



# CREATIVE STRATEGIST PROGRAM EVALUATION

DECEMBER 2021

FULL REPORT



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. Solis<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup>



*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.<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>4</sup> The Section of Fine Arts employed visual artists to decorate public buildings. A few years later, the American National Theater and Academy was chartered.<sup>5</sup>

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,<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> The CIA established the Congress for Cultural Freedom, made up of intellectuals, writers, historians, and artists.<sup>10</sup> 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."<sup>11</sup> It was funded for many years by the CIA, State Department, and conservative businessmen eager to fight Communism.

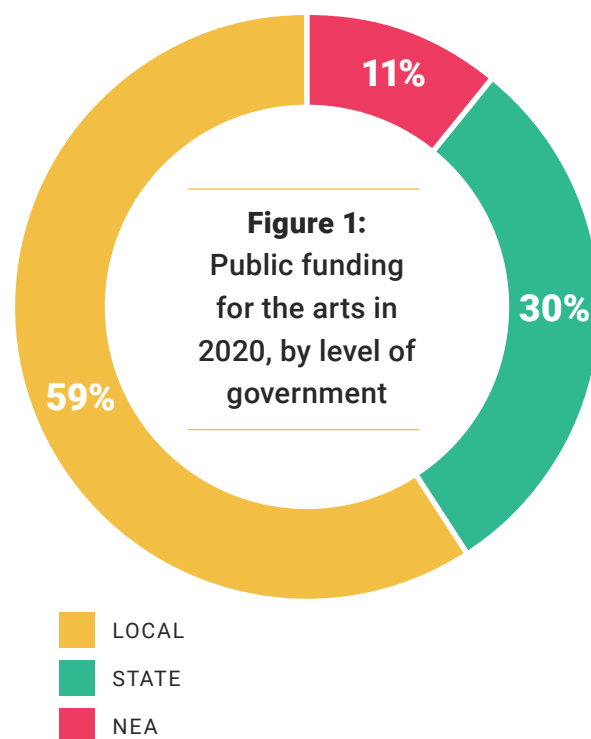
The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) were established by the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965.<sup>12</sup> The NEA was designated to cultivate American creativity, culture, and support artistic traditions. The National Historic Preservation Act followed in 1966,<sup>13</sup> intended to protect America's historic and cultural resources.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> Further decentralization took place in the 1970s and '80s with the establishment of local arts agencies (LAAs) at the municipal and county level,<sup>16</sup> and today there are an estimated 4,500 LAAs across the US.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

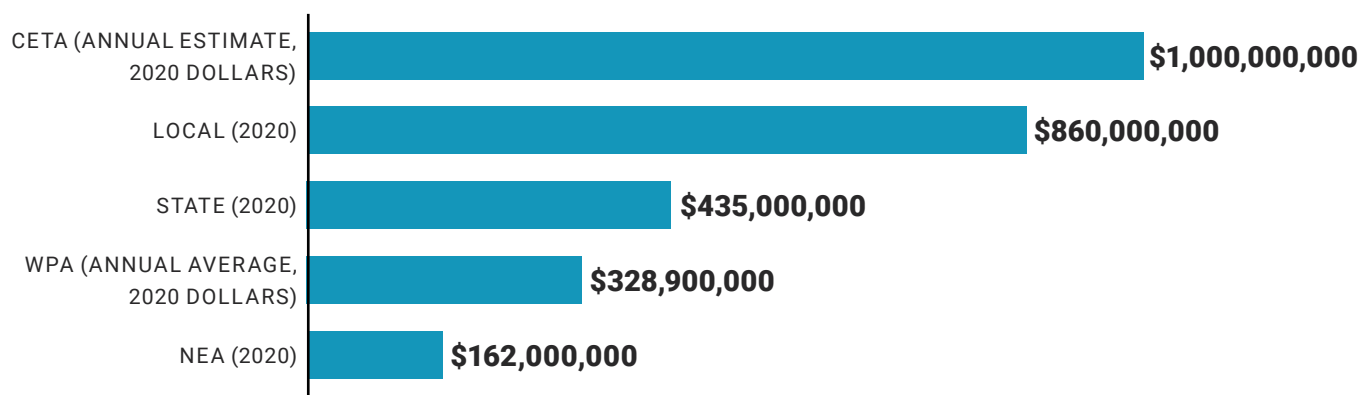
In 1973, facing the worst economic recession since World War II and soaring unemployment, President Richard Nixon signed into law the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). CETA funds were distributed through city and county governments, with the assumption that local authorities would best 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,<sup>20</sup> 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."<sup>21</sup> It is estimated that at its height, CETA paid more than \$200 million a year to individual artists, arts organizations, and their community partners,<sup>22</sup> 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),<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.”<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> 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.”<sup>30</sup> 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.”<sup>31</sup>

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.<sup>32</sup> 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,<sup>33</sup> Kim Abeles’ *Valises for Camp Ground*,<sup>34</sup> and the department’s first artist residency where Sandy Rodriguez worked with residents of the MLK Hospital Recuperative Care Center.<sup>35</sup> 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.

