



CREATIVE STRATEGIST PROGRAM EVALUATION

DECEMBER 2021

INTRODUCTION & GOVERNMENT ARTIST RESIDENCIES IN CONTEXT

Part 1 of 4



Los Angeles County
Arts & Culture



Artist Deborah Aschheim sketched voters as part of a #365DaysOfVoters social media campaign for the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk.

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INTRODUCTION

The Los Angeles County Creative Strategist—Artist in Residence (Creative Strategist) program places artists in County departments to work alongside staff, project partners, and community stakeholders. Through a collaborative process, creative strategists work with their host departments to develop, strategize, promote, and implement artist-driven solutions to complex civic challenges.

The program originated as part of the LA County Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII), a public process that generated 13 recommendations for actions the County could take to ensure that every resident has equitable access to arts and culture, and to improve inclusion in the wider arts ecology for all. In June 2017, the LA County Board of Supervisors approved a motion by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Hilda L. Solis¹ that recommended the creation of the Creative Strategist program, where artists, arts administrators, or other creative workers who are representative of diverse constituencies would be placed in paid positions as creative strategists in County departments:

“ to develop innovative solutions to social challenges by increasing community engagement and participation, identifying cultural and community assets, supporting public programs and events, creating new public artworks and beautification projects, and ultimately increasing access to artistic and creative experiences in every community.”²



Youth design traffic safety messages at the YWCA in Walnut Park, CA.

The LA County Department of Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture) was directed by the Board of Supervisors to implement and administer the program.

This evaluation analyzes the first six residencies that took place in the Creative Strategist pilot phase. The report begins by placing these residencies in the context of the historical relationship between government and the arts in the United States, including a discussion of other artist residencies. The report then describes each of the six residencies in the Creative Strategist program pilot period, identifying both successes and challenges in meeting the program’s goals. It ends with recommendations for program improvement.



Creative strategist Sandra de la Loza (right) and a community member at Walk for Wellness at Earvin "Magic" Johnson Park.

GOVERNMENT ARTIST RESIDENCIES IN CONTEXT

HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE ARTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Federal investments in the arts

Historically, the United States has left funding of arts and culture to the private sector, both for-profit and nonprofit. There have been two notable exceptions: New Deal investment in the arts and artists in response to the Great Depression of the 1930s, and use of arts and culture to win “hearts and minds” during the Cold War period. The National Endowment for the Arts was established in 1965 to provide ongoing financial support for the arts, and creation of state and local arts agencies soon followed. A third major period of significant federal investment in the arts occurred during the recession of the 1970s, when the arts community found ways to utilize funds set aside to help unemployed workers in the US to support artists and arts nonprofits at a significant scale.

When President Franklin Roosevelt launched the New Deal with passage of the Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933, the arts were included. The Federal Art Project was a major component of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and was inspired in part by the Mexican mural movement.³ While this new agency’s main focus was infrastructure projects, a portion of its funding was directed toward projects for visual artists, theater workers, writers, and musicians, through the Federal Writers Project (FWP), Federal Music Project

(FMP), and the Federal Theatre Project (FTP).⁴ The Section of Fine Arts employed visual artists to decorate public buildings. A few years later, the American National Theater and Academy was chartered.⁵

The WPA and its focus on the arts as part of a larger response to widespread unemployment is arguably the most significant government investment in the arts in American history. US entry into World War II and the employment it created brought an end to the New Deal era. Between 1935 and 1943, WPA spending on art and museums, music, and writing programs alone totaled more than \$171.6 million,⁶ the equivalent of \$2.631 billion in 2020 dollars. Annualized across eight years, this was the equivalent today of more than \$328.9 million per year in these three disciplines combined (or \$2.18 per capita per year).

