



CREATIVE STRATEGIST PROGRAM EVALUATION

DECEMBER 2021

CREATIVE STRATEGIST PROGRAM PILOT PHASE

Part 3 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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CREATIVE STRATEGIST PILOT PHASE

BACKGROUND AND INITIAL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

In its original design, the Creative Strategist program would begin with two placements in year one, three in year two, and four in year three. For each residency, \$50,000 was allocated, with a total of nine residencies initially funded over three years. The original Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII) recommendation envisioned that every County department would have had a creative strategist and that, “over time these residencies will grow into permanent LA County employee positions.”⁴¹ A new full-time County position was established and funded at Arts and Culture to develop and oversee the program, called the “Cross Sector Manager.”

Early in program design, Arts and Culture staff realized the Cross Sector Manager needed to have a wide-ranging skillset, including an understanding of the structure and norms of County government, knowledge of arts practices for social good, and strong administrative skills. There was significant discussion early on about whether the Creative Strategist program should be placed within Civic Art or whether it should be a standalone program. While it would involve hiring artists and be built on projects that had been run by the Civic Art division, the work of the creative strategists was expected to roll out in ways that would be different from a standard public art process. The program was first placed in the Civic Art division. Until a permanent Cross Sector Manager could be hired, Pauline Kanako Kamiyama, then Deputy Director of Civic Art, was assigned to design and launch the program. As

she said, “The division had a tradition of socially engaged work. The Creative Strategist program built on that history and aimed to look at how an artist practice could impact and leverage county investments in certain areas.” Those prior projects included the Antelope Valley Art Outpost project, Kim Abeles’ *Valises for Camp Ground*, Sandy Rodriguez’s residency at the MLK Hospital Recuperative Care Center, and the multi-artist Creative Graffiti Abatement Project at four sites in South Los Angeles.⁴²

An application process was developed that was a hybrid between traditional public art and arts grants processes. Standard practice in public art is to scope a project through a series of meetings with the artist and host department(s) where the artwork is to be placed, coming to consensus on the final product before the project begins. This is different from Arts and Culture’s Organizational Grants Program (OGP) where grants are made to organizations to implement projects proposed by grantees. For the Creative Strategist program, County departments interested in hosting a residency submitted a letter of interest in which they proposed a challenge or initiative that the residency would address that aligned with the CEII initiative. Kamiyama said, “During the application process, we were really looking to see if a department was serious about systems change work and if they understood that an artist was not there to play the role of an intern or there for a creative services contract.”

Arts and Culture worked with the departments selected to host a creative strategist, honing and clarifying the goals of the residency. Together, Arts and Culture co-wrote with the host department each request for proposal (RFP) to seek an artist for the residency. Each RFP was shared widely throughout the region's artist community.

Artist applications were scored by a panel that included staff from both Arts and Culture and the host department, professional artists, and co-chairs of the CEII Advisory Committee. Kamiyama was intentional about bringing on artists who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) to the applicant panel to ensure there were diverse perspectives and lived experiences present in the evaluation and selection processes. Finalists were scored both on the content of their proposal and their demonstrated ability to communicate effectively with a non-arts audience. The artists also needed to have some experience dealing with government. As a result, she said, the residency was unlikely to select a first-time social practice artist.

For each residency, a single individual artist was selected. In practice, the terms “creative strategist” and “artist” came to be used interchangeably by Arts and Culture, the host departments, and by the artists themselves. Each host department was required to select a staff person to oversee the residency, designated as the “department connector.” Host departments were also required to provide a desk and phone to the artist in order to integrate them into their larger system, as well as a County-issued email address. Because this program was an outgrowth of the County's CEII process and was intended to increase access to the arts for all residents of LA County, Kamiyama was intentional about connecting the creative strategists to CEII documents and concepts.

It was expected that each residency would begin with a research phase where the creative strategist would learn about the department and its work. Based on this research, the creative strategist would submit a project proposal to the host department for approval. After finalizing the project, the creative strategist would carry it out.



*Community engagement with creative strategist
Deborah Aschheim at the Compton Pride Festival*

Creative strategists and their host departments were given flexibility for how they would roll out this process, but everything had to occur within the residency's 12-month period.

The residencies were structured such that creative strategists were under a part-time, flexible contract to account for the natural ebb and flow of the project, but the total dollar amount of the \$40,000 stipend was equally divided over the 12-month period so the artists would have steady, consistent income throughout the residency.

While the first residencies launched in June 2018, Arts and Culture did not have a full-time, dedicated Cross Sector Manager on board until December 2019. During that 18-month period, Arts and Culture staff from different divisions were assigned various programmatic responsibilities in response to staff turnover. This included Kamiyama in Civic Art, the department's Board Liaison/Special Assistant, and the Cross Sector Analyst (the author of this evaluation).

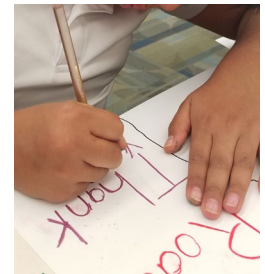
This section provides a description of each residency, including key players and major milestones. They are organized in chronological order with the cycle one residencies first (PLACE Program in the Division of Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention in the Department of Public Health, LA County Library, and Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk) followed by cycle two residencies (Office of Violence Prevention in the Department of Public Health, Department of Parks and Recreation, and Department of Mental Health).

Cycle One

As the first Creative Strategist residency was launching at LA County Library, another artist residency had already rolled out in partnership with the Department of Public Health, funded through Arts and Culture's Civic Art program. This residency was brought into the cohort with the other cycle one residencies. The other five residencies in cycles one and two were funded entirely by the Creative Strategist budget allocation.



Poet Rocio Carlos helps young patrons explore one of Alan Nakagawa's kamishibai theaters at the Claremont Helen Renwick Library.



For creative strategist Clement Hanami, it was important for members of the Westmont/West Athens community to see their words reflected in the artwork.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PLACE PROGRAM

Residency proposal⁴³

As a result of a long-standing collaboration with the Department of Public Health (Public Health) on the Healthy Design Workgroup, the then LA County Arts Commission proposed to embed an artist-in-residence in their PLACE Program (Policies for Livable Active Communities and Environments), working on one of the program's healthy communities issues. The residency's focus honed in on the Vision Zero initiative, a cross-departmental effort to reduce traffic fatalities and injuries in unincorporated areas of the county. The creative strategist would use arts-based methods to collaborate with community stakeholders, PLACE staff, and other

County departments to implement aspects of the Vision Zero action plan. The creative strategist would conduct field research and identify community assets, as well as barriers to safe walking and biking in areas where data showed high rates of traffic incidents with pedestrians. The artist in this role would work to create a communication bridge between the County and community and would develop artistic interventions, strategies, and engagement plans for programmatic activities to raise awareness of traffic safety issues. During the second year, the creative strategist would produce art happenings and/or artworks around Vision Zero goals.



Artist profile

Clement Hanami is a Japanese-American visual artist who grew up in East Los Angeles. He is currently the Vice President of Exhibitions and Art Director at the Japanese American National Museum (JANM). His most recent projects include curating the exhibitions *Instructions to All Persons: Reflections on Executive Order 9066* and *Transpacific Borderlands: The Art of Japanese Diaspora in Lima, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and São Paulo*. Hanami has exhibited work at many venues including the Geffen Contemporary, the Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, and Armory Center for the Arts.

Department profile

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health works to advance the conditions that support optimal health and well-being for the county's ten million residents. One of the department's top priorities is to advance health equity. The PLACE Program is a policy and systems change program within the department that oversees efforts to implement Vision Zero, an initiative that aims to eliminate traffic-related fatalities by 2025.

Department connector

Jean Armbruster, Director, PLACE program

The residency

Vision Zero is co-led by Public Health and the Department of Public Works (Public Works). Unlike the other Creative Strategist residencies, Hanami's was originally planned to run for two

years and was funded by Civic Art program funds from Arts and Culture. Because his residency spanned two years, Hanami was able to participate in both cycles, making suggestions in cycle one, some of which he saw implemented in cycle two.