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### **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/](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:

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**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](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>



*Creative strategist Deborah Aschheim talks with students at Cal State Dominguez Hills.*

# EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluator was embedded in the Creative Strategist program as a “Cross Sector Analyst,” serving as both support to the Cross Sector Manager as the program was designed and implemented, and as a program evaluator. The department intentionally assigned one person to hold both responsibilities in order to create informal feedback loops that would allow the program to be adjusted and improved in real time, rather than waiting for a formal evaluation report. This also reflected Arts and Culture’s early recognition that the complexity of the Creative Strategist program required more than a single person to design, implement, and manage it effectively.

Data collection for the evaluation was both formal and informal. Most data collection for the evaluation was integrated into program activities, and included all of the following:

- **Participant observation** took place in cohort meetings, as well as participation in program activities and events led by the creative strategists.
- **Bi-weekly check-ins with creative strategists** were conducted every other week by phone to discuss project progress. This was an opportunity for creative strategists to identify any needs as well as strategize and troubleshoot challenges or program obstacles.
- **Monthly check-ins with department connectors** occurred once a month by phone to get updates and identify any connector or department needs for making the residencies successful.
- **Monthly creative strategist reports** were submitted in writing every other week at the start of the residency, reporting on progress, sharing key questions, findings, and activities. Check-in calls by phone were often more informative, so these reports became less instrumental and were eventually phased out.
- **Cohort meetings** took place quarterly with all creative strategists and department connectors, as a peer learning opportunity where residency needs, challenges, and progress were shared.
- **Exit interviews** were conducted with each creative strategist and department connector at the end of the residencies.





## Evaluator's statement of positionality

I was actively engaged in the inner workings of the program and experienced first-hand the frustrations, successes, and growing pains. I built personal relationships with the creative strategists, department connectors, and Arts and Culture staff. In my regularly scheduled conversations with creative strategists, the line between troubleshooting and data collection were blurred. As a result, a certain amount of “objectivity” often expected from evaluators was lost. This report, I believe, demonstrates that the benefits of this approach outweigh the apparent costs.

My role in management and administration evolved over time in response to staffing changes. As improvements were made to the program based on what we were learning, my responsibilities at first expanded. Then, when Pauline Kamiyama left the department in July 2019, I was briefly asked to manage the program. When a full-time Cross Sector Manager was hired and onboarded in December 2019, I stepped back to work almost exclusively on the evaluation, and my primary focus was the creative strategists.

I came to the department on a two-year placement as a Mellon/American Council of Learned Societies Public Fellow. I drew from my training in cultural studies, as well as my field work experience in participant observation. The women of color, feminist traditions, and radical theorists that have framed my own activism throughout my life and my graduate experience informed both my administrative and evaluator perspectives. For me, one of the things that ties these areas together is the idea that “objectivity,”

in many ways, is a social construction. To fully understand history and unpack the idea of objectivity, we must look to the silences, breaks, and ruptures in official narratives as launching points for research and investigation. This evaluation was an opportunity to apply these ideas in practice.

It is my view that government institutions have historically operated on a belief in their own neutrality and objectivity, considering themselves a representative entity reflective of the diversity of the political landscape. Most of these first six residencies came to a close as the COVID-19 pandemic was announced and closures began, but the writing of this report continued as the political ruptures of 2020 – nationwide protests against police brutality and the inequitable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color and working class people – provided clarity into the effect of long-standing unequal distribution of wealth and resources and the underlying history of white supremacy that many of our institutions, including government, were built on. In this context, taking a position of being “neutral” or “objective” is a choice that takes the side of the status quo.

Because of the time period covered by the evaluation and writing of this report, it does not take into account actions taken by LA County in the wake of events of 2020, including voter-approved Care First Community Investment programs (formerly referred to as Measure J), which allocates at least 10% of the County’s locally generated, unrestricted funding to address racial injustice through community investments,<sup>36</sup> passage of LA County’s first-ever Countywide Cultural Policy,<sup>37</sup> and the Board-adopted Anti-Racism, Diversity and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative.<sup>38</sup>

This evaluation draws in particular on Lithgow and Wall's *Embedded Aesthetics: Artist-in-Residencies as Sites of Discursive Struggle and Social Innovation*. They argue that artist residencies in government produce "productive frictions," which are, "Activities, practices and events which run counter to the explicit organizational goals of efficiency, but which in the end are productive in unexpected ways."<sup>39</sup>

They further state that, "Productive frictions reflect the discovery of resources for new experiences, the creation of new experiences, and the making visible of previously obscured or invisible experiences."<sup>40</sup> In this sense, they say, artist residencies in municipal governments can make visible normalized structures that have for long become commonplace to an extent they are considered natural. This visiblizing process often brings out a productive friction that has the potential to offer a world of transformative possibilities. Thus, these residencies and this evaluation can be seen as interventions in the idea of objectivity.

