Los Angeles County
Arts & Culture

ARTS AND CULTURE 2020 AND BEYOND

Supporting the people of LA County in crisis and recovery

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July 2, 2020

INTRODUCTION

What began as a **health** crisis has become an **economic** crisis and a moment of reckoning for **racial justice**. Since mid-March, systemic and structural inequities across LA County have become more visible than ever before.

What is the role of arts, culture, and creativity in 1) helping people make it through the pandemic, 2) addressing long-standing inequities in County investments, and 3) supporting communities in a recovery that must embrace true racial equity? If we want the arts to be relevant and essential in the current moment, the Department of Arts and Culture must translate our best ideas into action. This research project is a first step toward that goal.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research project was to gather innovative ideas from within the Department of Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture) for how LA County government can support local artists, arts nonprofits, small arts businesses, and arts educators with actions that are relevant, meaningful, and timely. It was built on a recognition that we must think beyond our current work to how we can support communities across the county experiencing disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 closures such as working class people, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, immigrant communities, queer and trans communities, people

experiencing homelessness, and those detained or incarcerated, as they persist and recover in the wake of the current emergency and beyond. We also knew we must acknowledge and address historical inequities in investments and opportunities based on race and ethnicity as well as socioeconomics. Our goal was to gather ideas with a focus on building a new arts ecosystem centered on principles of equity, inclusion, and belonging, and use them to create concrete proposals for action.

METHODS

The Research and Evaluation team conducted focus group discussions and interviews with all Arts and Culture staff during April-May 2020. We conducted a focus group with an ad hoc subcommittee of the Arts Commissioners. From the data we identified **five key themes**. As those themes began to emerge during the data collection phase, we identified **six relevant theories** that can help ground the department's work and help us set priorities and make decisions. Finally, we offer **five recommendations** for action. At the end of the report are a list of sample projects from around the world where creative people are using arts and culture in ways that reflect the themes and theories we are building on, to **inspire our work**.

As this final report was being reviewed by Arts and Culture staff, a powerful civil rights movement emerged. Built on years of organizing in BIPOC communities, leaders in this movement are asking hard questions about white supremacy and police violence, and refusing to accept simplistic answers. They offer solutions that were unimaginable only months ago. Public opinion and elected officials are responding by beginning to embrace some of those solutions. Arts and Culture staff and contractors offered comments and recommendations for this report that address both issues raised and solutions offered by this civil rights movement, and those have been incorporated. We recognize that if the internal interviews had taken place later in May, those issues and solutions likely would have been more central to the themes and recommendations that emerged. As with any research project, this one is a product of its time.

FIVE THEMES FROM FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

Across the focus group discussions, there were five areas of consensus about where and how Arts and Culture should direct its time and resources.

Meet basic needs

- Support the work of meeting basic needs for money, food, housing, health care, testing, utilities, transportation, safety etc. Invest our resources in meeting basic needs.

- Provide everyone with affordable access to the internet. Build out infrastructure including hardware and software to ensure everyone has access.
- Make more funding available and make it easy for people to access grants contracts and other resources
- Minimize interactions with law enforcement; build on alternative visions of public safety
- Build a new social safety net to support gig workers of all kinds, not just artists
- Support the establishment of legal, financial, and safety protections for artists, as well as wage standards. Create labor standards and best practices for working with artists, with an accountability structure
- Support the informal economy (e.g., street vendors, culture bearers, grassroots artists)
- Help people staying home to stay socially connected
- Document and amplify the stories of frontline and essential workers
- Document and amplify the stories of both the victims of police violence and those who are fighting for justice

Transition to a community-centered, equity-driven model

- Work in community, for community. Meet people where they're at, serve people we have not served in the past. Support community arts and culture hubs that already exist throughout the county. Support artists as they work in their communities.
- Change our focus from top-down arts programming to supporting culture as it is lived in people's lives
- Build and maintain a physical presence in communities with the highest need. Be in community rather than the office
- Do all our work through a lens of equity. Invest our resources in those with the greatest need, who have been hit the hardest
- Address the unique needs of the most vulnerable, including those in the justice system, people experiencing homelessness, immigrants, transgender people, etc. Support community initiatives for restorative justice and healing.
- Use arts and culture workers to deliver messages for how to stay safe and healthy, and comply with public health orders. Get information out about resources and opportunities, coach others to access them
- Do a better job of curating and vetting information and resources, getting information to the field more effectively and responsively
- Support undocumented communities through trusted intermediaries
- Put people and their communities at the center of our work
- Support the creation of platforms for self-expression
- Treat community members as subject matter experts