Hanami started his residency by getting to know the department and embedding into the Vision Zero initiative. Fatal and severe collisions are a significant issue in the unincorporated neighborhoods of Westmont/West Athens, where his work focused. To get to know the community, Hanami connected with community organizations in the area on his own and participated in Public Health-sponsored events there, particularly PLACE Program's pedestrian planning and bicycle education work. He quickly observed that Public Health didn't have adequate staff to connect with the community. Jean Armbruster, Director of the PLACE Program and his department connector, agreed. She was

excited by the idea of Hanami using arts-based strategies to support a community-building process. She saw the creative strategist as providing a way to engage with residents in this highly impacted area as well as offering an avenue to work across departments. This became especially important when they began working on the production and installation of Hanami's final project.

Hanami's residency was the first of its kind for Arts and Culture, beginning a full year before the other Creative Strategist projects. Objectives of the program were not fully fleshed out when he started. As a result, Hanami and Armbruster had to work together to figure out how to navigate the residency and make the best use of this important new opportunity. Hanami soon discovered the people he worked with at Public Health generally thought art was something that could be seen or produced rather than a process. To expand their view, he took a group of 20 staff from Public Health and Public Works to JANM. At the museum they explored exhibits and had conversations about art and its connection to history and culture. This helped create a foundation he deeply needed in order to show the Vision Zero team how art could be used as a community building strategy.

To build his own skills and think through how to better use arts strategies for municipal projects, Hanami attended a training on civic practice art⁴⁴ with the Center for Performance and Civic Practice in Chicago.⁴⁵ He learned how to frame his ideas in a way that would resonate with department staff and leaders, thinking about his project as an avenue for community empowerment. The training, he said, "provided an alternative way of looking and creating and visual roadmaps" and a space for him to think

differently about what was, to him, the unfamiliar territory of LA County government.

In the initial phase of his residency, some of Hanami's work was done in partnership with the YWCA, where he led a series of youth video storytelling workshops on traffic safety. Youth told stories of how their families, friends, and community had been impacted by poor traffic safety. Together, they developed ideas and signage to make the built environment of the Westmont/West Athens area more pedestrian friendly. Over the course of the residency, Hanami conducted another series of workshops where community members could share ideas that would influence the final installation of community-based traffic safety signage in the area. In the last community engagement phase of the residency, Hanami expanded the workshops to a local library to solicit more input from families and seniors in the neighborhood. He emphasized that the goal was not only to promote traffic safety, but also to use the arts to increase civic participation and community agency.

His final project proposal involved incorporating the thoughts and ideas on traffic safety shared by people who live in the Westmont/West Athens neighborhoods, paired with their photographs, onto temporary public art for display on billboards and bus shelters in the area. It was important to Hanami for community members to see their own cautionary words, such as "slow down don't text," writ large for speeding drivers to see. He had gained their trust during his engagement with them, and wanted to empower their thoughts and ideas. Installation of a second component of his project proposal, a bike-rack in the shape of a pedestrian, were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and are scheduled for installation at the Woodcrest Library sometime in 2021. Hanami and Armbruster are also

proposing a final showing of the artwork created with community members at the Woodcrest Library, sometime in late 2021 or early 2022.

The first phase of the residency took longer than Hanami felt it should have. He spent significant time building community relationships, discovering in the process that many community members had a hard time taking his project seriously because they did not trust County government to deliver on their promises. Beyond this, there was a lack of clarity on the goals of the residency for both him and Public Health.

“ I had to figure out how County [government] worked and how the community worked. That was a big lift. ”
— CLEMENT HANAMI

Working with Public Works required negotiating how to get the department to support the idea of community-designed utility boxes in the Westmont/West Athens area. Hanami found these conversations and processes to be weighed and slowed by layers of bureaucracy. He believed that Arts and Culture relied too much on host departments to be champions of the arts. Support for the residencies and projects should have come directly from the department managing the Creative Strategist program. For Armbruster, there were times when she had to think through how to work with someone who was not a regular employee and was not required to follow the same rules and regulations.

“ I had to figure out how to manage someone whose schedule changed and sometimes would only work a few hours a week. ”

— JEAN ARMBRUSTER

In spite of these challenges, she noted that Hanami helped open the Vision Zero team’s eyes to the potential for art to support community engagement efforts, which for her was a positive outcome of the residency. On a personal level, she was inspired to attend additional exhibits at JANM. She also engaged in deep conversations with Hanami about culture, change, and history. His biggest impact, in her perspective, has been his contribution to using arts-based methods for community engagement.

Productive frictions

Hanami took on a number of unanticipated roles throughout the residency. He acted as researcher, a social practice/community engagement artist, a workshop designer and leader, municipal government translator, and a builder of hard art. He observed that the PLACE program didn’t have sufficient outreach staff, so he tried to get a sense of the impacted communities in the Westmont/West Athens area in order to fill that gap and design a project that would be relevant to local residents. Even as he did this, he was aware that after his residency there might not be anyone to continue his community engagement work.

Formats and language were sometimes sticking points. At times, he had to turn his ideas, designs, and proposals into a framework that

would be understandable to the Vision Zero team. Because both parties had to think outside the box, Hanami and the team had to build a new vocabulary for their collaboration. His roles changed as the project evolved, with Hanami, the PLACE program teams, Public Works staff, and the team at Arts and Culture all pivoting with each shifting moment of the residency.

The project post-residency

Installation of Hanami's work was delayed due to COVID-19. Temporary public art developed through community workshops was installed on billboards in the Westmont/West Athens neighborhoods in October-November of 2020. In 2021, a bike rack was being fabricated for installation at the Woodcrest Library. A second round of billboards and a display at the library were being planned. The residency was extended through March 2022.



Community members design signs to help make their neighborhoods safer.



Recommendations to improve the program

- Ensure support for the residency at the highest levels of both the host department and Arts and Culture.
- Creative Strategist program staff at Arts and Culture should have a mix of skills, including program management, social practice and civic practice art, community engagement, and equity.
- Define the goals of residency early on to make best use of creative strategist and host department time.
- Launch each residency with an orientation for creative strategists and connectors.
- Provide training for department connectors and creative strategists on how to work with each other and explore what kinds of changes the department wants to make.

— CLEMENT HANAMI AND
JEAN ARMBRUSTER



Images from Alan Nakagawa's residency with the LA County Library.

LA COUNTY LIBRARY

Residency proposal

LA County Library proposed to have their creative strategist develop a masterplan for their Artist-in-Residence (AiR) program, to include the entire 84-facility library system. The Library sought to use the residency to broaden its AiR program system-wide, to increase patron interaction and expression through performing and visual arts, and to find opportunities for staff and artists to share their experiences with the larger library community. The masterplan for the LA County Library AiR program would include strategies for communications, implementation, and evaluation.



Artist profile

Alan Nakagawa is an interdisciplinary artist who works with sound, video, sculpture, drawing, paint, performance, food, and (most recently) perfumes. He has held a number of residencies including artist-in-residence for California State University Dominguez Hills' Praxis Art/Ninomiya Photographic Archive and Creative Catalyst Artist in Residence at the City of LA's Department of Transportation. Nakagawa also hosts a radio show called Visitings on DUBLAB radio 99.1 FM, and is a co-founder of the arts collective Collage Ensemble (1984-2011). He has received grants and fellowships including Art Matters, City of Los Angeles Artist Fellowship, and a California Community Foundation Mid-Career Artist Fellowship.

Department profile

The Los Angeles County Library is the second largest library system in the country. It provides services to over 3.5 million residents living in unincorporated areas and to residents of 49 of the 88 incorporated cities of Los Angeles County and extends over 3,000 square miles. One of the Library's strategic initiatives revolves around being a center for learning while supporting and cultivating creativity in the community.

Department connector

Christiane Warburton, Assistant Library Administrator

The residency

In addition to developing a framework for an Artist-in-Residence program for the County Library system, Alan Nakagawa's residency was also intended to train librarians on how

they could use arts strategies for community engagement. His residency shifted quickly from those goals and his scope of work. Nakagawa began by learning about his new environment and embedding himself in the department. Within the first couple months, Nakagawa realized how enormous the library system was and had to come to terms with the fact that he had less than 12 months to finish this major project. In collaboration with Warburton, they decided Nakagawa would focus on five libraries, one located in each of LA County's five Supervisorial districts.