**Productive frictions appeared throughout these residencies.** From its inception, the Creative Strategist program was built on the possibility of shifting departmental cultures and approaches to equity from ostensibly objective outputs and outcomes to innovative and artistic processes. In my role as program staff, I often found myself listening to many needs and points of view, productive frictions that I sought to hold in a generative or transformative way. This process deeply informed both my role as program staff and as evaluator.

— **Robin Garcia**

*Cross Sector Analyst,  
Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow*

## Individuals Interviewed

- Jean Armbruster, Director, Department of Public Health PLACE Program
- Deborah Aschheim, Creative Strategist, LA County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk
- Angel Baker, Division Chief, Program Development, Department of Mental Health
- Leticia Buckley, former Interim Director, LA County Arts Commission
- Sandra de la Loza, Creative Strategist, Department of Parks and Recreation
- Clement Hanami, Creative Strategist, Department of Public Health PLACE Program
- Pauline Kanako Kamiyama, former Deputy Director of Civic Art
- Olga Koumoundouros, Creative Strategist, Department of Public Health Office of Violence Prevention
- Alan Nakagawa, Creative Strategist, LA County Library
- Faith Parducho, Special Assistant to the Chief Deputy Director, Department of Parks and Recreation
- Mike Sanchez, Media and Communications, LA County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk
- Elaine Waldman, Health Program Analyst III, Department of Mental Health
- Christiane Warburton, Assistant Library Administrator, LA County Library
- Andrea Welsing, Director, Department of Public Health Office of Violence Prevention
- Anu Yadav, Creative Strategist, Department of Mental Health

# 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.”<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup>

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).

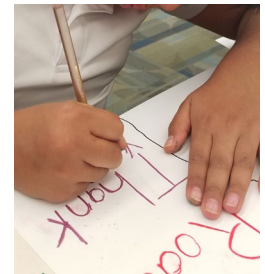
This section provides a description of each residency, including key players and major milestones. They are organized in chronological order with the cycle one residencies first (PLACE Program in the Division of Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention in the Department of Public Health, LA County Library, 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 Rocío 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 proposal<sup>43</sup>

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 art<sup>44</sup> with the Center for Performance and Civic Practice in Chicago.<sup>45</sup> 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

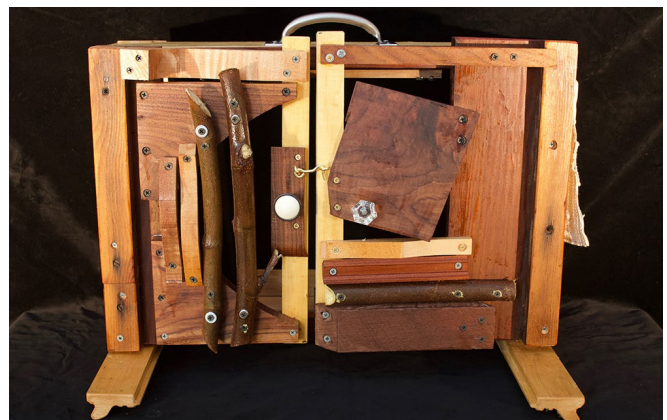


phase of his residency, he needed to understand each library's relationship with the specific community around it. This helped him think about how his own project could help with building strong community relationships. At the same time, he needed to learn what his department connector and other staff 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 California<sup>46</sup> 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'.

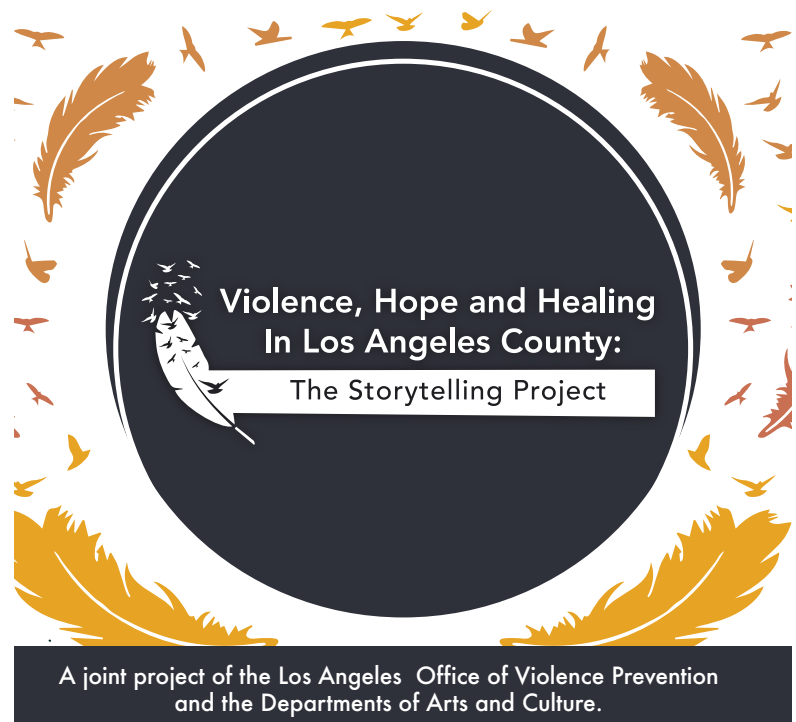
**11—**  
**CONTINUE TO CUT** various shapes of different sizes and arrange them on your mandala. Create shapes that make you feel happy and good. Since most mandalas are contiguous and symmetrical, make sure your cut shapes are repeated in the circle and arranged evenly.