Assess our current programs and services

- Provide technical assistance to artists, arts nonprofits, and arts educators as they struggle to survive the crisis and as they support the emerging civil rights movement
- Support arts nonprofits, fiscally sponsored organizations, collectives, and artists to use online technology more effectively while also protecting their intellectual property
- Provide technical support to small and community-based arts venues so they can reopen safely
- Construct new contracting templates that better protect the rights of those we contract with
- Continue to use and improve what we've discovered to be effective about working online and providing virtual services
- Address key structural barriers to participation in all programs and projects administered by Arts and Culture
- When making hard choices about how to invest our financial and human resources, do it through a lens of DEI

Support County partners in meeting residents' needs

- Build and strengthen relationships with other County departments to serve our community better
- Offer arts and culture skills and knowledge to other departments as they strive to respond to the crisis, keep people healthy, and meet basic needs
- Use existing County physical and other infrastructure to build out hyperlocal services
- Build better digital connections between government and community
- Support other County departments in their efforts to improve equity and inclusion, including sharing our plan of action for equity
- Invest our human and financial resources in working with County partners
- Make our work relevant to today's needs
- Gain a better understanding of the Board's priorities

Expand resources for arts and culture from all sources

- Raise new money from government and philanthropy
- Work with philanthropy to improve their practices (e.g., general operating support, reducing barriers to applying and qualifying for grants and loans)
- Help artists and other creatives access government jobs, contracts, and relief opportunities

- Help the County gain skills and knowledge needed to hire and work more effectively with artists
- Provide many small contracts and grants rather than a few large ones
- Help artists monetize their online work
- Commission artworks more quickly
- Support small arts businesses
- Help the public become more comfortable with paying for online content
- Get donations from high net worth individuals
- Focus on increasing arts and culture resources in communities where Arts and Culture has historically underinvested

THEORIES TO HELP US MOVE FROM IDEAS TO ACTION

As we analyzed the data, the Research and Evaluation team identified several theories that can help Arts and Culture translate these themes into action.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

There was almost complete consensus across all focus groups and interviews that our most urgent task is to address basic needs of people who have been hit the hardest by COVID-19, both the health and economic crises. As the civil rights movement has emerged, needs for personal safety have become equally paramount. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a helpful tool for prioritizing both needs and how arts and culture can help meet them.
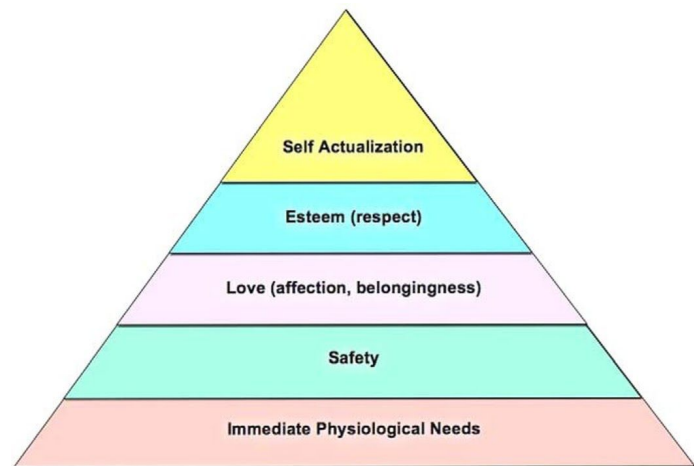
Maslow, A. H. "A theory of human motivation." *Psychological Review* 50, no.4 (1943): 370–396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346he

Mutual aid networks

As often happens in the wake of disaster, mutual aid networks have blossomed around the US and across LA County since the pandemic emerged. People are joining together to help each other out, to ensure the people around them have food, medicine, and human connection. Volunteers shop for the elderly, stand in line to buy diapers for frontline medical workers, raise

money to help others pay the rent or medical bills. Mutual aid is also a model used in mental health, addiction treatment, and social work, with individuals and professionals creating networks where people support each other as they work through challenges in their lives.

Munn-Giddings, Carol, Tomofumi Oka, Thomasina Borkman, Grace L. Chikoto, Jürgen Matzat, and Rolando Montaño-Fraire, "Self-Help and Mutual Aid Group Volunteering," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations*, edited by David Horton Smith, Robert A. Stebbins, and Jurgen Grotz, 393-416. London: Macmillan, 2016.