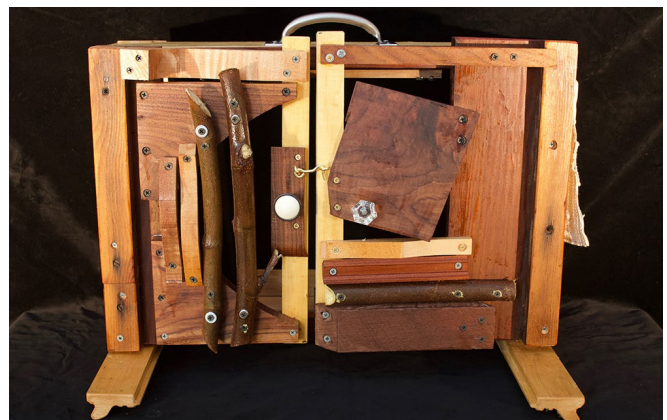
When he started his residency, the Library was going through an archiving and digitizing process, moving the department to online platforms. This shift was changing the work life of some of the librarians across the Library system, which Nakagawa thought could change the libraries' relationship with their surrounding communities. Therefore, in the investigatory

phase of his residency, he needed to understand each library's relationship with the specific community around it. This helped him think about how his own project could help with building strong community relationships. At the same time, he needed to learn what his department connector and other staff he worked most closely with understood about art. Similar to Hanami, he found that ideas about art in the department fit what he called "art in a box," crafts that could be easily replicated. To expand their understanding of what art could be, he spent time trying to gauge their art experience and interests, looking for ways to support and expand their conception of art. He also invited Warburton to view his exhibition at the Orange County Museum of Art, which he hoped would help expand her engagement with potential projects he might propose.

Nakagawa discovered few cultural access points between the rest of the county and the library. He identified a need at each of the five libraries he was working with to increase their capacity for programming that was responsive to the cultural needs of the surrounding community. Drawing on his experience in community engagement and social practice art, Nakagawa put together a proposal that would help each library develop relationships with its local community. He outlined different possible approaches a County Library Artist-in-Residence master plan could take, with phased implementation of arts-based activities at each library. One example he gave was the idea of a kamishibai theater, a traditional Japanese theater and storytelling form that often took place in town squares using hand-drawn cards in a wooden frame. He included kamishibai merely as an example or reference point for what the residency could include. Nakagawa presented his concept during a one-

on-one meeting with his department connector, who took it up the organizational ladder to obtain input and approvals. This approval process took about three months, and to his surprise Library leadership wanted Nakagawa to move forward with the kamishibai project.

Nakagawa collaborated with writer Rocio Carlos to help shape the storytelling aspect of the project. Together, they developed a plan to use the kamishibai project to support building relationships between each of the five libraries and its surrounding community. In each workshop, participants could collectively create a story based on local experiences and design images that would be showcased in a kamishibai theater handmade by Nakagawa for each library. While his kamishibai concept had only been



Nakagawa introduces one of his handmade kamishibai theaters to students at Topanga Elementary Charter School.

intended as an example of what was possible and not an actual proposal for what he would do, Nakagawa realized it made sense for the libraries. The project focused on storytelling around themes and issues important to community members, creating visual representations of their stories. It was also a good fit because librarians are familiar and comfortable with storytelling practices. They could build on their existing skills and knowledge to strengthen relationships with local residents.

Warburton experienced challenges moving Nakagawa's proposal through the approval process to get a green light. Departmental processes often had to be explained to Nakagawa, and they experienced communication challenges between him and Library staff, though over time those were ironed out. For his part, Nakagawa spent the early phase of his residency figuring out how to translate his artistic methods into the language of the department. For Warburton, the residency provided an opportunity for her to get to know the Arts and Culture department, which she had previously known little about.

While the original goal of the residency was to create a plan to build out future artist residencies, Warburton also wanted to use the residency to pilot a new marketing strategy. She hoped the residency would prove the value of person-to-person engagement as a way to promote the library to the public beyond traditional marketing and communications. The residency brought out things that Warburton already knew about government, including the fact that bureaucratic processes often slow down operations. Bringing Nakagawa on board brought this into sharp relief. Early on, both Warburton and Nakagawa realized the original vision of the residency would

be too much to accomplish within a single year, especially with all the internal changes taking place at the Library. Nakagawa's residency resulted in five kamishibai workshops, one in each of the selected libraries. Each library that hosted a workshop kept the kamishibai theater and the story from their workshop, in the hope that librarians might use both the concept and the theater itself in future workshops with the community.

At the end of the residency, Nakagawa was frustrated that he didn't have the opportunity to achieve the original goal of the residency. He was also frustrated with the length of time that it took to get his project approved. Reflecting some months later, however, he was ultimately happy with both the process and product. He had known that as the Creative Strategist program was in a pilot phase, there would be lots of lessons learned and that it was essentially an experiment. The kamishibai project turned out to be a perfect fit for the Library as it offered a tool to tell stories and engage the community. Nakagawa also realized that since the pilot had little structure, he had made a significant contribution by sharing what worked and what did not, offering suggestions for future cycles.



Evaluator Robin Garcia (center) conducting participant observation at one of Nakagawa's workshops.

Productive Frictions

One major frustration was realizing the scope of the original project to design a masterplan for a system-wide LA County AIR program was beyond the capacity of one artist in a one-year residency. Nakagawa had to scale his project down in a way that satisfied the expectations of County Library. He also had to spend time educating staff about art and its creative uses, finding creative ways to expand the knowledge of staff he worked with throughout the residency. The process Nakagawa went through to introduce the kamishibai theater shows how both the Library and Nakagawa had to learn from each other to work effectively.

The project post-residency

In 2019, funds from the Civic Art Program were set aside to bring Nakagawa back to do additional kamishibai storytelling workshops at libraries in the Second Supervisorial District, as well as to lead four training workshops for LA County librarians in kamishibai theater storytelling techniques. By the time the MOU between County Library and Arts and Culture was executed, the COVID-19 pandemic had shuttered libraries. Several strategy sessions over the 2020 summer between Nakagawa, Carlos, and staff from Library and Arts and Culture led to the development of a new engagement plan, which included creating four training videos, one of which focused on the history of kamishibai theater. The videos are now accessible to library staff for all 84 facilities. In January 2021, Nakagawa and Carlos led one live training session with Library staff over Webex, to close out the project. (See <https://lacountylibrary.org/kamishibai/>)



Recommendations to improve the program

- Include an orientation to different forms of art for department connectors and other staff working with the creative strategist. This would help to broaden their scope and understanding of what art is and what it can be used for.
- Introduce the residency from the top levels of the host department, to give it legitimacy and open doors throughout the department.
- Hold more meetings that include all participating creative strategists and department connectors to build on each other's projects and consider potential cross sector projects and relationships across the program. If done early enough in the residency, this could help departments determine what they wanted to accomplish.
- Extend residencies to more than a year in order to accomplish a more meaningful goal.
- Ensure that staff managing the program in Arts and Culture have experience with social practice art, civic practice, and/or public engagement.

— ALAN NAKAGAWA AND
CHRISTIANE WARBURTON



Images from Deborah Aschheim's residency with the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk.



A sampling of #365DaysOfVoters sketches by Aschheim.

REGISTRAR-RECORDER/ COUNTY CLERK

Residency proposal

The creative strategist was originally embedded in the Media, Communication, and Creative Services section of the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (Registrar-Recorder), working collaboratively to help formulate and implement a strategy for marketing and educating LA County residents about the Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP) initiative. The strategist would play a role as a bridge for communication between the County and community. Through an iterative process, the creative strategist would develop artistic interventions, collateral, strategies, and engagement plans for programmatic activities inclusive for all residents. Activities were imagined to include both community- and artist-initiated projects, workshops and convenings, happenings, events, and site-specific artworks.