**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](http://www.pearlchsiung.com), [pearl@pearlchsiung.com](mailto:pearl@pearlchsiung.com)





*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



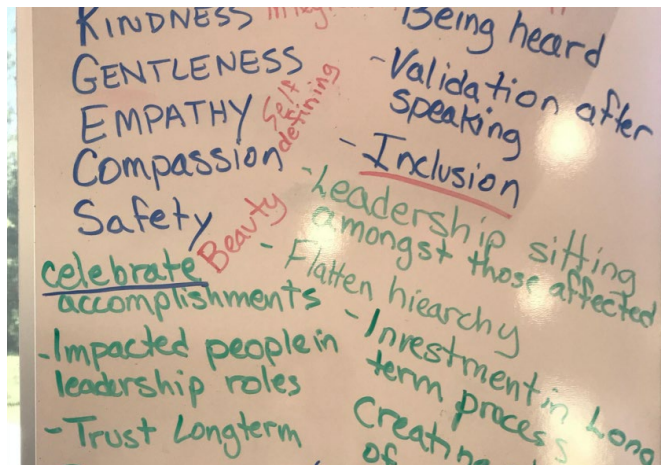
issues of race, class, and gender. Also during the research phase, Koumoundouros met with people from relevant government and community-based agencies, and with representatives of the Community Partnership Council, a newly-established advisory body that would help shape OVP's five-year strategic plan.

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

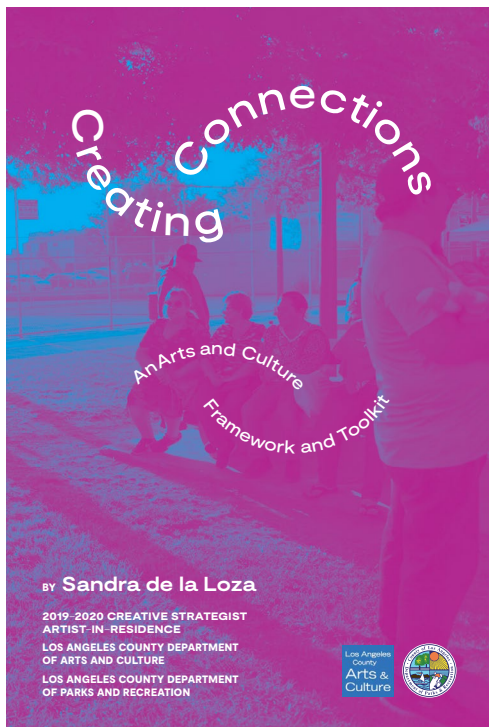
Realizing that a year was not enough time to carry out the storytelling project – it had already taken significant time to produce the orientation – OVP decided to provide funding to keep Koumoundouros on for a second year, which is nearing its conclusion at the time of this writing. Koumoundouros has 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.



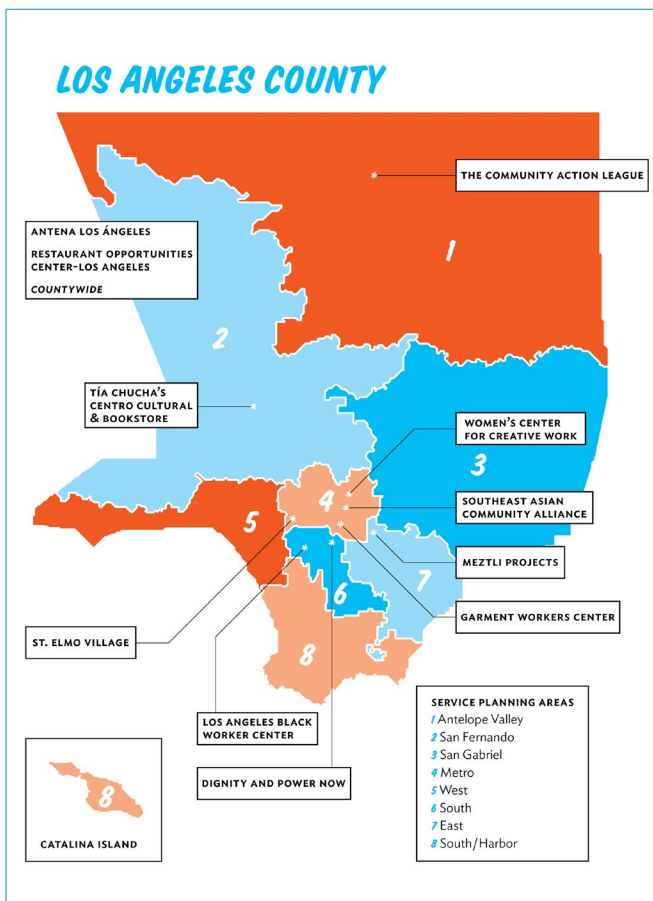
## Recommendations to improve the program

