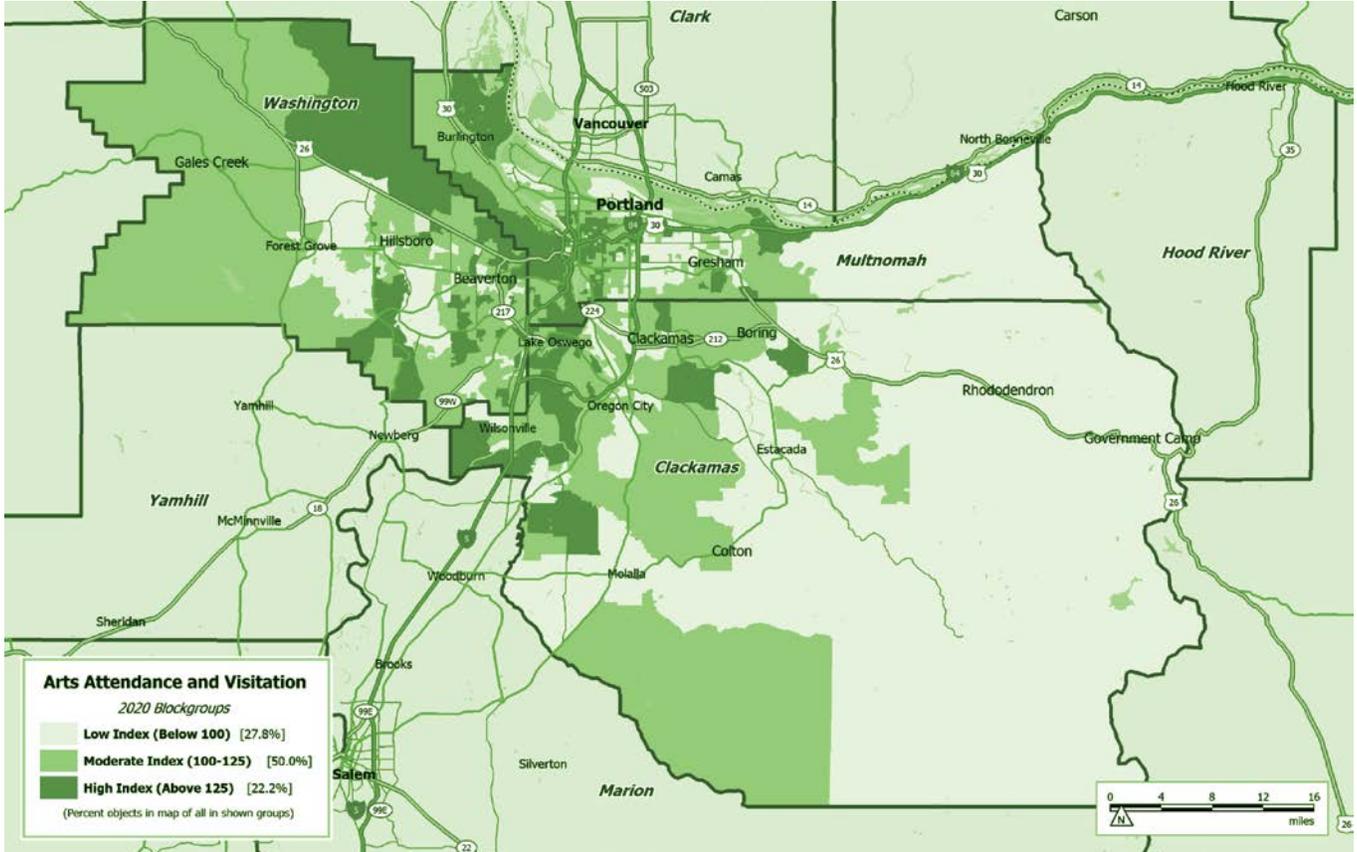
Individual Grants



This map shows the concentration of grant awards to individual artists during the five-year period of 2018 to 2022. Awardees are found throughout the region but are concentrated in and near Portland. The review of arts grants in the region, also found that only about 2% of total grant dollars went to individuals. Our Creative Future recommends increasing and broadening support for individuals as way to better and more directly serve the community.