First artist profile

María del Carmen Lamadrid is a media designer and tinkerer from Puerto Rico based in Los Angeles. She is interested in fostering collaborative research methods for civic design practices shaped by post-colonial theory. She completed her MFA in Media Design from ArtCenter College of Design's Media Design Practice/Field. Lamadrid authored the *Social Design Toolkit*, a critique of neoliberal practices that foster structural inequality in social design. Her work has been featured in the 2009 National Art Sample of Puerto Rico, by the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning at the University of Sydney, and other places.



Second artist profile

Deborah Aschheim's work explores collective memory and place-based narratives. She makes installations, sculptures, and drawings, combining studio production with oral history and community engagement. Aschheim's solo exhibitions include the Barrick Museum at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; the Richard Nixon Presidential Library; Suyama Space in Seattle; San Diego State University; the Mattress Factory Museum in Pittsburgh; Otis College; and Laguna Art Museum. She has created public artworks for Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center in Downey, the Sandler Neurosciences Center at UCSF, Amazon.com in Seattle, the City of Sacramento, and the Los Angeles Police Department. Aschheim has also been artist-in-residence in a number of programs.

Department profile

The Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk provides essential records management and elections services for the County. Among other records, the Registrar-Recorder is responsible for voter registration, voter files maintenance, administering federal, state, local, and special elections, and verifying initiatives, referenda, and recall petitions. LA County, with more than 500 political districts and 5.7 million registered voters, is the largest and most complex county election jurisdiction in the US.

Department connector

First connector: Brenda Duran, Media and Communications

Second connector: Mike Sanchez, Media and Communications

The residency

María del Carmen Lamadrid was the first artist selected for the residency at the Registrar-Recorder. She was assigned to support the team working on the rollout of the new Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP) system, a major overhaul of the entire system for how elections are run in LA County, from software to machines to voting locations. She was placed in the communications division and began by holding a series of workshops to get staff input on the new voting system while also recommending new approaches the department could use for community engagement. She quickly ran into challenges getting approval for activities she proposed. She struggled to gain access to relevant VSAP staff and found herself limited to creating marketing materials and other work she considered to be more akin to a creative

services contract. This conflict was not resolved in a timely manner. Eventually the program was paused, and an agreement reached between Registrar-Recorder and Arts and Culture to restart the program with a different artist placed in a different unit of the VSAP project with a different connector.

The second artist placed in residence at Registrar-Recorder was Deborah Aschheim. As she came on board, her original department connector left for a job in a different County department. Mike Sanchez took her place as connector. In reflection after the residency, Sanchez noted that the process of matching artists to host departments should be improved, to better align with expectations including staff roles and responsibilities.

By the time Aschheim was being onboarded, cycle two of the Creative Strategist program had begun. Based on experiences in cycle one, Arts and Culture was beginning to provide more structure and support to the creative strategists and host departments, primarily through regular meetings that allowed the creative strategists and department connectors to learn from and support each other. A more intentional, three-phase structure for the residencies began to be articulated: 1) Research; 2) Project development and negotiation; 3) Execution and implementation phase.

During the research phase, Aschheim engaged in a series of activities to understand the inner workings of the Registrar-Recorder as well as the different community projects and groups already engaged in the VSAP initiative. She went on a listening tour, meeting with staff in different divisions at Registrar-Recorder, attending outreach events where staff explained VSAP to

the public, and attending vote center placement project meetings promoting the adopt-a-vote-center project. She also sought to understand what Registrar-Recorder staff thought about art and its potential for their work. Over the summer she worked on a mock election and visited schools to try to launch projects for the Next Generation of Voters initiative. Aschheim began to propose small-scale arts activities to support voting, such as stickers that kids could make while their parents or caregivers voted, so a lack of childcare wouldn't be a hinderance to voting.

Registrar-Recorder was preparing to roll out VSAP for the March 2020 Primary Election. Aschheim worked with the consultant Registrar-Recorder had hired to create an adopt-a-vote-center project, tapping her personal contacts at local universities and community colleges to try to build a network of campus-based vote centers. Finding the right contacts at colleges and universities who were interested in becoming a vote center and had both decision-making and contracting authority was a major challenge. A few schools that expressed interest in being a vote center ultimately backed out. When she learned about the *Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act*, a bill that required all

community colleges, California State campuses, and University of California⁴⁶ campuses to create voter education and election awareness programs for the 2020 election, she worked to access matching funds made available by the bill for the schools she was working with. In total, she worked with four Cal States and six community colleges.

Aschheim submitted a proposal to increase peer-to-peer messaging and voting among students with disabilities, working class people, people of color, and LGBTQ+ youth by designing get-out-the-vote art workshops at some of the new vote centers located on college campuses. Once approved, she began outreach to people on campuses where she already had contacts in arts departments. She expanded this to reach out to people who worked in other departments, in facilities management, and dean's offices. Her goal was to make the workshops accessible and attractive to students, and for professors to integrate them into the curriculum. She wanted students to feel valued as a resource and to shed light on issues they care about.

Aschheim describes her experience as “a constant process of aligning and realigning until the very last day.” Every time there were shifts and turns, or new projects Registrar-Recorder wanted her to work on, she met those needs but it meant she had to shift her project timeline. As an artist she felt she was well positioned to ebb and flow with the process.

At voter outreach events, Aschheim would often set up a table with a sign to encourage people to come up and talk to her. This was intended as a simple icebreaker. She would (with their permission) photograph each person, sketch a portrait of them, and Registrar-Recorder would post the portrait, along with their reason for



Voter outreach materials created by students at LA Valley College, on display on campus.

voting, on their social media channels with the hashtag #365DaysOfVoters. As the hashtag suggests, Aschheim's goal was one voter for every day of the year.

“ The idea was, if I could get everybody that I could reach to participate, then their friends would see that they're voting, and that might get them to vote.

— DEBORAH ASCHHEIM

In reflecting on the residency, Sanchez said it would have been helpful if the residencies began with project activities and a timeline, so that there would have been a clear path forward. He also recommended that rather than an individual connector, host departments should designate a team to facilitate the residency as a way to have a larger accountability process. This would have helped anchor Aschheim to the department and given her greater access and buy-in across divisions. It took time for Sanchez and other Registrar-Recorder staff to adapt to working with someone who had more autonomy than a full-time staff member. Recognizing this challenge, Aschheim worked to build relationships in order to show the value she brought, a process that took time. Aschheim also stated that if she had been placed in closer proximity to executive decision makers, this would have enabled her to more easily work in the system. She sometimes found it challenging to identify who could provide resources or sign off on tasks she was working on. Registrar-Recorder staff were very busy with implementation of the new elections system, and the stakes were high. Team members she worked with did not always have the bandwidth to help or authority to make decisions. She also wanted

more time and opportunity to think critically and strategically with the program manager at Arts and Culture and with the creative strategist cohort. There were times when she wanted more support from the host department or from Arts and Culture than was available.

Aschheim believes that what made the project successful was that the Registrar-Recorder was squarely focused on one thing and that was the new voting system. Her entire residency was about supporting VSAP and Registrar-Recorder, using the principles of the Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative as a guide. She notes, “This kept me on my toes always thinking about what I could do to be most helpful in the process and make the project meaningful.”

Aschheim's residency came to an end just as the COVID-19 pandemic was declared and shutdowns were announced across the economy, including college campuses. The work she was doing in person with college students suddenly shut down as well. Voting changed dramatically in 2020 and nearly 80 percent of all eligible voters in the county mailed in their ballots or put them in a Registrar-Recorder Drop Box.



Voter outreach staff working for the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk.

Productive frictions

Aschheim navigated her residency by doing an analysis of where the department was at in its approach to community and underrepresented voting populations. “I look for problems that have never been solved, problems they’ve given up on solving.” She spent a significant amount of time assessing what was going on in the department, how she could contribute, and determining what divisions or staff could be allies. Whenever new directives came down from above, Aschheim had to shift to match the moment. Aschheim felt she had to repeatedly show the value she could bring to the department. She was able to meet that challenge because she had extensive background in electoral campaign work, as well as art, critical theory, and experience with systems analysis. She used her sessions with the program manager at Arts and Culture to reflect on changes at the Registrar-Recorder in terms of programmatic shifts, interpersonal events, and project development.