- 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.*



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

## 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.





## 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





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



# ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE PROGRAM

As cycle two of the pilot phase was coming to an end, Arts and Culture staff developed a theory of change for the Creative Strategist program. The goal was to build a theory of change that would reflect the original aspirations of the Creative Strategist program, informed by what had been learned from implementation of the first six residencies and changes that had been made to the program throughout the pilot phase. It was also informed by literature that had been reviewed, including work written about other types of artist residency programs run by local government agencies. This was a point where having an evaluator embedded in program implementation proved particularly useful.

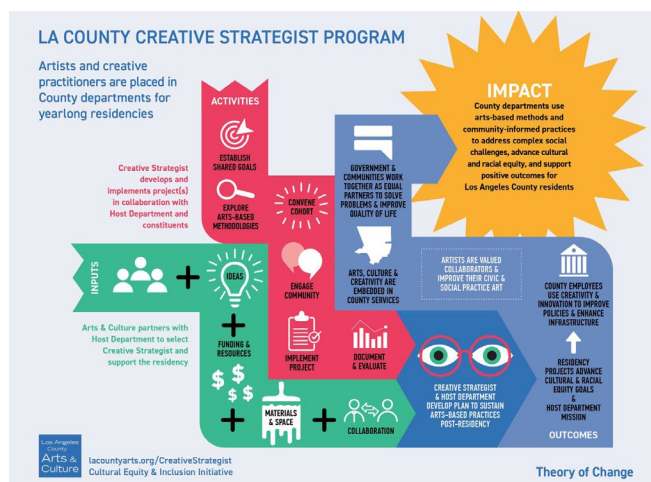
Through this process, the team:

- Refined and clarified the inputs required from both Arts and Culture and the host department
- Identified six key activities that would be consistent across all residencies
- Established outcome goals for the first 3-5 years and for the first 6-8 years

The full theory of change can be seen in Appendix 1.

The theory of change is being used as future phases of the Creative Strategist program rolls out, both for program planning and communications. It will also be used to evaluate the program. For this pilot phase, the evaluation centers on two main questions:

- Were the goals of the residencies achieved?
- Was progress made toward the original vision for the residencies?



A theory of change for the Creative Strategist program was created during cycle 2. See the Appendix for a larger, detailed version.

## Were the goals of the residencies achieved?

Each residency and each host department was different from the rest, with its own focus and purpose. Operational structures of each department were different, and creative strategists were placed at different points in the organizational structure. Each artist selected brought a unique set of skills, knowledge, disciplinary practice, and worldview to their work.

One important consistency across all the residencies is that none of them achieved the goals set out in the host department's original proposal within a year. In each residency, there came a point at which both the creative strategist and department connector realized it would take much more time to achieve their goals than a one-year, part-time residency would allow. For the most part, the artists brought into the residencies had limited subject matter expertise in the area they would be working

in. The artists required much more time to learn about the work of the departments and the communities they served than had been planned for. The departments required much more time to understand that “art” is both a process and a product, and to understand what a creative strategist could and could not do for them. Operational checks and balances that are familiar to government staff became roadblocks to action, especially when approvals were needed for creative activities outside of everyday bureaucratic functions. When executive level support and advocacy were requested to

help remove obstacles, either within the host department or from Arts and Culture, that support tended to move at such a gradual pace that implementation was slowed even further. Nevertheless, in spite of the challenges faced along the way, each residency had tangible results, as Table 1 shows. In nearly all cases, the creative strategists are continuing work begun in the residencies, though sometimes in other spaces. As of this writing, all but one residency had been extended or the artists re-hired (directly or indirectly) by their host departments to continue work that was begun during the residency.