[Link to Arts Grants Review](#)

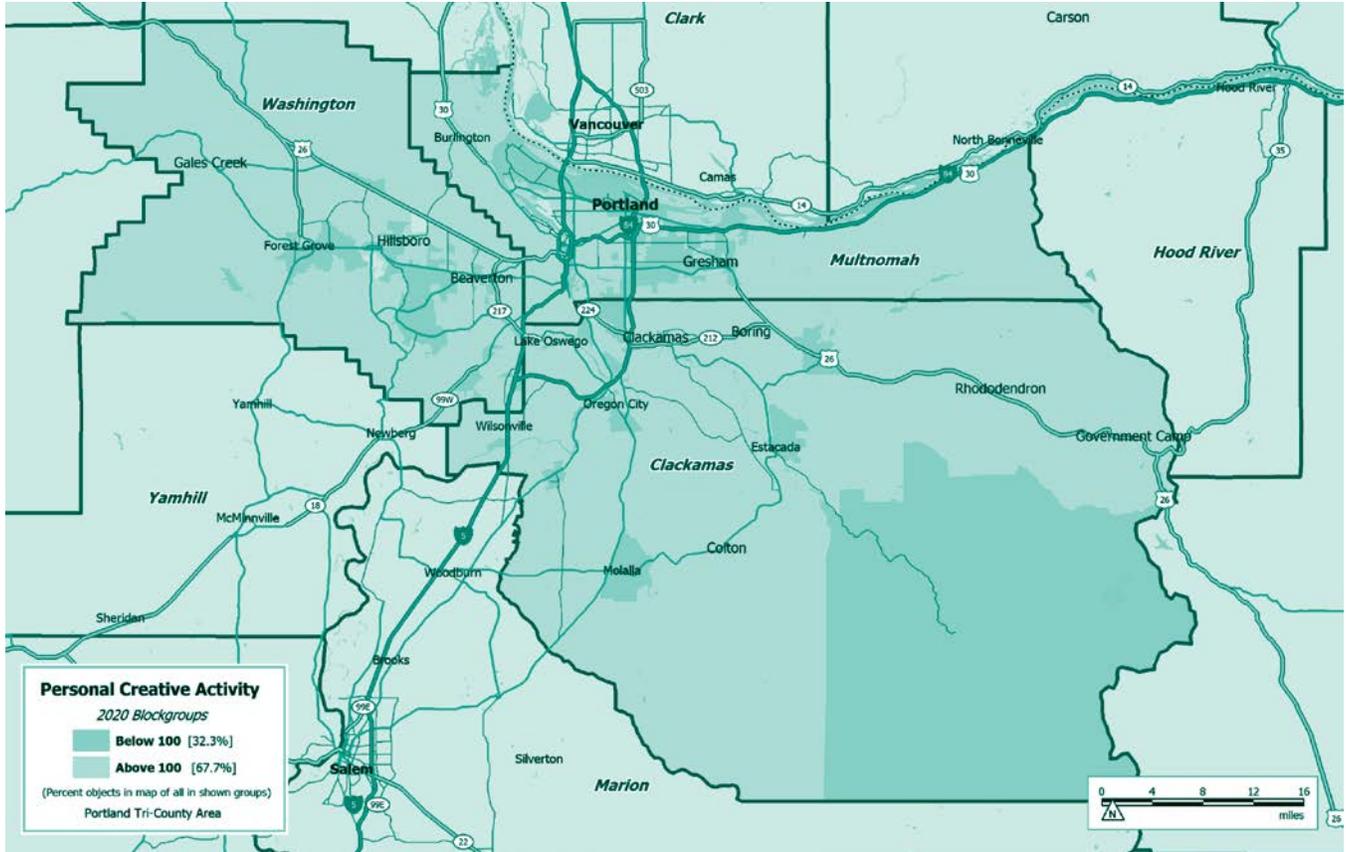
Arts Attendance



This map shows concentrations of arts attendance in the tri-county region. Almost three-quarters of the population (71%) are concentrated in areas with high or moderate demand for arts activities, such as visiting art galleries or museums, live music, and live theater. 29% of the population shows low demand, although this measure often indicates that these households have less access to the arts and/or are participating in other ways. As with the map of Organizational Grants above, this demand map illustrates the opportunity to target investment in the smaller cities and unincorporated areas of the region.

[Link to Arts Demand Study](#)

Personal Creativity



This map shows areas of above-average participation in personal creative activities, such as playing a musical instrument, drawing, dancing, and crafting. The region clearly has an active culture of informal or amateur personal creativity, found throughout the three counties. This illustrates the opportunity to support and celebrate amateur creativity and, as with the other maps above, to target support in the smaller cities and unincorporated areas of the region.

[Link to Arts Demand Study](#)

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

The Steering Committee developed working definitions of equity, diversity, and inclusion to guide our work in advancing arts and culture in the region. As overarching principles for all plan goals and strategies, they are working definitions to reflect the evolving nature of these ideas. These statements were adapted from materials developed by Americans for the Arts.

Equity: The principle of equity acknowledges that there are populations that have been and are systemically underrecognized and underserved, and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups. Equity is the guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement in the systems, protocols, practices, and policies that allow everyone to be treated fairly, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.