The project post-residency

While the work Aschheim did on college campuses was eclipsed by historical events, she continued to work on outreach to voters. After the pandemic was declared, her #365DaysOfVoters project took on a life of its own. She created an Instagram account by that name and continued to solicit participants. She partnered with cities of Glendale and Pasadena as well as local activist groups to gather more participants. By the time of the November 2020 presidential election, she had drawn 700 people. (See <https://www.instagram.com/365daysofvoters>)



Recommendations to improve the program

- Begin the residency with an orientation to the department and to the arts, for both creative strategists and department connectors.
- Establish a team in the host department to facilitate the residencies that includes executive level leaders and program staff.
- Place the creative strategist as close as possible to leadership to improve residency buy-in and to speed the approval process for creative strategist activities.
- Structure cohort strategy meetings so that creative strategists can think through projects, department dynamics, and navigation together.
- Increase the investment from Arts and Culture in terms of program funding, staff support, and professional development for both creative strategist and department connectors.
- Focus the residency specifically on one very tangible program or project in the host department.

— DEBORAH ASCHHEIM AND
MIKE SANCHEZ

Cycle Two

During the first cycle of the residency it became clear the creative strategist needed to be placed as close to the executive level of the department as possible. In the second cycle, Arts and Culture asked potential host departments how close they would place the creative strategist to leadership, and what access the creative strategist would have across the department. In interviews to select departments for the second cycle, Arts and Culture had a conversation with the potential host about the possibility of

extending the residencies beyond a year, to gauge interest in long-term investment to support the vision for the project.

Building on feedback from creative strategists and department connectors during the first cycle, Arts and Culture decided that it would be a great benefit to build overlapping cohorts for increased success, artist professional development and to support the cross sector potential of the program.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

STEPS

1—
FOLD PAPER in half diagonally and cut excess paper to create a square.

2—
OPEN UP paper and fold in half into a rectangle.

3—
FOLD IN HALF again to make a folded square.

4—
DRAW, then cut a line for the outside edge of your mandala shape. This line can be curvy, geometric or both.

5—
SIMILAR TO MAKING PAPER SNOWFLAKES, cut shapes out of the folded sides of the paper. Save these shapes in case you want to use them later.

6—
KEEP PAPER FOLDED in fourths. Now fold diagonally so that new creases radiate from center of mandala.

7—
CUT NEW SHAPES out of this fold. You may need to unfold once and refold a new diagonal crease separately as the paper gets too thick to cut through. Trace shapes to repeat where helpful.

8—
UNFOLD paper to see your mandala design and if you need to adjust any cuts.

9—
USING OTHER COLORS of paper, draw and cut a 'self' for the center of the mandala. You can do just a circle or a face and hair.

10—
THINK about a peaceful and calm facial expression and draw it onto your 'self'.

11—
CONTINUE TO CUT various shapes of different sizes and arrange them on your mandala. Create shapes that make you feel happy and good. Since most mandalas are contiguous and symmetrical, make sure your cut shapes are repeated in the circle and arranged evenly.

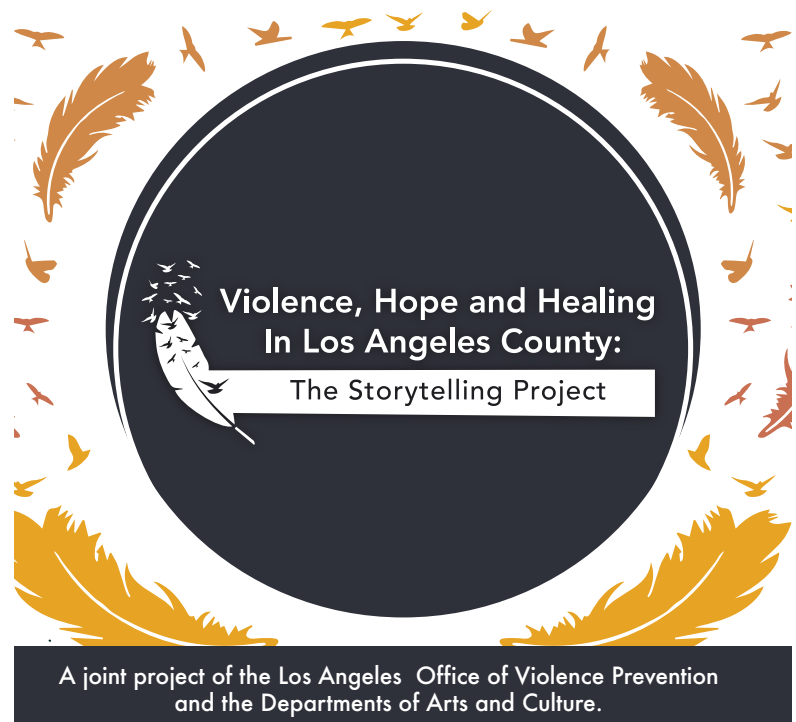
12—
GLUE all the elements down.

PEARL C. HSIUNG (pronounced *SHUNG*): The inseparable relationship of **HUMANS** and **NATURE** is central to my art practice and in this art activity. By studying this interconnection, I feel grounded, inspired, and further curious about our role **WITHIN** and as **A PART** of nature.

www.pearlchsiung.com, pearl@pearlchsiung.com



Instructions for how to make a wellness mandala, from Sandra de la Loza's "Creating Connections" guide for Parks.



Images from Olga Koumoundouros's residency with the Office of Violence Prevention.

OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Residency proposal

The Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health sought a creative strategist to play a key role in helping to create an environment that fosters innovative ideas and dialogue around trauma and violence prevention. The creative strategist would work to increase access to the arts, affect social change through innovative practices, and use creative techniques to increase stakeholder engagement and participation. This residency

was envisioned as engaging community-based organizations and sister County departments and programs to encourage staff to consider art as a critical component in their strategic planning and service delivery models. The work of the creative strategist would involve cultural research to inform OVP efforts to build its approaches and programming around the assets, diversity, creativity, and complexity of the communities it serves.



Artist profile

Olga Koumoundouros makes art projects that bring together personal narratives of her life with those around her in the context of understanding American power dynamics and their impacts. She is interested in how systemic structures buoy and harm the commons to inform an ever shifting American dream. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at venues including Human Resources, Armand Hammer Museum, REDCAT, Salt Lake City Art Center, Krannert Art Museum, Scottsdale (AZ) Museum of Contemporary Art, Palm Springs Art Museum, The Studio Museum, Stadshallen Belfort, Adamski Gallery, and Project Row Houses.

Department profile

The Los Angeles County Office of Violence Prevention sits within the Department of Public Health (Public Health). In 2019, the LA County Board of Supervisors passed a motion to establish and fund OVP. This Office works to strengthen coordination, capacity, and partnerships to address the root causes of violence, and to advance policies and practices that are grounded in race equity to prevent all forms of violence and to promote healing across all communities in Los Angeles County. OVP monitors the trends and circumstances of violent deaths affecting Los Angeles County to inform decision makers and program planners about ways to prevent and intervene on violence in the community, at home, and in the workplace.

