

# **Advancing Cultural Equity and Inclusion:**

*Our Approach for Developing a Cultural Policy for the County of Los Angeles*

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF ARTS AND CULTURE .....3**

**HOW WE GOT HERE: CULTURAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION INITIATIVE .....3**

**HOW WE DEVELOPED THE POLICY: OUR FIVE-PHASE APPROACH .....4**

**WHO WE ENGAGED: VOICES FROM THE FIELD .....4**

**Policy Advisors .....5**

**Community Stakeholders and Partners .....5**

**County Departments .....6**

**PRIORITIES FOR THE COUNTY POLICY .....6**

**IMPLEMENTING THE CULTURAL POLICY .....8**

**Appendix 1: Policy Advisors.....9**

**Appendix 2: Key Works Reviewed in the Cultural Policy Process ..... 11**

## THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF ARTS AND CULTURE

Arts, culture, and creative expression are integral to mental, physical, and social well-being. They connect people to their full humanity. In a time when our nation is experiencing increased division, arts and culture help build vibrant and resilient communities that bridge human divides.

Research shows that diverse, inclusive, and accessible arts and culture experiences enable people to feel a sense of belonging and to achieve their highest potential. In addition to the social benefits, there are economic benefits as well. For example, investments in arts and culture are directly tied to the creative economy. In LA County, the creative economy generates nearly \$88 billion in labor income, and nearly \$208 billion in total value. The health and vibrancy of this economy contributes directly to employment, education, public safety, infrastructure, workforce development, and community development opportunities. In other words, arts, culture, and creative expression are essential to civic life.

All communities have arts and cultural expression, but in practice there are systems of power that have unequally privileged some communities over others, thus contributing to a variety of challenges including a lack of cultural resources, cultural infrastructure, systems of support, recognition, social capital and inclusion. As a result of long-standing policies, some communities, such as communities of color, low-income communities, LGBTQ, disability, rural communities and those impacted by the justice system, often receive unequal investments and fewer opportunities. These inequities must be addressed if we are to build strong and vibrant communities.

Arts, culture, and creativity are a critical component of the efforts launched by the County of Los Angeles to further equity, Board Priorities and the County Strategic Plan goals. When everyone has equal access to the benefits of the arts, the benefits will be seen in health, education, jobs, and other areas of life.

## HOW WE GOT HERE: CULTURAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION

The County of Los Angeles has a long history of investing in arts and cultural experiences, including museums, civic art venues, and grants for community-based arts organizations. By transforming its long-standing Arts Commission to a new Department of Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture) in 2019, the County positioned itself to ensure that every resident has access to arts and culture, that arts organizations reflect the diversity of their communities, and that the benefits of arts and culture are integrated into all aspects of civic life, from how communities are designed to how children learn in school.

Fully committed to addressing the historical inequities in arts and cultural experiences, and to identifying strategies to resolve them, the County Board of Supervisors (Board) introduced a motion for the Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII) that engaged stakeholders across LA County in 2016. At the conclusion of the CEII, the Board took a bold step in April 2017 to advance cultural equity and inclusion by unanimously adopting a set of recommendations that could expand access to arts and culture for residents across LA County.

The first of those recommendations called for the development of a Cultural Policy that would focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and access and would to serve as a roadmap for how County Departments

can contribute to cultural life. This recommendation laid the foundation for a groundbreaking policy, one that would position LA County, per the CEII directive, “as a national arts leader in advancing cultural equity and inclusion in every sector of our civic lives.”

As Arts and Culture helps the County achieve its strategic goals and manage the public’s resources, the Cultural Policy provides the County of Los Angeles with a tool to address historical inequities and disinvestments by utilizing investments in arts and culture as core strategies to promote positive outcomes for the County’s residents and its communities. The Cultural Policy also provides direction for how County Departments, Commissions, and major initiatives, can collaborate, cooperate, and innovate through arts, culture, and creativity in ways that will positively contribute to cultural life for all County residents.

## HOW WE DEVELOPED THE POLICY: A FIVE-PHASE APPROACH

Beginning in March 2019, Arts and Culture began a five-phase approach to develop the Cultural Policy. An important guiding value for this approach was to intentionally seek input from a broad swath of stakeholders and County leadership to ensure the policy reflected both local and national wisdom.

### **Phase 1: Learn from the Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative**

Reflected on what was learned from the CEII process, including literature reviews, town halls, working groups, and the advisory group.

### **Phase 2: Frame the Cultural Policy**

Conducted interviews with key Policy Advisors across the United States and reviewed relevant literature and research on policies and plans that promote cultural equity and inclusion.