**Table 1: Tangible results of pilot residencies**

Host Department	Tangible Outcome	Continuation beyond one-year residency
County Library	Five kamishibai workshops; training videos for librarians	Nakagawa was hired back to conduct additional workshops in the Second Supervisorial District; due to the pandemic, he instead created training videos
Vision Zero (Public Health)	Traffic safety signage installed; bike racks forthcoming	Residency is extended through March 2022
VSAP (Registrar-Recorder)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20 get-out-the-vote workshops held on 10 campuses</li> <li>#365DaysOfVoters campaign on Instagram launched</li> </ul>	Aschheim continued the #365DaysOfVoters campaign in partnership with other cities in LA County
Office of Violence Prevention (Public Health)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community retreat held to gather community input into OVP’s strategic plan</li> <li>Storytelling Project gathers nearly 100 stories from community members about experiences and impact of violence; turned into a book</li> </ul>	Residency extended by OVP in order to complete the Storytelling Project; residency extended through 2021
Parks and Recreation	Arts and Culture framework and toolkit for parks created and disseminated	Three-month extension to complete framework and toolkit; de la Loza hired to prototype the framework at Earvin “Magic” Johnson Park
Mental Health	<i>Healing Through Story</i> toolkit created and disseminated	Yadav brought back by the department for subsequent community engagement work



Each host department said they would keep the creative strategist on in their residency if they had funding to do so. Conversations took place between Arts and Culture and every host department about possible extensions, but in most cases additional support to formally extend the residency did not materialize. The residencies at Vision Zero and OVP were the only ones extended with host department funds. By the time cycle two residencies were coming to a close, the COVID-19 pandemic had been declared and County budgets were being cut.

As of this writing, the funding for the Creative Strategist program has been reduced in response to pandemic-related Countywide budget cuts to a single annual residency. However, in acknowledgement of lessons learned through the pilot phase, the per-residency budget amount has been increased by half, to \$75,000. In 2021, two residencies are planned. In addition, several other County departments have expressed interest in hosting a residency that would be covered by other funding sources. This suggests there is growing interest among County leadership in the value of the innovative thinking and creative problem solving this program brings.

## Was progress made toward the vision for the residencies?

From its inception, this program attempted to explore how art could be used as a tool to make government more equitable. The original recommendation laid out in the County's Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII) stated ambitious goals. Ensuring that people and communities who have historically had less access to the arts and the benefits

they offer, is central to the program. As the recommendation was written, creative strategists would "formulate strategies that foster transformational changes" that would "increas[e] access to artistic and creative experiences in every community." Working in their host departments, creative strategists would achieve this by

- increasing community engagement and participation,
- identifying cultural and community assets,
- supporting public programs and events, and
- creating new public artworks and beautification projects.

All of the residencies focused on **community engagement and participation**. Nearly all of them included **public programs or events**. Many identified **cultural and community assets** during their research phase which paved the way for their final projects. There has been some limited creation of **new public artworks or beautification projects**, including books and guides to using storytelling. Each project launched by the creative strategist had some continuation post-residency, and these new iterations were as varied as the residencies themselves.

A significant amount of **art-as-process** occurred across the residencies, with many of the creative strategists doing work engaging communities, especially those historically underserved by local government. Some creative strategists completed staff trainings and left toolkits that department staff can continue to use, if they choose to. At the same time, some of the **art products** that were created could have been achieved through a creative services contract. This is notable in light of the fact

that most of the creative strategists spent a significant amount of time early in the residency expanding the view of their host departments from thinking about art products to thinking about art as a process that could help them achieve their mission. This may also reflect what can now be seen as a too-short time frame for the residencies that shortchanged the implementation phase. If more time were available for implementation of the proposed projects, the final art products might very well have been just as strong as the process phase. The lesson here may be that an art product is not necessary for every residency or host department.

Did the residencies increase equity and inclusion in the arts? Did they help to make progress toward transformational change in their host departments? It became clear early on that there was not a shared understanding of “equity” or “transformational change” among all parties involved. In spite of that, and because of the emergent and process-oriented nature of the program, these residencies did bring to the surface gaps in the operational culture of the host departments and old habits of thinking about relationships with community. They opened opportunity, but what host departments do with that in the long term remains to be seen over a longer time period. When governments seek to address civic challenges or support aspects of civic life that are long-term, structural, or deeply entrenched, realistic expectations are needed for of how much one artist residency can achieve.

One friction that was clearly visible in each residency comes from the fact that artists and government employees have very different ways of working in the world. They speak different languages, even when they are talking

about the same things. This led on occasion to frustration, misunderstandings, and even moments of distrust. Looking back, it is possible to see places where the creative strategists and their department connectors were actually working toward the same goal but their style of work and communication prevented them from understanding each other. The Cross Sector Manager can and should help to mediate when these frictions arise, to build understanding and mutual respect.

While these may play out as interpersonal conflicts, they may in fact reflect systemic differences. As Lithgow and Wall have said, artist residencies in municipal governments can challenge everyday practices and change institutional operations and policies but they are not inherently transformative nor necessarily focused on equity or social justice.<sup>47</sup> What tied these residencies together was the idea that art-based strategies can *support* change. Because of varying and loose understandings of equity and the role of the residencies in moving toward it, the program was ultimately shaped by the specific individuals involved. When program staff at Arts and Culture changed, when connectors at the host departments changed, and in the single case when the artist changed, the residencies also changed.