Department connector

Andrea Welsing, Director of the Office of Violence Prevention

The residency

OVP is a new office within Public Health, established in February 2019. Artist Olga Koumoundouros had the opportunity to embed arts-based community engagement strategies into the Office's practices as it was being built. To begin to understand OVP, the communities it would serve, and relationships between the community and OVP, she attended seminars, webinars, and conferences. She also read books on violence prevention and trauma recommended by Andrea Welsing, the OVP Director, and staff of Public Health's Trauma Prevention Initiative. Koumoundouros met with Initiative staff, who conduct on-the-ground intervention work, and attended their meetings at local parks. She focused on bringing into her residency what she learned about implicit bias and the way racism has historically underpinned many contemporary health policies, especially exploring social determinants of health and their intersection with

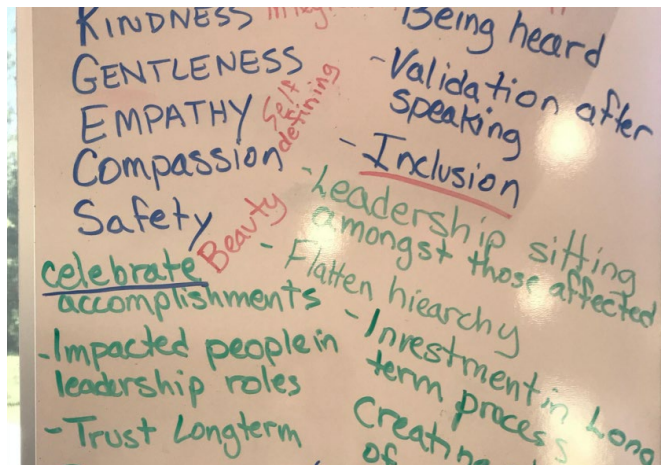
issues of race, class, and gender. Also during the research phase, Koumoundouros met with people from relevant government and community-based agencies, and with representatives of the Community Partnership Council, a newly-established advisory body that would help shape OVP's five-year strategic plan.

For her project, she proposed a collaboration with Joel Garcia, a community activist and artist whose work draws on Indigenous and ancestral traditions to support community and municipal initiatives through the arts. Using culturally-relevant and arts-based community engagement practices, they would co-facilitate an orientation convening for the Council. They hired Nkem Ndefo, a consultant who specializes in trauma-informed care, to develop and lead the trauma-informed aspects of the retreat. Their goal was to model a different approach to community engagement and offer a new and innovative way of connecting a government agency with community. Koumoundouros felt her role as a creative strategist was to bring out differing viewpoints, in this case between the members of the Community Partnership Council and staff at OVP.

For the orientation convening, Koumoundouros hired local vendors to provide food and created a gift bag for all participants. She bought healing salves, body butters infused with lavender and other essential oils from survivor-owned micro businesses. The bag itself was silkscreened by local youth. Using the County procurement process to purchase these items from small local businesses was challenging at times.

The retreat opened with a land acknowledgment accompanied by an altar building activity intended to open up space for a new kind of engagement that had the potential to intervene in the historical divides between government and

community. They used arts activities including drawing or mapping personal histories then sharing them in groups, and using markers and paper to sketch out ideas for the new OVP strategic plan. They led participants in a process of writing and drawing inspirational images or ideas on paper that covered the walls of the retreat center. These were then used to conduct a collective analysis on violence and to open up space for people with different viewpoints to share. Differences of opinion emerged between some members of the Council around approaches to and understandings of violence.



Images from Koumoundouros's orientation convening with OVP's Community Partnership Council.

These disagreements generated conversation between Koumoundouros, Welsing, Garcia, and Debbie Allen (Deputy Director of the Health Promotion Bureau at Public Health) around methods, process, and future goals. For Koumoundouros, this was a significant moment. She states, “Our job is to hold space and make a process that speaks to all involved and transforms them at the same time, both government and communities.” Welsing notes that the orientation convening and process set the tone and actually transformed the Creative Strategist residency.

“ Community partnerships have been the real gold thread in government efforts. Sometimes we need to tone down and step back and listen. This is what we are trying to do here. ”

— ANDREA WELSING

For both connector and creative strategist, reflection on the retreat was a pivotal moment in the residency. In reflection Koumoundouros said, “One of the qualities of being an artist is that we make something out of nothing. Our work is around being a generator or a catalyzer. White supremacy is not fluid. It is attached to power and we have to have a keen eye on how it continues to dominate in how we serve those that have historically been impacted. We have to look at how we continue to subdue into a place of neutrality on issues we need to take positions on.”

Many members of the Community Partnership Council were representatives of community organizations and Koumoundouros wanted to expand beyond that to include more community

residents. Welsing and Koumoundouros decided that for the remainder of the residency, in coordination with community-based organizations that worked on violence prevention, she would run a project where residents of impacted communities would share their personal stories and solutions to violence. These stories would be used to inform OVP’s strategic plan, and the material collected used to inform future policy change. Planning, creating, and distributing in multiple mediums could be a process to strengthen avenues of communication by sharing out community-based solutions to violence and input to local government directly from survivors.

In addition to the orientation, Koumoundouros proposed to create a conversation area inside a staff break room where quotations from the stories she gathered would be displayed. Using colorful writing materials on an easel, people could make additions and comments, sparking dialogue about the hopes and beliefs that inspired staff to do this work. She believed this could bring out the creative energy in the office and build up the internal creative space of the OVP.

Koumoundouros believes she played an important role as a translator; from the arts to government and back, and from the community to the agency.

“ Artists are softeners and communicators. Activists can also translate and be responsive but can sometimes be narrow and look for situations that fit into an analysis they already carry. ”

— OLGA KOUMOUNDOUROS



Koumoundouros used trauma-informed arts engagement strategies to engage OVP's Community Partnership Council members.

For Welsing, the iterative and often free form nature of the residency was both exciting and challenging. She appreciated the cohort meetings with other creative strategists and connectors throughout the year as a way to learn from each other. At the same time, she felt more structure would have made the residency more effective. She said it would have been helpful to have more support and guidance from Arts and Culture during the residency year, in things both big and small. For example, a delay in creating a new logo at Arts and Culture in turn delayed business cards, which were not sent to the creative strategists until more than halfway through their year residency. Greater promotion of the residencies along with press releases to share the news about the residencies at the beginning of the program would have been helpful.

For the residencies to have a lasting stamp on departments and their processes, Welsing said, one year is simply not long enough. "Without a lasting investment from Arts and Culture, or elsewhere, we might have just walked away with warm memories." Both Welsing and Koumoundouros recommend an orientation for all parties involved. Koumoundouros also

encouraged open discussion before the residency begins on the acceptability of experimentation and failure, so that departments would be less risk averse and more willing to be innovative.

Productive frictions

Preliminary planning of the Community Partnership Council orientation was instrumental to putting trauma-informed violence prevention models into practice. Learning how to navigate inside the institution of County government while utilizing tools related to the layered subject matter of violence and violence prevention was also challenging. The first two phases took most of the first year to get to a project proposal. The storytelling project that was proposed grew out of both the orientation and the subsequent discussions between the creative strategists and department staff, which were noted by many members involved to have been uncomfortable at times. The process-oriented nature of the residency and ongoing conversations between Koumoundouros and Welsing that were both practical and deeply theoretical were instrumental to designing and implementing the project.

The project post-residency

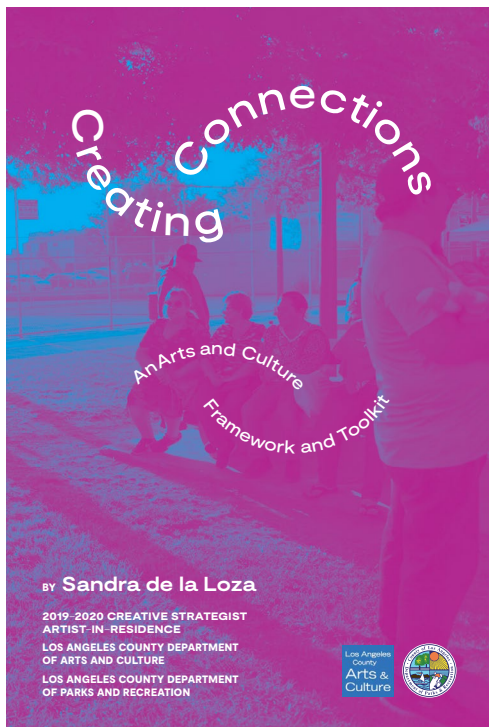
Realizing that a year was not enough time to carry out the storytelling project – it had already taken significant time to produce the orientation – OVP decided to provide funding to keep Koumoundouros on for a second year, which is nearing its conclusion at the time of this writing. Koumoundouros has collected nearly 100 stories from survivors of violence from a wide spectrum of perspectives, taking into consideration such factors as geography, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, age, gender, and type of violence. She is developing a book with the stories that will inform OVP's operations and be shared internally with other County agencies and externally with the public. Portraits of those storytellers who have given permission have been taken to accompany their stories in the book. Additionally, a research and evaluation partner – Community Health Councils – has been brought on board to code the stories and illuminate common themes. This data will be an important resource for OVP as they continue their work engaging communities impacted by violence.