Diversity: The practice or quality of including or involving people of different backgrounds, ensuring representation of all community groups and racial identities. These differences can be defined as race, ethnicity, age, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, mental or physical abilities, nationality, language, religious beliefs, socioeconomic background and status, learning style, and education, among other areas of identity.

Inclusion: The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate and bring their full, authentic selves. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in the words and actions of all people. This can manifest in the intentional integration of diverse voices and perspectives within organizational and community conversations. Inclusion is closely tied to a sense of belonging for all members of the group.



GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The following five goals describe what we want to see change and improve through plan implementation. Each goal includes vision language to clarify and amplify the meaning. The strategies describe how we will make progress towards each goal. Strategies have sample actions that can be adopted and customized by local governments, funders, and other partners.

Goal one: Build towards an inclusive arts and cultural community that reflects, serves, and welcomes all.

All communities and people are valued members of the region's arts and culture community and share in its cultural richness. BIPOC, immigrants, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, and people in every town and every city across the three counties are supported as contributors to our collective regional culture.

Strategies and Actions

- 1.1 Provide specific and accessible support—funding and other resources—for the arts and culture of people who are BIPOC, immigrants, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, the unhoused, neurodiverse, seniors, opportunity youth, and their community-based organizations.
 - 1.1.1 Reevaluate and reprioritize funding programs to address funding inequities in the region, including for diverse and smaller-budget organizations, individual artists, and community-based organizations serving underrecognized communities.
- 1.2 Provide increased support for programs in libraries, parks, and other community settings for underrecognized populations and communities.
 - 1.2.1 Create a regional resource hub connecting artists and arts and cultural organizations with libraries and parks. Opportunities include convening, assistance with engagement and accessibility, coordination, connections with artists in communities of color, program funding, artist residencies, and technical assistance.
 - 1.2.2 Expand the existing My Discovery Pass program (Multnomah County Library's free admissions partnership program).
 - 1.2.3 Utilize tools such as the Metro Equity Focus Areas map to identify communities of concern (Metro's maps identify communities with concentrations of people of color, people with limited English proficiency, or people with low income).
- 1.3 Provide support services for cities throughout the region to develop their local arts and culture.
 - 1.3.1 Develop toolkits for replicable programs, such as public art, equity policies and practices, funding, community festivals and events, and grantmaking.



- 1.3.2 Assist and encourage cities to increase funding and other resources for arts and culture.
- 1.4 Provide support services for programs, artists, groups, and venues in smaller cities and unincorporated areas throughout the counties.**
- 1.4.1 Make intentional efforts to provide increased funding and other resources to these people and places and to include them in regional initiatives, such as leadership and advocacy.
- 1.5 Address barriers to facility and space use, such as fees, transportation, parking, and availability of food. See also 3.3, affordable space program, below.**
- 1.5.1 The regional network of local arts agencies recommended in 2.5 can assess these barriers, formulate policies, and support local initiatives to increase the accessibility of facilities and spaces.
- 1.6 Create a racial and cultural equity fund for BIPOC organizations and other organizations serving underrecognized populations through arts and culture (e.g., houseless, opportunity youth, people with disabilities), creating a pathway to organizational growth and sustainability.**
- 1.6.1 Consider a collaborative public/private fund for this purpose.
- 1.6.2 Incorporate both funding and technical assistance to support sustainable organizational development.
- 1.7 Provide support and best practices for cities and counties to develop local arts agencies and cultural equity offices.**
- 1.7.1 The regional network of local arts agencies recommended in 2.5 can coordinate and support this work.
- 1.8 Improve and fund accessibility to arts and culture programs, venues, and opportunities for people with disabilities in a comprehensive manner.**
- 1.8.1 Engage leadership in the disability community to identify issues and needed responses.
- 1.9 Continue and expand support for K–12 arts education and creative youth development.**
- 1.9.1 Encourage and support arts education as part of well-rounded education as called for by the Every Student Succeeds Act, including standards-aligned instruction through arts as curriculum, arts integration, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math), and arts exposure.
- 1.9.2 Encourage and support arts education across the arts disciplines: visual arts, music, dance, theater, and media arts.
- 1.9.3 Advocate at the state level for fully funding schools at levels that allow for arts education to be an integral part of each student’s schooling, kindergarten through 12th grade.
- 1.9.4 Encourage the inclusion of arts education within STEM programs (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) becoming STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math).
- 1.9.5 Create a regional service organization for arts education, building on recent efforts to serve the field. Opportunities include convening, networking, leadership, and advocacy.



- 1.9.6 Recognize and support the field of creative youth development and its work integrating arts education with youth development, and engaging young people as active agents in their own change.