The end of World War II and the launch of the Cold War brought a new era of US intervention in countries from Korea to Iran to Cuba to Vietnam. The CIA and the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs at the State Department used American modern art, especially abstract expressionism, as a covert weapon for hearts and minds.⁷ The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City purchased art and created exhibits on contract to the US government. Museum leaders including Nelson

Rockefeller and Thomas W. Braden moved easily between MoMA and positions in the CIA and State Department.⁸ The International Organizations Division at the CIA placed agents in the film industry, publishing houses, and even as travel writers and promoters of abstract expressionism.⁹ The CIA established the Congress for Cultural Freedom, made up of intellectuals, writers, historians, and artists.¹⁰ Funded by the State Department, the International Cultural Exchange Service sent drama, dance, and music groups on international tours, using the arts as a tool of soft power. The country's first MFA program in creative writing, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, was established in part to bring young intellectuals from other countries to study and learn about "the American way."¹¹ It was funded for many years by the CIA, State Department, and conservative businessmen eager to fight Communism.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) were established by the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965.¹² The NEA was designated to cultivate American creativity, culture, and support artistic traditions. The National Historic Preservation Act followed in 1966,¹³ intended to protect America's historic and cultural resources.¹⁴ A national system of state arts agencies (SAAs) was established by the NEA in part to allow greater local control of how federal arts dollars would be spent.¹⁵ Further decentralization took place in the 1970s and '80s with the establishment of local arts agencies (LAAs) at the municipal and county level,¹⁶ and today there are an estimated 4,500 LAAs across the US.¹⁷ While some funds flow from the national level to state, and from state and national to the local level, most LAA funds come from municipal and county governments, and from private philanthropy.

Funding for arts and culture grew significantly under Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, but declined under President Ronald Reagan as he sought to shrink the government under his New Federalism policy.¹⁸ Controversies over NEA funding of art deemed by conservative elected officials to be offensive also led to pressure on funding. This reached a high point during the Reagan administration, when the NEA's budget was drastically reduced. During the administration of President Donald Trump, several attempts were made to completely eliminate the NEA, NEH, and other cultural agencies through the budget process. While Congress restored their funding each time, it has never again reached pre-1980s per capita levels.¹⁹

In 1973, facing the worst economic recession since World War II and soaring unemployment, President Richard Nixon signed into law the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). CETA funds were distributed through city and county governments, with the assumption that local authorities would best understand local needs. The program was not specifically intended to support artists but workers in all industries. San Francisco was one of the first cities to use CETA funds to support artists,²⁰ and many others followed, obtaining grants that put artists to work through nonprofit organizations in cities across the country. In this way, CETA became "the first public service employment program since the 1930s to make extensive use of artists."²¹ It is estimated that at its height, CETA paid more than \$200 million a year to individual artists, arts organizations, and their community partners,²² the equivalent of more than \$1 billion per year in 2020.

Today, most government funding of arts is at the local level. In fiscal year 2020, combined arts funding from the NEA, state government, and local government totaled \$1.47 billion, or \$4.42 per capita. As Figure 1 shows, nearly 60 percent of that funding comes from municipal and county governments (\$860 million, or \$2.61 per capita),²³ while a little more than 11 percent is from the NEA (\$162 million, or \$0.49 per capita). Private funding for the arts is still significantly greater than public funding. By comparison, funding for the arts by the 1,000 largest arts philanthropies in 2018 (most recent year available) was more than twice the total of all government investment in the arts at \$3 billion.²⁴

Figure 2 compares funding for arts and culture through WPA and CETA to current levels of government funding for the arts.