Recommendations to improve the program

- Increase support from Arts and Culture including financial investment, curriculum development, and administrative support.
- Increase residencies to longer than a year for deeper impact.
- Ensure the team staffing the Creative Strategist program at Arts and Culture has social practice or civic practice skills.
- Kick off each residency with an orientation so all parties begin with a common knowledge of departmental language and operations as well as an understanding of creative strategist approaches.
- Promote the residencies more widely and visibly, both within County government and beyond.
- Encourage experimentation and risk-taking by making clear that failure is acceptable.

— OLGA KOUMOUNDOUROS AND
ANDREA WELSING



Images from Sandra de la Loza's residency with the Department of Parks and Recreation.

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Residency proposal

An internal inventory and assessment of programs conducted by the Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) had uncovered disparities in their programming. They applied for a creative strategist to collaborate with Parks staff to establish new standards for the creation, development, and enhancement of arts and culture as core programming and curriculum across all of its facilities. The creative strategist would further develop and implement a plan to help evaluate the extent to which Parks was reaching vulnerable populations. The creative

strategist would also facilitate partnerships between Parks and local artists to both connect the department with the vast resources of the local community and provide a platform for local artists. A large part of this work was intended to include development of culturally-relevant arts-based tools, activities, programs, and training materials that address existing inequities including race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, LGBTQ+ populations, and people with disabilities.



Artist profile

Sandra de la Loza is a community-engaged visual artist, arts educator, and organizer who resides in northeast Los Angeles, where she grew up. Within her artistic practice, she supports communities in finding and documenting hidden social and ecological histories to strengthen community bonds and relationships to place, and to support collective action toward community-led placemaking projects. She has exhibited her work in major museums, alternative art spaces, and community centers in the United States, Latin America, and Europe. De la Loza has also co-created autonomous spaces for artistic production, community action, and critical dialogue that center the voices and history of people of color, including Arts in Action (2000-2004), Decolonize LA (2016-2017), and At Land's Edge (2016-2018).

Department profile

The LA County Department of Parks and Recreation manages 183 parks, including natural areas, wildlife sanctuaries, lakes, trails, arboreta, and botanic gardens, as well as local, community, and regional parks. The department also maintains and manages the John Anson Ford Amphitheatre and the world-famous Hollywood Bowl in partnership with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Parks is committed to providing social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for all to enjoy.

Department co-connectors

Norma Garcia, Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation

Faith Parducho, Special Assistant to the Chief Deputy Director

The residency

De la Loza was placed in the Parks executive branch, which helped her to understand more quickly than some other creative strategists the department structure and the way it was broken down between administrative functions and geographic agencies. During the research phase of her residency, de la Loza observed that arts and culture programming varied from agency to agency within the parks system. Some agencies had more robust offerings like drawing or Aztec dance classes, but for the most part de la Loza found programming to be very sparse.

As she got to know the department, de la Loza familiarized herself with larger conversations around art in the public sector. She was particularly interested in learning how art could be used to create more inclusive practices and cultures within their agencies. Outside Parks, de la Loza did field research on different County-

run initiatives and programs that utilized arts. For example, she attended events like the *We Rise* exhibition and program sponsored by the Department of Mental Health. She sought to identify good partners for Parks, meeting with a number of community-based and grassroots arts organizations like Side Street Projects and artists who might not have previously had connections or access to County agencies. She also met with BIPOC artists as well as large institutions like LACMA.

At the same time, de la Loza connected with autonomous community projects, explored decolonial practices around health and wellness, looked at cultural plans and civic art programs outside Los Angeles, and read about creative placekeeping. She explored community-based program projects in the areas where County parks were located. She consulted with artists, cultural workers, and community organizers to get feedback on how to provide culturally relevant programming that draws on arts and wellness as a way to honor community knowledge and histories.

“ LA working-class communities of color have been so historically neglected and unsupported, and despite that have been so creative and resourceful. Arts production has grown and thrived despite that neglect. For me, the residency was shaped by my memory and experience as a child and how I lived and the importance of parks in my life.

— SANDRA DE LA LOZA

De la Loza said it took time to determine who to talk to at Parks about different issues. As the artists did in other residencies, de la Loza discovered that staff in her host department generally thought about art as an outcome like a drawing or painting. She often felt she was code switching, finding ways to translate her own artistic sensibility and perspective into governmental language. When presenting the findings from her research phase and in her proposal, she had to use language, logic, and equity goals that would make sense to Parks staff and leaders. By contrast, when working with community artists, she could more easily engage in a common language, and a shared understanding and approach. She also thought through how to translate the complex system of becoming a County vendor so that those opportunities could become accessible to diverse arts and community groups.

Her final project was a framework and toolkit for how Parks could creatively activate space and honor local cultural practices, ***Creating Connections***. The framework is broken into four different sections: Art and Community, Art and Wellness, Art and Food, and Art and Nature. Initially, de la Loza had proposed to implement the framework by working side by side with Parks staff. She wanted to enhance what each park was already doing rather than impose a new arts and culture framework from the top down. While the framework was published, there was not enough time to begin implementation during the residency year. Parks expressed interest in extending the residency for implementation, but due to budgetary constraints were able to extend the residency only for three months. De la Loza therefore did a number of presentations to Parks staff about how they could implement the framework.

Faith Parducho, one of de la Loza's two department connectors, said she was a perfect match for their department because of her prior work around land, archives, and investment in public space. She and de la Loza agree that a one-year residency is not enough. Two years and adequate funding to implement the framework and toolkit would be needed for long-term impact.

Productive frictions

After proposing an ambitious project, de la Loza and Parks realized they did not have the time or funding to implement it, so the project was scaled back. She pivoted to the moment and used her time to create a framework that could be adapted across the entire park system and implemented at any time. In the toolkit, she included interviews with community-based artists and developed lesson plans in each area of focus. By grounding the toolkit in community-based approaches, de la Loza sought to ensure that when Parks was ready for implementation, it could be adapted to any park location by consulting and contracting with local artists already identified in the toolkit.

The project post-residency

During her residency, de la Loza participated in an interpretive planning group for the newly-renovated Earvin "Magic" Johnson Park (EMJ Park), along with administrators from Parks, Public Health, and the National Park Service. As part of a broader partnership between Arts and Culture, Parks, and LACMA for arts programming at EMJ Park, Arts and Culture contracted with de la Loza for nine months to prototype elements of her *Creating Connections* framework. Parks sees this as a potential model for scaling up this work and implementing de la Loza's framework at other park sites. As part of her project, de la

Loza will develop a cultural asset map for EMJ Park, identifying arts and culture resources in the immediate surrounding Willowbrook neighborhood and will connect Parks staff to local artists and creative workers to provide relevant programming for the community. She will create a replicable and accessible curriculum that Parks staff can continue to use to create arts programming at this and other sites.



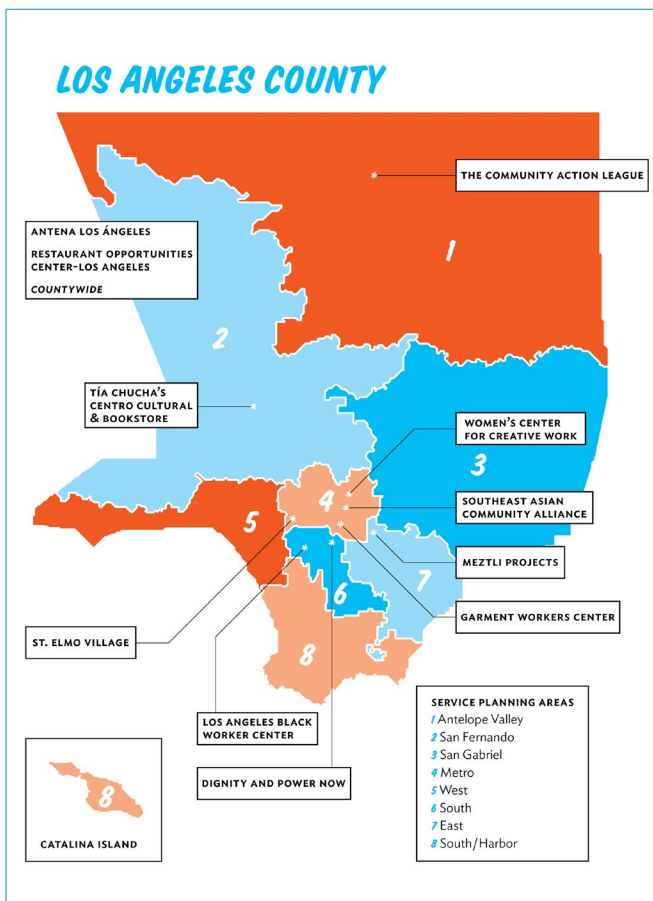
Recommendations to improve the program

- Expand the residencies to more than one year.
- Include funding to implement creative strategist projects in the host department after the residency has been completed.
- Provide greater administrative and financial support for the residencies from both Arts and Culture and host departments.