1.10 Continue and expand support for public art programs in cities and counties in the region.

- 1.10.1 Develop and expand public art requirements and programs in cities and counties (see 1.3.1, toolkits for public art, above).
- 1.10.2 Support and facilitate community-initiated public art projects.
- 1.10.3 Provide professional development and specific commissioning opportunities for emerging/aspiring public artists.

1.11 Develop enhanced and inclusive leadership in the arts and culture community.

- 1.11.1 Develop civic leadership training and placement for artists, culture bearers, and creatives.
- 1.11.2 Invest in youth leadership development in the arts and culture community.
- 1.11.3 Invest in professional and leadership development for diverse arts administrators.
- 1.11.4 Convene biannual meetings of an implementation committee for Our Creative Future to report on progress, navigate changed circumstances, and leverage new opportunities.

Goal two: Forge purposeful connection and coordination within the arts and cultural community.

Arts and cultural community members are well-connected and working together as appropriate. They also recognize and express their interconnections, as both independent and interdependent (relying on one another) pieces of a regional arts and cultural community.

Strategies and Actions

2.1 View the arts and cultural community as inclusive and mutually supportive, with intentional efforts to include artists, culture bearers, artisans, nonprofits, commercial arts, and others.

- 2.1.1 Sustain a consistent message of inclusion—the regional arts and culture community as a “big tent”—throughout communitywide communications and initiatives for arts and culture.

2.1.2 Hold regular convenings of arts and cultural stakeholders among and across subsectors.

2.1.3 Hold regular regional conferences to report on progress in implementing Our Creative Future and reassess opportunities and challenges.

2.2 Broaden the efforts of funding, support services, and advocacy to include individual creatives and small businesses working in the commercial or quasi-commercial arts.

2.2.1 Realign eligibility for funding and other resources to address the needs of individual creatives—musicians, filmmakers, etc.—and small creative businesses working in the commercial or quasi-commercial arts.

2.3 Advocate for effective public policy and action in support of the work of the arts and cultural community.



- 2.3.1 Create or enhance a regional advocacy organization and network for arts and culture. Build on existing organizations and leaders already working in this space.

2.4 Build comprehensive public awareness and understanding of arts and culture in the region.

- 2.4.1 Develop a regional public will campaign to increase comprehensive awareness and valuing of arts and culture among all residents and workers in the region.

2.5 Develop a network of local arts agencies (e.g., Portland’s City Arts Program, county arts programs, city arts programs, county Cultural Coalitions, RACC) to replace the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) and strengthen regional arts leadership.

- 2.5.1 Convene leaders from the local arts agencies to define and form the focus and structure of a network.
- 2.5.2 Form relationships and explore collaborations with additional arts and cultural agencies, such as Oregon Arts Commission and Oregon Cultural Trust.
- 2.5.3 Deepen existing relationships and explore collaborations with potential partners such as Indigenous Tribes, Travel Oregon, Oregon Heritage, Oregon Historical Society, Oregon Main Street, and other cultural agencies.

2.6 Promote information and resource sharing and networking within the arts and culture community. See also convenings, 2.1.2.

- 2.6.1 Develop an online directory for the arts and culture community—a “hub” of available resources—building on available information and directories.

- 2.6.2 Develop an enhanced regional arts marketing program, building on and coordinating existing calendars and marketing efforts, such as Travel Portland and Oregon Arts Watch.

- 2.6.3 Encourage and support collaborations of larger and smaller organizations for mentorship, audience sharing/building, shared facility use, etc.

- 2.6.4 Develop a collaborative initiative to address the changing audience behaviors in the performing arts. See 3.8 below.

- 2.6.5 Identify and address the potential for shared spaces/facilities as part of the affordable space initiative recommended in 3.3.



Goal three: Empower the arts and cultural community with sufficient, sustainable funding and other resources.

The arts and cultural community is robustly supported through significantly increased levels of funding, affordable space, arts-friendly policies, and more, sufficient to enable the full power of arts and culture in communities throughout the region.