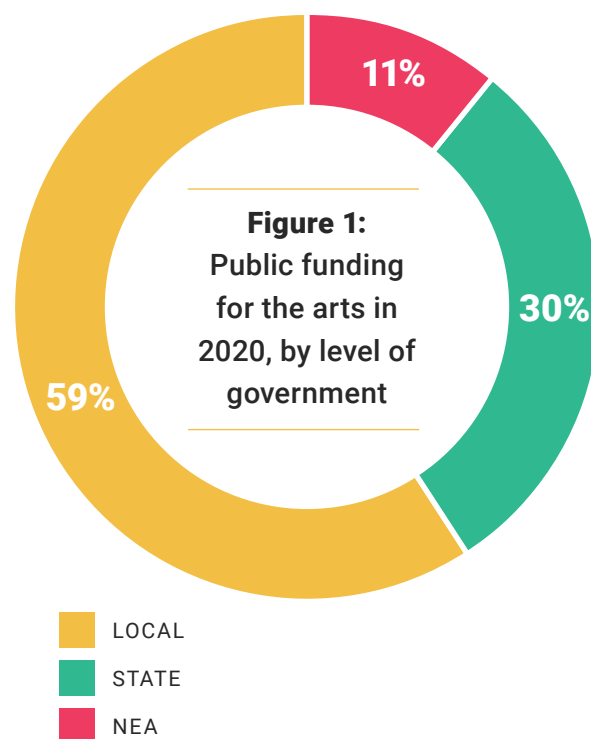
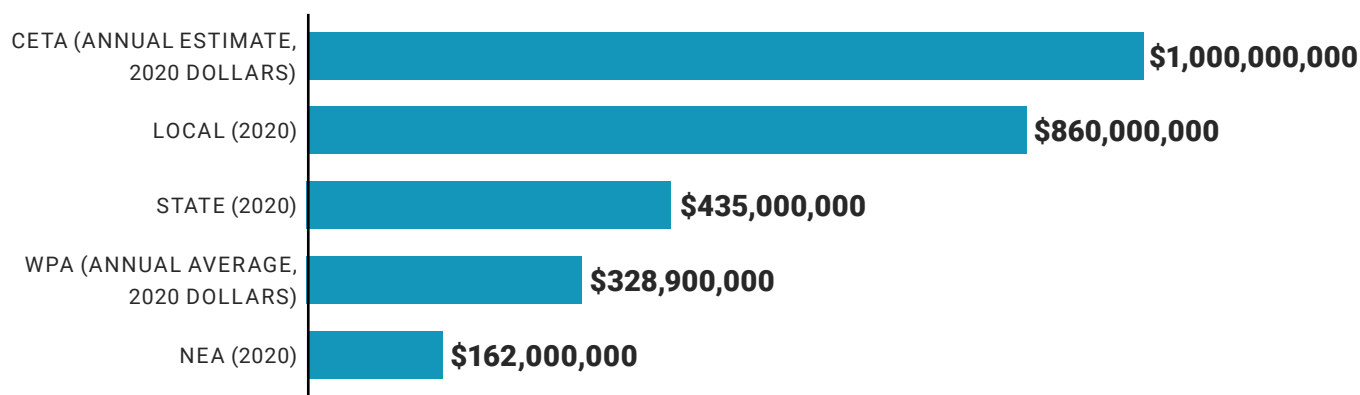


Figure 2: WPA and CETA compared to current public funding for the arts (2020)



Artist residencies in government

While artist residencies in federal agencies are not common, they do exist. The NASA art program was launched in 1962 and has commissioned such artists as Norman Rockwell, Robert Rauschenberg, and Laurie Anderson.²⁵ At NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, designer Dan Goods leads The Studio, a team that turns the work of scientists and engineers into stories that are accessible to the general public.²⁶ They also help the scientists and engineers they work with imagine the future. The National Park Service founded its artists residency program in 1916, recognizing that artists can contribute to the conversation about preservation, environmental issues, and park resources. Today 50 different parks, preserves, monuments, and historical sites across the system host artist residencies.

Local arts agencies traditionally provide grants and loans to arts nonprofits and individual artists, oversee or fund arts education programs and services, manage cultural facilities, and administer public art programs.²⁷ In recent years, local governments have begun to launch artist-in-residence programs, seeking to harness their creativity to “find innovative solutions to public sector problems.”²⁸

Possibly the first local artist residency in a non-arts government agency was Mierle Laderman Ukeles in the New York City Department of Sanitation beginning in 1978.²⁹ Since then, other government agencies have structured formal programs to embed artists into their work for delimited periods of time. While each program connects artists with city agencies, they function differently and respond to the needs of the agency as well as the community.

Literature on artist residencies in government is also beginning to emerge. A guide by the arts nonprofit, *A Blade of Grass*, in collaboration with the Animating Democracy program at Americans for the Arts, presents these programs as partnerships between local government and artists that use creative processes to engage residents and improve communities. As the guide explains, “Partnerships merge municipalities’ and artists’ distinct ways of working, allowing them to address issues in new ways; and aspire to greater goals in service of the public than they can reach separately.”