— SANDRA DE LA LOZA AND
FAITH PARDUCHO



De la Loza's activity prompts encourage park users to engage with nature for the Walk for Wellness event.



DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Residency proposal

The Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) proposed to have their creative strategist work on *We Rise*, a youth-focused mental health and well-being campaign that took place through ten days of pop-up art and music programming. The creative strategist would be embedded in the Strategic Communications Division, helping to create and implement a creative engagement strategy working directly with clients at the LACDMH Resource and Wellness Centers throughout the County.

Images from Anu Yadav's "Healing Through Story" toolkit, published as part of her residency with the Department of Mental Health.



Artist profile

Anu Yadav is a critically-acclaimed writer, performer, and theater artist and facilitator dedicated to art and social justice. She was an artist-in-residence at the Washington, DC, Public Library and named a Person to Watch in *American Theatre* magazine. Yadav wrote and performed the solo shows *Meena's Dream* and *'Capers* and co-founded the storytelling collective CLASSLINES. She is a member of the Actor's Equity Association, Dramatists Guild, Alternate ROOTS, Network of Ensemble Theaters, and the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

Department profile

The mission of LA County Department of Mental Health is to optimize the hope, well-being, and life trajectory of LA County's most vulnerable through access to care and resources that promote not only independence and personal recovery but also connectedness and community reintegration. LACDMH is the largest county-operated mental health department in the US with programs in more than 85 directly-operated sites and more than 100 co-located sites. LACDMH contracts with approximately 1,000 providers, including community-based nonprofit organizations and individual clinicians, to provide mental health services to people of all ages.

Department connectors

Mimi McKay, Director of Communications

Angel Baker, Division Chief, Program Development

Elaine Waldman, Health Program Analyst III

The residency

During her research phase, Yadav conducted a listening tour by connecting with community-based organizations whose work had a wellness component. She geographically mapped out these groups across the county, identifying their supervisorial district and their proximity to LACDMH wellness centers and clinics. Her map included Health Neighborhoods, sites LACDMH has identified as needing greater resources. She discovered that in a number of communities, the Wellness Centers and Clinics were not known or accessed, so she turned her research to identify projects that could bridge the gap between LACDMH resources and community organizations. The map Yadav created showed the geographic disconnect as well as the potential for creating strong pipelines between community and clinical sites.

Yadav focused on how arts and storytelling could heal and transform communities while also strengthening relationships between LACDMH and the communities they serve.

Her project was to create a curriculum and train LACDMH outreach staff on culturally relevant engagement strategies including storytelling and story circles. She brought in guests from community-based organizations such as the *Garment Worker Center*, a worker rights organization; *Dignity and Power Now*, a grassroots organization whose mission is to build a Black and Brown abolitionist movement rooted in community power; and *Antena Los Angeles*, a collective dedicated to language justice advocacy and organizing. Yadav prepared the curriculum and conducted arts-based community engagement workshops with outreach and engagement staff throughout the County, presenting concepts and methods of community organizing that could connect to the department's outreach goals. She facilitated a series of workshops for LACDMH Peer Resource Center staff on methods for listening and storytelling. She presented similar workshops on listening to other areas within LACDMH including with the Homeless Outreach Mobile Engagement program, Service Area Chiefs, Discipline Chiefs, Service Area Leadership Teams, and Underserved Cultural Communities meetings. She also met one-on-one with many staff.

Her final product was a 70-page toolkit called *Healing Through Story: A Toolkit on Grassroots Approaches* with interviews from 11 grassroots groups and exercises on arts-based strategies for community engagement, facilitation, and addressing implicit bias.

Similar to the other Creative Strategist program residencies, there was a lack of clarity early on among both the creative strategist and the host department about logistics and expected outcomes. Yadav was sometimes challenged to know who to talk to in the department about specific issues or decisions. Her flexible work hours were sometimes confusing for LACDMH staff. Yadav was in the middle of conducting a final set of workshops and outreach when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared and Safer at Home public health orders announced. She transitioned from storytelling workshops to simply finalizing the toolkit with detailed exercises. She mapped her toolkit onto the 2020-2030 LACDMH Strategic Plan to demonstrate how grassroots groups were already in alignment with many of the strategic plan goals in their work and function as community trusted wellness centers.

Productive frictions

Staffing shifts at Arts and Culture and LACDMH had a significant impact on Yadav's residency. Arts and Culture did not have a dedicated, full-time Cross Sector Manager for the program during the first six months of her residency. Her LACDMH department connector changed twice during the residency. Each new staff person had different skill sets and styles to which the creative strategist had to adapt. She and the other creative strategists worked together to bring forward their requests for consistent staffing, program development, and professional development to Arts and Culture leadership. Many of their requests were granted, including a more robust communication plan connected to the residency. Through this process, the creative strategists developed relationships and created a support system amongst themselves. Despite the

challenges, Yadav created a toolkit that connected to LACDMH's strategic plan and offered exercises on how to engage in culturally relevant outreach and build community leadership.

The project post-residency

In 2021, Yadav was hired by a consulting firm working for LACDMH to build on her community engagement work as part of a new installment of the department's *We Rise* program. She was tasked with outreach to artists, community groups, grassroots leaders, and healers to organize pop-up events including mural-making, ancestral healing workshops, and literary art to celebrate those communities and resources, and to use arts-based strategies for healing and well-being.



Interior page from Yadav's "Healing Through Story" toolkit.



Recommendations to improve the program

- Conduct two orientations, one for creative strategists on how government works, and another for department connectors on how artists work.
- Provide a curriculum to help creative strategists and department connectors develop skills in community engagement and civic practice.
- Provide professional development for creative strategists to develop skills in civic practice and art.
- Embed planning for future residencies that can build on the current residency.
- Use the residency to build relationships with other County departments for future residencies and other ways to partner.
- Provide consistent program staff at Arts and Culture and the host department.
- Develop transition plan in the case of staffing shifts.
- Ensure the team at Arts and Culture staffing the program are versed in civic practice in the arts as well as community engagement.
- Extend residencies to at least two or three years for long term impact.
- Identify project focus and goals early in the residency.

— ANGEL BAKER, ELAINE WALDMAN,
AND ANU YADAV



**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

- 41** Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, *Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative*, 2017.
- 42** Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture. *Report and Documentary Highlight Benefits of Artworks for Civic Engagement*. May 25, 2018. <https://www.lacountyarts.org/article/report-and-documentary-highlight-benefits-artworks-civic-engagement>.
- 43** Descriptions of each residency in this section are adapted from what was originally proposed in the Request for Qualifications issued for Creative Strategists. Each project evolved during the course of the residency.
- 44** “Civic practice” art is art that brings artists, culture bearers, designers, and others into collaboration with community around a goal, project, or vision.
- 45** See Center for Performance and Civic Practice, <https://www.thecpcp.org>.
- 46** California is home to 116 community colleges with 2.1 million students enrolled. California State University is made up of 23 campuses with 481,929 students, making it the largest four-year public university system in the United States. The University of California system is made up of ten campuses and 285,216 enrolled students.



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