Each artist brought to their residency expertise in certain discipline(s) and creative practices as well as a predisposition to specific artistic approaches. The artist’s subjective identity is a strength that can be built on, but it also limited what the final project ultimately would be. For example, a theater artist was not likely to propose to use sculpture or painting for their final project. However, all of them drew on community engagement knowledge they

had acquired either as part of or outside their artist practice. The Creative Strategist program can continue to welcome artists from all arts backgrounds but should consider prioritizing those with experience with social practice and civic practice art.

If the ambitious goals laid out in its original vision are to be met, much more work is necessary at the beginning of each residency to create a shared vision and understanding of the needs of the host department, and to bridge gaps in knowledge and practice between each creative strategist and their host department. Arts and Culture staff need to work intensively with host departments to develop clear goals for the residency that are aligned with goals laid out in the County's Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative. The Cross Sector Manager should help the creative strategist and the department work together to define the creative strategist's role clearly so their work can successfully support the communities the department serves.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE CREATIVE STRATEGIST PROGRAM

As the residencies launch, a program is needed to educate creative strategists quickly but deeply about both subject matter and operations of their host department. The program should consider searching more intentionally for artists who already have at least some expertise in the work of the departments where they will be placed. Also, as the residencies launch, a program is needed to educate department connectors about the wide universe of what art is and can be, and the idea of art as process. Substantive, ongoing, and intense support

is needed for the creative strategists and the department connectors throughout the residency. If the Creative Strategist program is to succeed, it needs to be prioritized and supported at the executive level both in the host departments and at Arts and Culture.

The findings in this evaluation also raise fundamental questions about the purpose of the Creative Strategist program and how its goals can be met. Answers to these questions can help to improve its structure and administration in the future.



### Questions about the program's purpose

1. What is meant by “transformational change” and what is the appropriate role of Arts and Culture in driving those changes in other County departments?
2. Whose equity goals are paramount in an artist residency, those of Arts and Culture or those of the host department?
3. How can Arts and Culture use the Creative Strategist program to build relationships with other County departments in order to achieve equity goals?
4. What unique skills and benefits do artists bring to these residencies that subject matter experts, consultants, or community organizers do not?





## Recommendations to improve program structure and administration

### Program management

1. Broad goals for the residencies should be determined before the Call for Artists is issued, led by the host department and facilitated by Arts and Culture. Once goals are set, each residency should leave a significant amount of room for iteration and evolution of the project as the creative strategists and their host departments get to know each other better.
2. Each residency should begin with the creative strategist spending significant time getting to know a) the department and services they provide, b) background information about the field they will be working in, c) the communities served by the host department and how, d) the department staff they will be working with, and e) how County government works. This is a tremendous amount to learn in a short amount of time.
3. Residencies should be longer than a year in order to meet goals of both the residencies and the Creative Strategist program and to achieve meaningful long-term impact.
4. A formal program to guide and train both sides through the residency should be established and a professional development curriculum created. Topics could include orientations to social practice and civic practice art, organizational change, learning to listen across difference, how County government works, using arts-based strategies to work in communities, and cross sector collaborations toward equity.
5. There should always be several residencies operating at the same time to build a cohort of creative strategists and department connectors to share skills, develop cross departmental collaboration, and build mutual support.
6. Explore the possibility of selecting a team of artists instead of a single artist to work on some residencies. The potential impact for residencies could be greater and their reach wider across departments.
7. Make a greater investment in the program in terms of staffing, communications, professional development, and funds to extend successful residencies as needed.

### Staffing

8. The Cross Sector Manager's job does not begin and end with individual residencies. Administration of a residency starts far in advance of its start date and facilitation continues when a host department extends the residency, with or without financial support from Arts and Culture. Program staffing at Arts and Culture should reflect this longer time horizon.
9. The structure of the program requires that Arts and Culture staff administering it have a wide array of skills including program administration (i.e., budgeting, contracting, communications, and professional development) as well as arts practices including community engagement methods and civic or social practice art, as well as knowledge of County government functions and practices. They also need knowledge and

experience in diversity, equity, and inclusion as practiced in the arts, as well as knowledge of how LA County's diverse communities have been impacted by systemic racism. Ideally, program staff will reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of LA County. Therefore multiple staff are recommended to staff this program for it to achieve its full vision.

10. Roles of staff in host departments and Arts and Culture should be clearly delineated. Consistent staffing is strongly recommended. In the event of a staffing shift, a transition plan should be established.

## Host department placements

11. Creative strategists should be placed with access to executive level managers in departments. If this is not possible, the department executive should provide clear, visible support for the residency.