Solnit, Rebecca. *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*. New York: Penguin, 2010.

Popular Protagonism

Popular Protagonism is a term that comes from contemporary Latin American social movements, and specifically arose out of the Bolivarian Process in Venezuela that came into public view in 1998. This approach to governance acknowledged that effective change cannot be decreed from above, and that it had to be built from below. In community based spaces such as worker councils, arts and culture cooperatives, women's business collectives, LGBTQ collectives, etc., members can discuss their needs and develop plans to address them with the support of the state. This process transformed political participation across popular sectors of society and built community governance from the bottom up. The role of the state was to support, dialogue with, reflect back and help facilitate the voiced needs and desires of these spaces. Arts and culture

were used as tools to invigorate the process, help communities build popular power and reimagine the world they wanted to live in. In this model, residents of a community have decision making power to co-create, drive, and lead initiatives that they see themselves reflected in.

Hellinger, Daniel and David Smilde. *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy Participation, Culture and Politics Under Chavez*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Democratization of knowledge production

Scholars like Jacques Derrida have argued there is no political power without control of the archive, which illuminates the intimate relationships between institutions, government, and the construction of knowledge. Arts and Culture can play a direct role in shifting deep-rooted inequities by centering historically marginalized narratives and stories in its programs and practices, especially in light of the Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative. Historically, arts and culture have been vehicles to shift these dynamics at local national and international levels. Increasing support for culture bearers and community-based arts practitioners can help refocus departmental decision-making processes, operations, programming, and policies.

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Abolition

Theories of abolition are critical to understanding current movements against police brutality, policing, the carceral system, and militarization in LA County and worldwide. An abolitionist approach seeks to remove the prison from the social and ideological landscape of society. It challenges us to imagine a society in which race and class are not primary determinants of punishment, or one in which punishment itself is no longer the central concern in the making of justice. Alternatives to imprisonment, demilitarization of schools, investments in education and health systems, and a justice based system on reparation and reconciliation, emerge from abolitionist theory. Rather than offering a single alternative, abolitionist theory offers a multitude of alternatives, linking policing, the carceral system and their intersections with larger systems of power. With mass protests across the country pushing back against the historical legacy of policing in the US and LA County, and with the impacts of a public health crisis that inequitably affect BIPOC and low income communities, abolition offers a way to pivot from old ways of doing business to ones that democratize operations, budgets, and programs. Repurposing funds from punitive systems of control and toward arts and culture programs and essential services built from a trauma-informed perspective can lead to generative healing justice.

Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003.

Social infrastructure

Social infrastructure is the set of physical locations like libraries, parks and trails, diners and coffee shops, community centers, and arts and culture facilities that foster contact and connection between people. Waiting rooms, lobbies, and elevators - anywhere that people wait for services - are part of our social infrastructure. They are places where people from different walks of life gather in informal and sometimes unexpected ways. Social infrastructure is a critical element of healthy, strong, and resilient cities. Effective management of social infrastructure requires building, maintaining, programming, and staffing those places.

Social infrastructure was already in decline and inequitably distributed in the US before the pandemic and current civil unrest, both in quantity and quality. During the pandemic, the value of outdoor spaces has been elevated. Beaches, parks, and trails are places where people can get out, get some relief from stress and enclosure, and interact with other humans (from a safe distance). They are also important places where people can and do engage in their democratic right to free speech.

Klinenberg, Eric. *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*. New York: Crown, 2018.

O'Sullivan, Tracey L., Craig E. Kuziemsky, Darene Toal-Sullivan, and Wayne Corneil. "Unraveling the Complexities of Disaster Management: A Framework for Critical Social Infrastructure to Promote Population Health and Resilience." *Social Science & Medicine* 93: (2013): 238-246.

Sustainable urban design

Whenever epidemics and pandemics have passed through cities, architects and urban planners have responded by redesigning the spaces where we live, work, and play to make them healthier and safer. Modern planning and civil engineering were developed in response to malaria and cholera. Management of water and waste management has helped remake cities. Parks, too, were developed in the wake of epidemic disease to give urban dwellers places to engage in healthy activities. The density of cities is both a strength and a danger. As Le Corbusier said: "Hygiene and moral health depend on the lay-out of cities. Without hygiene and moral health, the social cell becomes atrophied." Urban design has also been used to stifle dissent and make it harder for people to exercise their right to gather and protest.