### **Phase 3: Inform the Cultural Policy**

Facilitated listening sessions with representatives from Arts and Culture’s advisory bodies, local stakeholder groups, and County Departments.

### **Phase 4: Align with County Policies**

Convened LA County Departments to design and align the policy with Board and Departmental priorities.

### **Phase 5: Finalize the Cultural Policy**

Integrated insights gathered from all stakeholders to craft the final Policy and worked closely with the Board of Supervisors for approval.

## WHO WE ENGAGED: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Development of the Cultural Policy would not have been possible without the diverse voices engaged throughout the process. These partners, representing various sectors of the arts ecology, included six Policy Advisors and a total of ten convenings with the following groups:

- CEII Advisory Committee
- Arts Commissioners

- Arts and Culture staff
- Public and private arts funders
- Arts and Culture grantees
- Arts service organizations
- County cultural entities such as LACMA and the Natural History Museum
- Arts for LA ACTIVATE alumnae
- Social justice and social service organizations
- County Departments

## Policy Advisors

Arts and Culture conducted interviews with nationally recognized experts Maria Rosario Jackson, Jamie Bennett, Vanessa Whang, Jessica Cusick, Holly Sidford, and Carole Rosenstein to gain their insights and expertise on key concepts, priorities, and goals that needed to be considered in the development of the Cultural Policy Framework (see Appendix 1 for Policy Advisor biographies).

Policy Advisors recommended that the Cultural Policy development process (i) engage community stakeholders, specifically those that demographically represent LA County including youth, (ii) acknowledge the historic context of the current arts landscape and the continued disparities that need to be addressed, and (iii) center the focus of the policy and the wider conversation on cultural life rather than arts because when culture is secondary, issues of race, socio-economic class, gender, sexuality also become secondary.

Additionally, the Policy Advisors identified four aspirational goals for the Cultural Policy:

1. Facilitate increased community access to arts and culture;
2. Shift attitude and understanding whereby residents see arts and culture as central to their lives;
3. Expand power and resources from large and traditional arts organizations to smaller, more representative organizations; and
4. Help residents and County Departments see arts and culture as a resource to advance cultural equity and inclusion.

Insights from the Policy Advisors were used to design the interactive stakeholder feedback sessions and County Department engagement.

## Community Stakeholders and Partners

Community stakeholders and partners were engaged to help Arts and Culture develop a deeper understanding of the challenges facing community arts and culture organizations, identify where inequities exist, envision what a more equitable arts and culture ecosystem would look like, and finally, brainstorm goals and strategies for the County Cultural Policy. These engagements built on the prior work of CEII and recent engagements of communities and County Departments on the role of the arts.

As a result of this engagement, the following four thematic areas emerged:

**Focus on Equity:** Historic arts and culture inequities should be central in the design and

development of the Cultural Policy.

**Inclusion and Belonging:** Arts and culture can play a role in improving community cohesion and a sense of inclusion and belonging for residents of LA County.

**Tangible Resources:** The County can increase and diversify the resources used to support arts and culture, the Cultural Policy should ensure that the County maximizes its financial, human, and physical assets to promote cultural equity.

**Cross-sector Benefits:** The Cultural Policy should foster the civic impact of the arts and the benefits of arts and culture to across sectors, from education to health, from employment to social connections.

## County Departments on Implementation

Arts and Culture was charged with bringing the ideas and recommendations from the stakeholder engagement sessions to the County Departments to support the design of the Cultural Policy. The Departments actively participated in three sessions that included a review of stakeholder feedback, brainstorming goals and strategies, and providing input on development of the policy.

During the final session, the Departments were invited to share their insights and reflections on what it would take to successfully implement the Cultural Policy. The following six insights were identified:

1. Departments look forward to incorporating arts and culture into their service delivery approach including by authentically engaging and collaborating with local arts and culture organizations.
2. Technical assistance and training is needed by all Departments to fully understand the range of strategies for incorporating arts and culture into service delivery approaches.
3. Departments need opportunities to learn more about how they and their staff can incorporate arts and culture into service delivery approaches.
4. Additional supports such as training, professional development, and/or funding are needed for those Departments that are ready or interested in incorporating arts and culture into their service delivery approach.
5. Bureaucratic barriers, such as contracting requirements and background check processes may need to be reviewed and modified in order to promote access to arts and culture resources.
6. Incorporating arts and culture into professional development for staff and contractors can be used to leverage the diversity of the LA County workforce, as a tool to develop internal cultural equity and inclusion strategies.
7. Arts and Culture will need resources to support policy implementation, provide guidance, coordination and technical assistance to Departments, and support opportunities for more collaborations between Arts and Culture and County Departments and a Countywide approach.