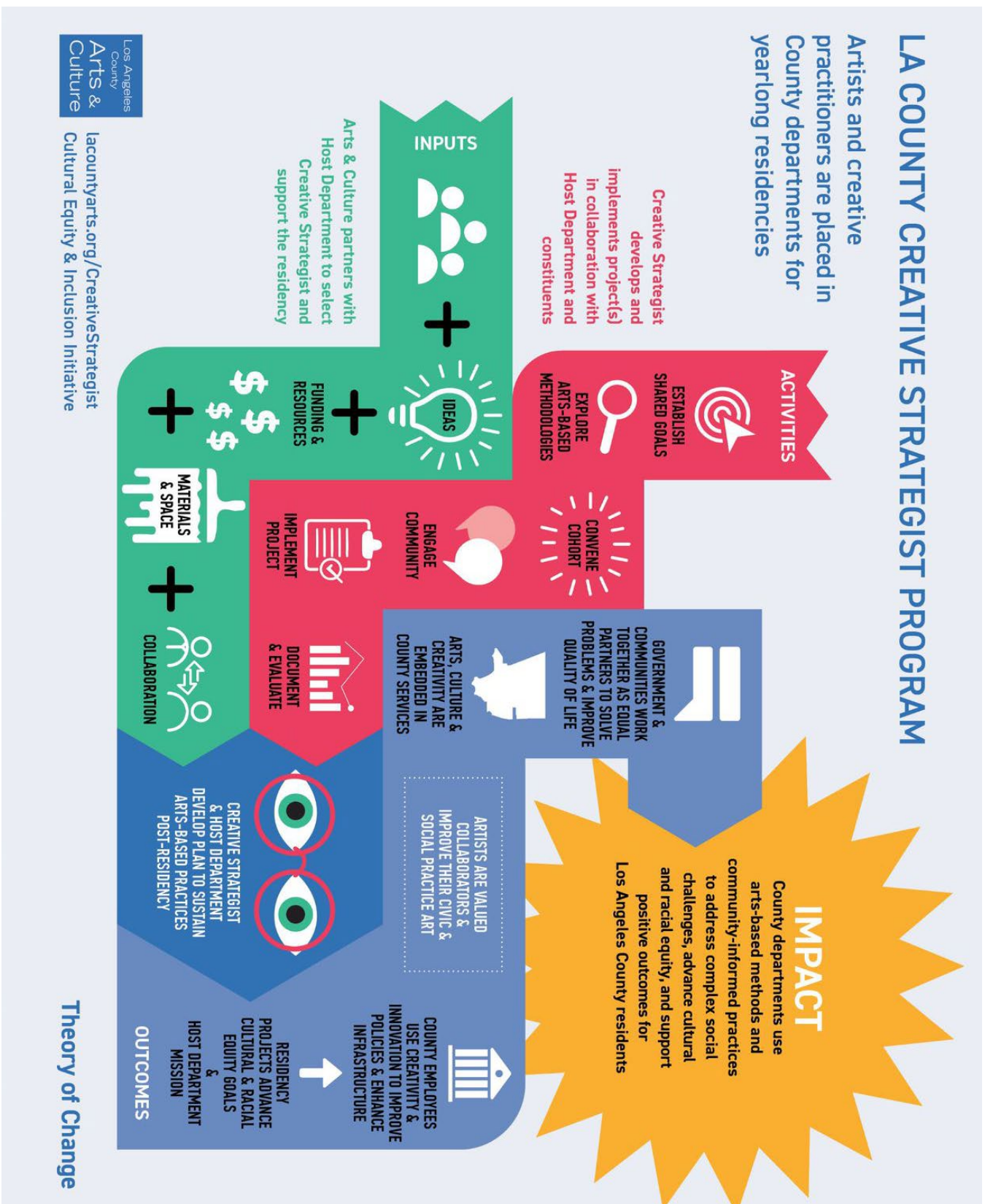
12. Consider having a team facilitate the residency within the host department, if the department is large, rather than designating a single staff person as connector. Representatives from the different divisions that the residency intersects with could be part of this team. This can help build an accountability system into the structure and allow creative strategists greater access across department divisions.
13. Work with the creative strategist to create a maintenance plan so that when the residency ends, changes in the department's approach to community and operations can continue.

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## In Conclusion

These residencies opened up space for new ideas and practices in six divisions of LA County government. The creative strategists modeled innovative approaches to working with community, but were restricted by time, by gaps in knowledge between the creative strategists and their host departments, and by varying and loose definitions of equity. Structural changes to staffing, budgets, and administration created other challenges. It is too soon, though, to determine whether the "productive frictions" they produced will have a lasting impact. While knowledge and new ways of seeing and understanding were gained by both the creative strategists and their department connectors, these changes and opportunities could potentially be lost if they are not built into the infrastructure of the department. In many ways, these residences were the beginning of conversations that did not have time to come to fruition. Time will tell whether what was learned and what changed will continue to have a transformational impact on the operations and mission of each host department.

# APPENDIX





# ENDNOTES

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- 45** See Center for Performance and Civic Practice, <https://www.thecpcp.org>.
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- 47** Lithgow and Wall, 2017.





**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.*





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