Already, experts predict our post-COVID future will see more people working from home and a decline in the number of brick and mortar retail establishments. Those empty spaces could be given over to address the current housing crisis, to parks, libraries, and other social infrastructure. As Janette Sadik-Khan recently said, "The question is whether we will have the imagination and vision to transform streets and bring about the safer, more accessible, and more resilient cities we've needed all along."

Florida, Richard et al. "How Life in Our Cities Will Look After the Coronavirus Pandemic." *Foreign Policy*, May 1, 2020.

Le Corbusier. *The City of To-Morrow and its Planning*. Translated by Frederick Etchells. New York: Cover, 1987.

Riddell, Robert. *Sustainable Urban Planning: Tipping the Balance*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Building on the five themes that emerged from our focus groups, and utilizing the theories above as lenses to help us move from ideas to action, the Research and Evaluation team recommends the Department of Arts and Culture embark on the five following actions. Each is written to include short-term actions that can build toward long-term goals. For each of these recommendations, actions can be taken within divisions, but they are designed for the Department as a whole.

Plan and implement a long-term partnership strategy for working with other County departments

County departments are actively working to meet basic needs for residents of LA County, from COVID-19 testing and treatment to tenant assistance to emergency funding. Other departments are gearing up to provide longer-term services such as job training. Arts and Culture can provide resources now to help those departments meet basic needs. This can be a first step toward building long-term relationships for future partnerships. *Purpose: to meet basic needs of County residents during the emergency while building long-term relationships with other departments that will make arts and culture more responsive to community needs.*

For example, in the near term Arts and Culture can

- Identify and fund artists to design print and online materials to disseminate critical messages for staying safe and healthy
- Hire artists and creatives to work in street teams posting public health messages in highly-trafficked physical locations across the County.
- Identify and fund out-of-work ushers to work as ambassadors at parks, trails, beaches, and other public locations to support health and safety
- Identify community-based artists and cultural organizations who could support contact tracing in a culturally appropriate way
- Identify makers with skills and equipment, then fund them to design and produce PPE, make soap and hand sanitizer, deliver art supplies, create experiences and community spaces online, support redesign of social infrastructure spaces, etc
- Identify and create an accessible online database of arts and culture organizations with physical locations that could volunteer as trusted locations where County services can be provided, such as testing, food distribution, etc
- Provide resources and technical assistance to physical arts venues so they can reopen safely and in compliance with public health orders
- Activate existing artists in residence to support the work of departments where they are placed

While engaged in these activities, Arts and Culture should establish a plan for partnering with other departments for such long-term activities as

- Partnering on joint grant applications to fund the integration of arts and culture in other departments' work
- Strategically assigning staff to serve on more Countywide committees and task forces

- Identifying departments whose work undermines the health of local communities, and work with them to move their practices to an equity model
- Placing creative strategists in long-term residencies (2+ years) with other departments that are co-funded with the host department
- Identifying idle County-owned spaces and land, for the purposes of making them available to community-based groups for arts and culture projects and programs
- Supporting efforts to identify idle County-owned lands for redistribution to LA County-based Native communities
- Work with County partners to secure housing for all residents of LA County, including artists and creatives

Launch a Countywide year-long social connection community arts project

Commission artists, collectives, small arts businesses, and arts nonprofits to provide pop-up performances, exhibitions, publications, and other events or works in the communities where they live. *Purpose: to provide culturally-relevant social connection and mental health support while putting artists to work.*

- Events roll out over a one-year period
- One in each of the 106 cities/unincorporated areas identified by *A Portrait of LA County*
- Priority (timing and resources) given to communities with lower American Human Development (HD) Index scores as seen in the *A Portrait of Los Angeles County* report.
- Hire local artists to provide culturally appropriate work in their local community
- Incorporate messaging that emphasizes social connection
- Partner with County departments, especially Parks and Recreation, Libraries, Public Works, Consumer and Business Affairs, Regional Planning, and WDACS to identify locations and provide logistical support
- Partner with Public Health to provide guidance to ensure the events comply with physical distancing and other health guidelines in place at the time
- Partner with Mental Health to ensure event messaging is supportive of mental health needs
- Provide technical support for live broadcast of the events via computer, phone, and terrestrial radio
- Use a prototyping model that allows maximum freedom to allow artists to test what works and be responsive to the community and the moment
- Create a parallel online social connection arts project where we promote the work of grantees, contractors, and other LA County artists and creatives - focusing on those from

historically disinvested communities - combined with messages about using those tools for social connection