Strategies and Actions

- 3.1 Significantly increase funding across the region for nonprofit organizations, individual artists/creatives, and small commercial arts enterprises.**
- 3.1.1 This can include updating the Portland Arts Tax; creating a regional Metro revenue source; creating new local county and city tax initiatives; and/or increased county/city allocations. Prioritize funding for artists and arts and cultural organizations and programs. See additional detail in the Funding section.
 - 3.1.2 Develop one or more campaigns for new and/or dedicated public funding for arts and culture.
 - 3.1.3 Make specific efforts to expand funding available to individual artists and unincorporated groups, redressing the imbalance and lack of such funding and acknowledging the direct benefit of funding artists. Increase eligibility of individuals and unincorporated groups for grants programs, and streamline application and reporting requirements to improve accessibility.
 - 3.1.4 Consider optional sources outlined in the Funding section.
- 3.2 Provide support services for artists and their networks, such as funding, networking, professional development/training, and mentoring.**
- 3.2.1 Provide professional development and mentoring opportunities for BIPOC and other underrecognized groups, including making existing training, information, and services more accessible. Invest in current organizations and programs working in this space. See also 2.6 above.
- 3.3 Develop a comprehensive affordable space program, including elements such as a directory, rent subsidy, facilitation of space projects, technical assistance, matching capital grants, identification of opportunities, and support for increased accessibility. Identify opportunities to use empty commercial spaces.**
- 3.3.1 Consider a public/private funder collaborative to provide resources and leadership for this program.
 - 3.3.2 Develop a cultural facilities comprehensive plan to identify specific facility needs, gaps in available spaces, and options for solutions.
- 3.4 Align arts funding policies with best practices in equity and accessibility.**
- 3.4.1 Build on the successful examples of funders that have been implementing best practices.
 - 3.4.2 Create an inclusive leadership task force to research and identify best practices in arts funding, including data collection to track change and success.



3.5 Convene an active cohort of foundation arts funders and corporate arts funders to encourage increased support and collaboration.

- 3.5.1 Build on the recent convenings of arts funders brought together as part of the cultural planning process by continuing to gather regularly.
- 3.5.2 Develop shared best practices in equity and accessibility for arts funding.
- 3.5.3 Explore new interconnections between artists and corporations, such as artist residencies and other arts/business partnerships.

3.6 Explore rebuilding the existing United Arts Fund (an annual United Way-style fundraising campaign), reinvigorating the workplace giving program and providing recognition and support for individual donors. Restore corporate and foundation support for the fund.

- 3.6.1 Consider creation of a funding program allowing donors to connect to and fund specific artists and projects.

3.7 Acknowledge and support the strategic role of service organizations in achieving the goals of this plan, such as MusicPortland, Oregon Media Production Association (OMPA), Portland Events and Film Office, Arts Concierge, etc.

- 3.7.1 Provide funding and capacity building for service organizations.
- 3.7.2 Consider service organizations as intermediaries for funding programs serving the strategic needs of their fields.

- 3.7.3 Create a service organization for the arts education field, building on recent efforts to fill this need.

3.8 Promote creativity and the arts through a communitywide marketing and audience development program.

- 3.8.1 Create an inclusive, communitywide audience development initiative for the performing arts that addresses post-pandemic changes in the marketplace.
- 3.8.2 Expand public awareness of available arts and cultural offerings through an enhanced communitywide marketing program. Build on successful programs, such as Travel Portland and other aggregators.

3.9 Develop a systemic solution to the sustainability of Portland's and its users.

- 3.9.1 Acknowledge and address capital needs of the facilities, as well as rising operating and rental costs for both facility management and facility users. Build on existing studies and initiatives related to these challenges.
- 3.9.2 Consider the opportunities of collaborative action, such as 3.4.



Goal four: Drive economic growth through the arts and cultural community.

The arts and cultural community amplifies its role as a force for economic prosperity, job growth, entrepreneurship, revitalization, and quality of life for everyone.

Strategies and Actions

- 4.1 Provide economic development supports for the commercial arts sector, such as music, film, media, fashion, and design. Consult and partner with service organizations to identify and provide high-priority supports.**
- 4.1.1 Develop or make available support services, such as small business training, assistance, and loans. Tailor support services to the specific needs and barriers of the commercial arts sector.
 - 4.1.2 Explore tax and other incentives and grants programs for creative businesses and individual artists and creatives.
 - 4.1.3 Make intentional efforts to ensure that economic development supports are equitable and accessible.
- 4.2 Build markets for commercial arts sectors. Consult and partner with service organizations to identify specific opportunities to build markets.**
- 4.2.1 Assess opportunities to fill gaps and strengthen markets in the commercial arts sector.
 - 4.2.2 Invest in existing markets to promote growth and visibility, including farmers', artisan, international food, and other cultural markets.
 - 4.2.3 Reassess, streamline, and facilitate permitting for event production and other arts and cultural activities.
- 4.3 Invest in arts and culture as a tool to revitalize downtown Portland, city centers, town centers, Main Streets, cultural districts, and corridors.**
- 4.3.1 Partner with local arts and cultural organizations, artists and creative businesses to identify strategies and interventions.
- 4.4 Strengthen cooperation and coordination with tourism organizations to enhance cultural tourism.**
- 4.4.1 Convene tourism professionals in the region to identify opportunities and shared needs in relation to cultural tourism and marketing of the arts.
 - 4.4.2 Measure and report on the impact of arts in tourism.
 - 4.4.3 Build on and enhance Travel Portland and other marketing programs to improve the availability of information about arts and culture offerings.
 - 4.4.4 Explore and develop a cross-sector partnership between arts and culture and agritourism.
- 4.5 Integrate arts and culture into workforce development. Create pathways for employment in the arts and culture community.**
- 4.5.1 Partner with school districts, colleges, universities, and others to create internships and mentorships in arts and cultural organizations.