## PRIORITIES FOR THE CULTURAL POLICY

Through our engagement with national policy experts and all groups of stakeholders, partners, and County departments, the following twelve priorities emerged:

1. **Commit to restorative, reparative, and equitable funding in communities:** Focus on historically underserved and under-resourced communities, such as small arts and cultural organizations, artists, collectives, and individual culture bearers, especially those from historically marginalized communities, e.g. communities of color, LGBTQIA+, disability, low-income, rural, indigenous, and immigrant communities.
2. **Ensure all residents have access to arts and culture:** Fund projects and community-based arts and culture institutions in decentralized communities to ensure that every LA County resident lives within one mile of an arts or culture facility in their own community. Recognize that communities have existing cultural practices, assets and cultural organizations rooted in their communities that are underserved; the goal is to expand support, recognition and funding to uplift and support their sustainability and self-determination.
3. **Support development of a diversity, equity, and inclusion infrastructure within the County:** Utilize best practices that advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and access while also supporting those efforts by other County agencies and Countywide.
4. **Integrate arts and culture:** Integrate arts and culture into the County's strategic plan and service delivery approach as a way for all Departments to contribute and support cross-sector arts.
5. **Utilize arts and culture to address trauma and promote justice:** Focus on communities of color that have been disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system.
6. **Shift the narrative on arts and culture:** In addition to the traditional view of the arts as primarily fine arts and what is presented on stages and museums, utilize existing data and emerging practices to commit investments within the County that promote the societal benefits of arts and culture. Additionally, highlight and support the ways County Departments have used arts and culture to support their core mission.
7. **Name structural racism and systemic oppression as root causes:** Acknowledge that the unequal investment in arts and culture funding and structural racism create inequities in arts and culture in ways that contribute to inequities in other domains such as health, education, and community well-being.
8. **Support authentic community engagement and community partnership development:** Identify partners to implement strategies that will empower community members to envision and enact cultural programs that are meaningful to them.
9. **Acknowledge and elevate Indigenous People:** Recognize Indigenous People and communities as traditional stewards of the land and their enduring contributions at County public events and ceremonial functions.
10. **Support diversity, inclusion, and belonging:** Support the development of culturally appropriate and culturally specific local programming that is County-led and/or County funded to contribute to community cohesion, participation in civic life, inclusion, and belonging at the neighborhood level.
11. **Increase the ways County can support arts and culture in assets and operations:** Maximize the use of County-owned facilities and land for arts and culture services and programming, expand access to affordable cultural and creative space, and embed artists in County Departments so that art, culture, and creativity are incorporated into practice and service delivery.
12. **Address gentrification and housing affordability:** Create policies that support local neighborhood level arts and culture and sustainable development practices in order to ensure

that land, business, and housing development decisions do not lead to community and cultural displacement.

## **THE CULTURAL POLICY**

The values, goals, themes, and priorities that we gained from this process have thus been synthesized into a Cultural Policy built upon three pillars that can guide the County in the vision of a region in which arts, culture, and creativity are integral to every aspect of civic life for all people and communities:

1. Invest in cultural infrastructure and access to arts and culture.
2. Advance arts and culture in every sector of civic life.
3. Promote cultural equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

This Cultural Policy supports and enhances the broader work of the County of Los Angeles to achieve its mission of measurably improving the quality of life for all people and communities. It does this by recognizing, reflecting, and protecting the diverse cultural practices of LA County's many neighborhoods and communities. Ultimately, this policy will nurture a culture within the County that values and celebrates arts, culture, and creativity and leverages arts and culture in programs, services, and strategies so that all communities can achieve their highest potential.

Following its adoption, the Department of Arts and Culture will continue to provide leadership, accountability, and coordination across County Departments and agencies to ensure arts and culture are utilized in the pursuit of goals articulated in this policy.



## Appendix 1: Policy Advisors

**Jamie Bennett** is Executive Director of ArtPlace America, a 10-year national funding initiative that has invested more than \$104 million to date to support and strengthen the field of creative placemaking, which ArtPlace defines as the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development. Previously, Jamie served as Chief of Staff at the National Endowment for the Arts and Chief of Staff at the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. He has also provided strategic counsel at the Agnes Gund Foundation; served as chief of staff to the President of Columbia University; and worked in fundraising at The Museum of Modern Art, the New York Philharmonic, and Columbia College. His past nonprofit affiliations have included the Board of Directors of Art21 and the HERE Arts Center; the Foot-in-the-Door Committee of the Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation; and Studio in a School's Associates Committee.