Johanna Taylor has found that, “Some residencies focus on agency engagement with residents and culminate in visible art products while others are internally facing within an agency and the reflexive process is the outcome.”³⁰ The fact that an art process is sometimes the primary or even only outcome of these residencies rather than an art product, presents challenges, especially for working with individuals who are unfamiliar with concepts such as creative placemaking or placekeeping and social practice art. She also notes that artist residencies in local government are usually flexible and open by design rather than prescriptive like a creative services contract. This has the potential to create conflict over “the distribution of power between artist and agency, specifically who created the conditions for the work, who defines goals, who controls the outputs.”³¹

Many artist residencies run by local government have arisen to aid creative placemaking, a community development process that navigates between public, private, and nonprofit funding to shape projects using arts and culture strategies. Other residencies revolve around cultural work as a means to support community-based models

of development and care. Roberto Bedoya, the Cultural Affairs Manager at the City of Oakland, launched the Cultural Strategists-in-Government program in 2019 to embed artists in departments across the city using what he terms “creative placekeeping.” The creative placekeeping framework offers a way to not just preserve the cultural history and memories of a community but to keep them alive and intact. It provides community members a way to maintain agency in their lives and neighborhoods.

While some programs have been initiated by arts and culture departments, others are shaped by public-private partnerships between a city and a separate organization. Many have grown out of public art divisions and draw on funding from percent for art programs.

In 2015, the City of Los Angeles placed artist Alan Nakagawa in residence as the city’s first Creative Catalyst with the Department of Transportation, working on its Vision Zero initiative to reduce traffic deaths.³² During the same period, Arts and Culture’s Civic Art division had developed cross sector partnerships where artists supported other divisions of LA County government, including the multi-artist Antelope Valley Art Outpost project,³³ Kim Abeles’ *Valises for Camp Ground*,³⁴ and the department’s first artist residency where Sandy Rodriguez worked with residents of the MLK Hospital Recuperative Care Center.³⁵ These programs served as both inspiration and models for the Creative Strategist program launched a few years later by Los Angeles County.



A billboard in the Westmont/West Athens area designed by Clement Hanami and community members as part of the Vision Zero initiative.

MUNICIPAL ARTIST RESIDENCIES

LA County's Creative Strategist program is one of a limited but growing number of government-run artist-in-residence (AIR) programs across the US designed to support non-arts government functions. These programs often utilize art or cultural practices to improve a government's engagement with the residents they serve. While others likely exist, we were able to identify seven that focus in some way on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We selected this focus because Arts and Culture's Creative Strategist program is intended as a model for arts-based, cross sector projects and community engagement with County departments to support diversity, equity, and inclusion across all domains of civic life. Those seven residencies are listed here, along with links where you can learn more about them.

Artist in Residence Program City of Austin Cultural Arts Division

AUSTIN, TEXAS, USA

The City of Austin recognized that, "As out-of-the-box thinkers, artists can offer unique perspectives on civic processes, often resulting in engaging, imaginative interventions that resonate with the community." The idea of placing an artist in residence in a city department emerged from a mayoral task force seeking to address institutionalized racism. Selected artists are asked to develop creative approaches to address issues identified by the participating department. The first residency took place in 2017. For more information, visit <http://www.austintexas.gov/page/artist-residence-program>.

Artists-in-Residence Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, USA

This AIR brings together artists and city employees to address community and social justice. The artists bring artistic expertise and experience with creative approaches while city staff provide subject matter expertise and experience with existing municipal systems. Together, they co-design projects responsive to the social and political context, testing new approaches to City policies and processes. The program launched in 2015. For more information, visit <https://www.boston.gov/departments/arts-and-culture/boston-artists-residence-air#three-years-of-boston-air>

Indigenous Artist in Residency Program City of Calgary Public Art Program

CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA

The purpose of Calgary's Indigenous Artist Residency is to foster a supportive environment and provide time and space for Indigenous artists to research and develop their ideas while honoring the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the region. The first three residencies took place in 2017. For more information, visit <https://www.calgary.ca/csps/recreation/public-art/indigenous-public-art.html>.

Artist in Residence Program Edmonton Arts Council

EDMONTON, ALBERTA, CANADA

The artist-in-residence program embeds local artists into different areas in Edmonton to engage with the community. While some artists are placed in city departments, others are placed in community organizations. The first residencies took place in 2015. For more information, visit https://www.edmontonarts.ca/artists_in_residence/.

Artist in the Public Realm Residency Greater Pittsburg Arts Council

PITTSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA, USA

The Office of Public Art's approach to artist residencies is to foster collaboration between artists, hosts, and organizers without preconceived notions of the outcome. The goal is to have entities work together to implement a creative project that engages communities. The first residencies took place in 2017. For more information, visit <https://www.pittsburghartscouncil.org/component/content/article/20-general/4208-artist-in-the-public-realm-residency->.