4.5.2 Identify and address the needs of the creative workforce, such as professional development, setting standards for fair pay, and mentorships/apprenticeships.

4.6 Expand documentation of economic impact and return on investment for arts and culture.

4.6.1 Establish annual or periodic measures of economic impact of the arts and make public reports to local government and the community. Build on successful efforts, such as Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 and Creative Vitality Suite.

4.7 Research and develop a creative economy strategic growth plan.

4.7.1 Assess and make the case for the creative economy in the region.

4.7.2 Articulate clear definitions of constituencies and growth goals for specific industries and occupations.

4.7.3 Align and intersect with other economic development agencies and plans.



Goal five: Utilize the arts and cultural community as a vital partner in the health and development of every community.

Arts and culture are recognized, valued, and supported as a partner in social services, health, healing, transportation, public safety, education, and other sectors.

Strategies and Actions

5.1 Local governments invest in arts and culture as a tool of their social service missions and other functions, such as health, transportation, housing, community engagement, public safety, etc. Consider arts and culture as part of solutions. Build on best practices of successful programs in other places.

- 5.1.1 Create artist residencies within city government. Artist residencies in this context refer to artists working within a city department or program to improve effectiveness through their creativity. This can include expanding Portland's Creative Laureate program.
- 5.1.2 Increase investment in artists and nonprofit arts and cultural organizations providing arts programming in social service settings, such as assisting houseless people, youth formerly in foster care, and immigrants.

5.2 Develop metrics and evaluations to demonstrate success in using arts and culture in municipal functions and to improve those efforts.

- 5.2.1 Build evaluation and data collection into programs, using arts and culture within municipal government.
- 5.2.2 Base success metrics on measures of community impact.
- 5.2.3 Convene a regional task force to define and promote shared metrics across the region.

5.3 Develop programs celebrating and supporting inclusive, amateur, community-based creativity throughout the region.

- 5.3.1 Increase support for showcases and celebrations of "everyday creativity" in local communities.

5.4 Explore and develop policies to require or incentivize public art within private real estate development. See 1.3 above. Build on the successful experience of public art programs in the region.

- 5.4.1 Consider the options to include commercial, industrial, residential, and affordable projects within the requirement or incentive program.



“A good cultural plan takes into consideration the needs of artists, arts organizations, students, families, seniors, and everybody else who already engaged with or makes art and those who don’t know what they want or need.”

— BIPOC Tri-county Community Conversations Participant



FUNDING FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

Options for the Tri-county Region

There is a well-documented need for additional funding for nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, individual artists, artist networks, quasi-commercial arts sectors (music, independent film/media, events), community-based organizations, and others. Additionally, throughout the engagement and research, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and immigrant artists identified a significant need for more equity in funding, including with being part of the decision making for funding distribution. This must be implemented with best practices in equitable funding, in line with Our Creative Future's equity, diversity, and inclusion definitions and vision (see page 30). Where can this funding be generated? There are a number of potential sources, many of which will require advocacy and political will.

- Metro:** Create a regional public funding source for arts and culture, fulfilling the original intention of the IGA. There are successful examples from around the U.S. profiled in the Arts Funding Models report, including the new Open Doors revenue program in King County, Washington.
- Metro:** Increase the existing allocation for arts and culture.
- City of Portland:** Update the existing Arts Tax to increase revenues, advance equity, redefine the allocations (e.g., more funds for organizations and individual artists), and improve its community reputation. While there are multiple options for modifying the Arts Tax, one consideration is to not disrupt the progress generated by more than a decade of consistent arts education funding for Portland's public schools.
- State of Oregon:** Enact state-enabling legislation modeled after the new State of Washington Cultural Access program, which allows cities and counties to enact sales or property taxes for arts and culture, with or without a voter initiative.
- Counties:** Increase existing allocations from general funds and other sources (Washington County uses general funds, while Clackamas County uses Transient Lodging Tax funds and economic development monies). Continue and expand support for county arts councils.
- Cities, towns, and rural areas:** Establish or expand existing allocations for arts and culture, appropriate to local needs and opportunities.
- Oregon Cultural Trust:** Support efforts to grow the Oregon Cultural Trust Fund and its annual collections and expand existing support for county Cultural Coalitions.
- Oregon Arts Commission:** Support efforts to expand the Arts Commission's annual budget and its role in supporting efforts to implement this plan.