**Jessica Cusick** specializes in cultural planning and policy development. Jessica has more than thirty years of experience working in community development and the arts for governmental agencies, the private sector, and non-profit organizations. Key areas of expertise include municipal government, public process, and resource development, as well as public/private partnerships and neighborhood revitalization projects in which the arts play a substantive role. Clients include the cities of Fort Worth, Pasadena, and Ventura; the California Arts Council; the County of Los Angeles; the Houston Midtown Redevelopment Authority; and the Seattle Public Library, among others. She also served as Manager of the City of Santa Monica Cultural Affairs Department.

**Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson** has extensive expertise in comprehensive community revitalization, systems change, arts and culture in communities, and dynamics of race and ethnicity. She has worked widely with philanthropy and governments advising on strategy, program design, research, learning and evaluation. She is a Professor at Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University. Prior, she was with Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. for 18 years. She is also a co-chair of the Advisory Committee to the Department of Arts and Culture's Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative.

**Dr. Carole Rosenstein** is an associate professor of Arts Management at George Mason University and author of the textbook, *Understanding Cultural Policy*. Her research focuses on cultural policy, cultural democracy, diversity and equity, and the social life of the arts and culture. Trained as a cultural anthropologist, Carole has expertise in qualitative research, cross-cultural and field methods, and interpretive analysis. Her work includes the study of: museum public finance for the Institute of Museum and Library Services; arts festivals for the National Endowment for the Arts; and data on nonprofit humanities organizations for the American Academy of Arts and Science. Her writing has been published widely in academic journals including: *The Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*; *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*; and *Cultural Trends*. Prior to teaching, Carole worked on the cultural policy portfolio at the Urban Institute in Washington, DC. She was a 2007 Rockefeller Humanities Fellow at the Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Carole serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society* and was a Trustee of the Association of Arts Administration Educators from 2011-2014. She is a lifetime member of the American Folklore Society.

**Holly Sidford** is President of Helicon Collaborative, a consulting company that provides strategy development, program management, research, and facilitation for arts and cultural organizations and

fundress. She has more than 25 years of experience leading nonprofit cultural and philanthropic organizations. Prior to founding Helicon, she was a Principal at AEA Consulting, an international consulting firm, where she guided organizational, program and policy planning with diverse clients. Prior to that, she was the founding President of Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), a ten-year national initiative to expand support for creative artists and she spearheaded the national research and planning effort that preceded LINC's creation. Before her work with LINC, Holly was Program Director for arts, parks and adult literacy at the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, and held leadership positions at the Ford Foundation, The Howard Gilman Foundation, the New England Foundation for the Arts and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities.

**Vanessa Whang** has served as Director of Programs for California Humanities, responsible for the strategic design, development, and evaluation of programs. In New York, Vanessa consulted on cultural equity, changing demographics, and program evaluation for Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Ford Foundation, Leveraging Investments in Creativity, and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, and others. In DC, she served as Director of Multidisciplinary Arts and Presenting at the National Endowment for the Arts. Vanessa started in the field as a community cultural activist, performing arts presenter, and recording/touring musician. She serves on the boards of the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts (Richmond, CA) and The Whitman Institute (SF), a trust-based funder for social good. She is co-author of the cultural plan for the City of Oakland titled *Belonging in Oakland, A Cultural Development Plan*.

## Appendix 2: Select Works Reviewed in the Cultural Policy Process

December 10, 1948: [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

September 29, 1965 (amended May 31, 1984, and December 20, 1985): [National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965](#)

November 10, 2015: [Board Motion](#): *Improving Leadership, Work Force, Programming and Audience Diversity in Los Angeles County Cultural Institutions*

April 2016: [County of Los Angeles 2016-2021 Strategic Plan](#): *Creating Connections: People, Communities, Government*

October 2016 (revised): [Statement](#) *Americans for the Arts Statement on Cultural Equity*

April 4, 2017: [Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative \(CEII\) final report](#): *Strengthening Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Arts and Culture Sector for All Los Angeles County Residents*

April 4, 2017: [Board Motion](#): *Los Angeles County Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative*

June 27, 2017: [Board Motion](#) *Establishing Transition of the Arts Commission to a County Department*

November 20, 2018: [Ordinance](#) *Establishing Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture*

United States Conference of Mayors, 86<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, 2018: [Resolution Supporting Cultural Equity](#)

*Building a Cultural Equity Plan*, PolicyLink. Accessed May 2019. <https://www.policylink.org/our-work/community/arts-culture/plan>.

Mauldin, Bronwyn, Susannah Laramée Kidd, Jesse Ruskin, and Matthew Agustin. "Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative: Literature Review." Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture. March 30, 2016. [https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ceii\\_litrev\\_final.pdf](https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ceii_litrev_final.pdf)

Rosenstein, Carole. *Understanding Cultural Policy*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018

Stevens, Louise K. *Developing a Strategic Cultural Plan: A Work Kit*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990

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