Cultural Strategists-in-Government City of Oakland Cultural Affairs Division

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, USA

Launched in 2019, Oakland's Cultural Strategists-in-Government program is designed to "advance transformational change" in city government and to advance equity in Oakland's communities. Five departments were selected for the first placements. Acknowledging that the work of local government can be "complex and often perplexing," cultural strategists were seen as adaptive synthesizers of competing viewpoints who can bring "alternative forms of wisdom" to find new ways to solve problems. The original RFQ to select cultural strategists can be found here: <https://city-of-oakland-california.forms.fm/request-for-qualifications-rfq-for-cultural-strategists-in-government/forms/5689>.

Creative Strategies Initiative City of Seattle Office of Arts and Culture

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, USA

Seattle's Creative Strategies Initiative is designed to build the capacity of city employees for transformational, anti-racist organizing in their daily work. Artists, cultural organizers, and healers are placed as designers and facilitators, leading projects that use arts, culture, mindfulness, and embodiment to interrupt the culture of white supremacy and cultivate a culture of belonging. This initiative grew out of a partnership between the City's Office of Arts and Culture and its Office for Civil Rights. For more information, visit <https://www.seattle.gov/arts/programs/racial-equity/creative-strategies-initiative>.

FURTHER READING

A starter list of websites and articles relevant to the emerging field of government-run artist residencies:

6 Reasons Government Should Collaborate with Artists, by Mallory Nezam, 2019, <https://medium.com/@nezombie/6-reasons-government-should-collaborate-with-artists-57c5e0305a55>

Art Practice as Policy Practice: Framing the Work of Artists Embedded in Government, by Johanna K. Taylor, *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2021.1925193>.

Artist Residencies in the Public Realm: A resource guide for creating residencies and fostering successful collaborations, by the Office of Public Art, Pittsburgh, PA, 2014, https://opapgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Artist_in_the_Public_Realm_Residency_Resource_Guide.pdf

Artists in Local Government, by Joanna Woronkiewicz and John Michael Schert, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2020, <https://oneill.iupui.edu/doc/research/artists-in-local-government.pdf>

City as Partner: Three Artists on Collaborating with Government Agencies, *A Blade of Grass Magazine*, 2018, <http://abladeofgrass.org/articles/city-partner-three-artists-collaborating-government-agencies>

Creative Citymaking Minneapolis: An Adaptive Action Evaluation, by Rainbow Research for Intermedia Arts, 2017, <https://rainbowresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/creative-city-making-evaluation-report.pdf>.

Embedded Aesthetics: Artist-in-Residencies as Sites of Discursive Struggle and Social Innovation, by Michael Lithgow and Karen Wall, *Seismopolite* 19, 2017, <https://www.seismopolite.com/embedded-aesthetics-artist-in-residencies-as-sites-of-discursive-struggle-and-social-innovation>

How Artists Change the City: Year Three Program Evaluation, by Sherman Cultural Strategies, 2018, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19EeLIHeXywhYyZJToNVGIgfLLyD-acZW/view>

Irrigate: Artist-Led Community Development, by Springboard for the Arts, 2014, <https://springboardexchange.org/irrigate>

Municipal-Artist Partnership Guide, by A Blade of Grass and the Animating Democracy program at Americans for the Arts, 2017, <https://municipal-artist.org>

Residencies in Municipal Government, Alliance of Artists Communities, no date, <https://artistcommunities.org/publicrealm-municipal>



**WALK TO
EMPOWER.**

— Identify your skills,
strength,
allies
(friends, family, plants).

— Affirm what you do know,
your inner fire,
your gifts.

*Sandra de la Loza's Walk
for Wellness at Earvin
"Magic" Johnson Park.*

ENDNOTES

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For more information about CEII, please visit <https://www.lacountyarts.org/about/cultural-equity-inclusion-initiative/cultural-equity-inclusion-initiative>.
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Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors

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Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture

Kristin Sakoda
Director

Evaluation Conducted and Written by

Robin Garcia
Cross Sector Analyst
Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow

Designed by

Anna Artemis Mhkikian

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