- **Cities of Hillsboro and Beaverton:** Continue and expand existing support for arts programs for specific community needs. In Hillsboro, this may include support for the city’s existing cultural plan recommendations.
- **Foundations funding arts and culture:** Expand the coalition of foundation arts funders, building on the momentum of increased investments from the Miller Foundation and the Oregon Community Foundation.
- **Corporate arts and culture funders:** create a corporate arts funder collaboration, building on the convening held during development of Our Creative Future.
- **Regional Arts and Culture Council:** Reinvigorate and expand the existing workplace giving program, including recognition and incentives for individual donors to the arts. Explore expansion into a larger United Arts Fund (a United Way-style coordinated annual fundraising campaign), including corporate and foundation giving.
- **City of Portland and Metro:** Explore funding solutions for the Portland’s venues and their users. This would require a combination of capital funding and ongoing operating or rental subsidy to ensure sustainability in the current economic and market environment. Draw on findings and recommendations of studies addressing the Portland’s facilities.

IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE

Oversight of Implementation of the Cultural Plan

Each of the seven local governments sponsoring this regional cultural plan framework will select relevant goals and strategies for their jurisdictions, and prepare an action plan to best fit their communities and governmental role (Metro; Clackamas, Washington, and Multnomah Counties; and the cities of Portland, Beaverton, and Hillsboro). Other cities, towns, communities, and individuals are invited and encouraged to use the framework as a resource.

A regional Implementation Team of local governments and others is forming to support and advocate for implementation of the action plans. This “coalition of the willing” will provide reporting and accountability to the community. It will also assess new opportunities and challenges for arts and culture.



What Follows Dissolution of the IGA?

Now that the regional Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) for arts and culture services has been dissolved, what is the best approach to regional governance and organization of arts and culture for current and future conditions? The original IGA was never fully implemented. RACC was a key element of the IGA and was formed in 1995, but a regional revenue source was never enacted. Also, the three counties have contributed to the IGA unequally, and Clackamas County has not been contributing at all in recent years. RACC's private fundraising has declined in recent years. There are other changes in the circumstances surrounding the IGA.

Here are options for arts and cultural leadership in the region moving forward:

- Form a committee or task force of elected officials from the local governments to be “champions for arts and culture,” providing political and strategic leadership for arts and culture in the region.
- Form a network of local arts agencies in the region, as recommended in 2.5 above. These currently include the City of Portland Arts Program, Clackamas Arts Alliance, Tualatin Valley Creates, Cities of Beaverton and Hillsboro, county Cultural Coalitions, and possibly RACC and Oregon Cultural Trust. This network could share information on an ongoing basis and coordinate efforts.
- Form an organization and network to lead advocacy in the cities, counties, and region, as recommended in 2.3 above, involving and building on existing advocacy organizations and leadership.

Thank you to everyone involved in Our Creative Future.
Find out how you can get or stay involved at [Our Creative Future](#).



Image Credits

Cover

Upper left: Joe Kye soundcheck at the Walters

Upper right: Bootycandy—The OUTwright Theatre Festival 2019

Lower left: RACC Garden Party, Photo credit: Dodge & Burn Studios

Lower right: Photo credit: Dodge & Burn Studios

Inside front cover

Top: Tiger Tiger

Bottom: Aaron Nigel Smith, The Right Brain Initiative

Page 4

Left: Chapel Theatre Winter Performance Series 2019

Right: La Strada Musicians, Photo credit: Michelle Baue

Page 8

Left: Rang Barse Holi Festival

Right: See me. I am. HEAR.

Page 12

Left: La Strada Musicians, Photo credit: Michelle Bauer

Right: AgriCulture, Washington County Museum

Page 14

Top: Meshi Chavez performing Crossing. Photo credit: Intisar Abioto

Bottom: RACC Garden Party, Photo credit: Dodge & Burn Studios

Page 18

Left: Carver, Bobby Mercer, 2021, The Portland Building, RACC

Right: Portland Center Stage—Coriolanus

Page 40

Left: Artist Alex Chiu, RACC

Right: SoundsTruck NW and Chamber Music NW

BEFORE THE METRO COUNCIL

FOR THE PURPOSE OF AFFIRMING METRO'S)	RESOLUTION NO. 26-5574
COMMITMENT TO A VIBRANT AND)	
THRIVING REGIONAL ARTS COMMUNITY)	Introduced by Councilor Christine Lewis and
AND EMBEDDING CREATIVE ARTISTIC)	Acting Council President Duncan Hwang
PRACTICES AS PLANNING AND)	
ENGAGEMENT TOOLS THROUGHOUT)	
METRO'S WORK)	