Build on the countywide social connection project to increase investment in social infrastructure

The County owns and manages a wide range of spaces where people gather informally. Arts and Culture can help to redesign, program, and maintain spaces that already exist, in order to transform them into spaces where people build social capital and social cohesion, and overcome social disconnection. Communities that have been hit the hardest by the current health and economic crises should be prioritized. *Purpose: to help people overcome social isolation and build social cohesion.*

- Provide programming at County-owned and -managed spaces where people gather, including Parks and Libraries
- Hire artists from the local community to provide the programming
- Identify community-based arts and culture hubs - including nonprofits, small businesses, and other spaces - and make grants so they can reopen safely and provide programming in those spaces
- Identify other County spaces such as lobbies and waiting rooms where people commonly gather, and provide programming and design support that will build connections between people
- Advocate for long-term investment in design, programming, and maintenance of those spaces
- Work with County departments to ensure these spaces and programs are staffed by artists, makers, athletes, health specialists, parks staff, and social workers rather than law enforcement, to ensure they are safe and welcoming spaces for all.
- Partner with County departments that manage those spaces to raise outside money to do this work at a scale large enough to serve 10 million people

Develop a plan to change the way we work in and with communities

Arts and Culture's sudden transition to working virtually has broken through both material and psychological barriers once considered unsurmountable. It has opened opportunities for our Department to rethink how we can serve communities in a way that reflects our stated aspirations for diversity, equity, and inclusion. *Purpose: to support people living cultural lives in their communities.*

- Evaluate which of the tasks we moved online allowed for more participation by people who have historically been underrepresented and continue those practices
- Continue to streamline application and reporting processes, reducing the burden to apply and report on grant activities
- Continue to actively reach out to identify artists, arts nonprofits, arts organizations, and small arts businesses we have not worked with in the past
- Identify arts and culture locations around the County - especially in communities where Human Development Index scores are low - where the County can provide programs and services to meet basic needs, and staff can telework
- Measure how the County's arts and culture spending is distributed by geographic and demographic communities, then prioritize funding for historically underserved communities.
- Conduct a series of hyperlocal community asset mapping projects to identify arts and culture assets and share these assets with the region at large
- Utilize a grassroots storytelling approach such as Anu Yadav's Healing Through Story toolkit to engaging communities to gather community input into our Department's priorities
- Work with allies in other industries to strengthen the social safety net for all gig workers, contract workers, part-time workers, and temp workers
- Advocate for the County to create a low-cost broadband network accessible to every resident and organization in the County
- Establish an equity framework for grants and contracts
- As movements across the country aim to rethink the role of police in society, police funding has come into question. Work to ensure that any funds made available by cuts to law enforcement are repurposed or diverted for essential services and arts and culture programs.
- Prioritize resources and funding to BIPOC communities, Queer and Trans People of Color (QTPOC) communities, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated persons, and people experiencing homelessness.

Arts Commissioners: embark on a long-term fundraising campaign

An ad hoc committee can be established now to set a long-term fundraising goal and timeline. Use the current economic downturn to plan for a launch in 2021. *Purpose: to increase long-term funding for the arts that increases Arts and Culture's flexibility and responsiveness.*

IDEAS TO INSPIRE

How artists and arts organizations are responding creatively to the crisis in their communities

- LA Artist Kristina Wong launched the "Auntie Sewing Squad" that makes masks and donated sewing supplies to the Navajo Nation. Artist Badly Licked Bear is driving items to Arizona and New Mexico.
- New Orleans Museum of Art delivers "Mini Masters at Home" kits to families who may not be able to access online arts education
- Philadelphia's Mural Arts is creating Space Pads designed by local artists to help mark physical distancing and support public health messaging
- Venezuela's Radio Verdura delivers live music to the people from the back of a truck with microradio
- Danish singer Mads Langer performs a drive-in concert
- LA County hosted a sprawling drive-by art exhibition organized by Warren Neidich, Renee Petropoulos, Michael Slenske, and Anuradha Vikram
- LA artist Lauren Halsey's Summaeverythang Community Center is distributing fresh organic produce to people in Watts and South Central Los Angeles