WHEREAS, the greater Portland region is home to a vibrant, inclusive and diverse social and economic ecosystem supported by our arts infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, arts and cultural practices are an important and enduring way people connect with each other and form the cultural bonds that hold communities together – constructing meaning and sharing knowledge, values, and identity; and

WHEREAS, arts and cultural activities are significant components of the social and economic health of the greater Portland region, enriching the lives of residents, fostering creativity, and strengthening community identity; and

WHEREAS, cultural activities and institutions cultivate social cohesion, intergenerational connection and a sense of belonging, which are essential to community stability and resilience; and

WHEREAS, creativity is integral to effective governance, resilience, and long-term sustainability; and

WHEREAS, investment into arts and culture positively impacts the economic performance of other industries by anchoring a sense of place, ameliorating social isolation, helping build stronger connections between communities, and inspiring greater engagement in public spaces; and

WHEREAS, Metro recognizes that historic and systemic inequities have limited access to cultural resources and opportunities for many communities, particularly communities of color, Indigenous peoples, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals; and

WHEREAS, artists and culture bearers are recognized and respected leaders within their communities as vital stewards of tradition, language, and heritage, especially in communities that have been historically underserved by government, and their lived experience, cultural knowledge, and creative practice are essential to shaping inclusive and responsive public programs; and

WHEREAS, since the Oregon Legislature adopted the 1% for the arts legislation in 1975, the state has invested in nearly 3,000 public artworks; and

WHEREAS, Metro has been the operator of the Portland's Center for the Arts since 1989, welcoming more than 800,000 attendees annually to the venues, and creating more than \$90 million in economic impact for the region each year; and

WHEREAS, Metro has been the facilitator of the GLEAN program since 2010, supporting 80 artists who turn garbage found at Metro Central Transfer Station into masterpieces, prompting people to

think about their consumption habits, initiating larger conversations about the waste we generate, and inspiring creative reuse for the region; and

WHEREAS, Metro's Community Placemaking grant program, now in its tenth cycle, is an effective and meaningful way Metro supports communities by implementing small-scale, innovative, community-driven arts and culture-based solutions; and

WHEREAS, the regional planning agencies across the United States have recognized the importance and demonstrable impact of integrating artists, arts, and culture into their core work, some with dedicated departments such as Atlanta Regional Commission and Boston's Metropolitan Area Planning Council; and

WHEREAS, Metro was one of only a small group of regional agencies accepted to Smart Growth America's Culture and Community Network - a national cohort of Metropolitan Planning Organizations and regional planning entities designed to help agencies integrate arts and culture into planning, community engagement, and regional decision-making - underscoring Metro's leadership, readiness, and commitment to advancing culturally rooted and community-centered planning practices; and

WHEREAS, Metro staff are initiating efforts to integrate artists and arts and culture strategies into planning projects and programs across the agency, including the update to our 50-year Future Vision project, to ensure that creative perspectives inform regional growth, infrastructure, and community development; and

WHEREAS, inviting artists into planning processes as respected thought partners can enrich every stage of planning, can challenge conventional and dominant narratives, expand our understanding of complex issues, and ensure a human-centered approach; and

WHEREAS, further incorporating arts and culture into Metro's work will demonstrate Metro's recognition of cultural expression as a vital ingredient to maintaining our region's sense of place; and

WHEREAS, embedding creative practices into planning enhances public participation, improves policy outcomes, and facilitates decisions that reflect the lived experiences of community, which is essential to building a more inclusive, innovative, resilient metropolitan region; now therefore;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Metro Council affirms a commitment to a vibrant and thriving regional arts community and directs the Chief Operating Officer to strive to embed creative artistic practices throughout Metro's work, and directs Metro staff to:

1. Use Metro public meetings as a platform to elevate creative work and practices; and
2. Explore opportunities to integrate artists, arts culture, and creative practices as planning and engagement tools in regional planning, economic development, and community well-being initiatives; and
3. Pursue initiatives to embed arts and culture into planning and programming, and encourage the inclusion of artists and cultural strategies and other efforts to shape the region's future; and
4. Strive to incorporate arts and culture into Metro projects that have a scoping phase; and

5. Report back to Metro Council on the progress of this initiative and future recommendations to advance the goals of this legislation in future budgets.

ADOPTED by the Metro Council this ____ day of _____ 2026.

Acting Council President

Approved as to Form:

Carrie MacLaren, Metro Attorney

DRAFT