



Belonging in Oakland: a cultural development plan *[draft]*

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with contributions from
Communities in Collaboration
and Alex Werth

For the Cultural Affairs Division | Economic & Workforce Development Department | City of Oakland

Heartfelt thanks go to the many community members and leadership and colleagues of the City and from the field who committed time, intelligence, and passion to this endeavor to advance the cause of cultural equity in Oakland and, hopefully, beyond.

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Photo Credit: Alice St. Mural, Community Rejuvenation Project, photo by Vanessa Whang

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PREFACE FROM THE CULTURAL AFFAIRS MANAGER

In the spring of 2017, the Cultural Affairs Division embarked on the development of a cultural plan for the city. It has been a journey of celebration and reflection as we identified our assets and shortfalls. It has been an undertaking that has been both telescopic and microscopic in its process: we hosted community meetings; met with civic leaders; conducted research into the economic and social impact of the arts; surveyed the public, and met with our grantees. We listened, looked, and learned about the many ways Oaklanders express themselves.

The “we” I am referring to, in addition to Cultural Affairs’ staff, is Vanessa Whang, the lead consultant and researcher for the Cultural Plan; Susana Morales and Heather Imboden of Communities in Collaboration who facilitated the community meetings for the planning process; and Alex Werth, the research analyst who produced a new picture of the economic impact and assets of Oakland’s arts and culture sector. These individuals brought their passion, professional skills, and commitment to developing the plan with an equitable eye and intelligence that honors Oakland’s past and present. And most importantly their labors prompt a future for Oakland that strengthens how one can belong to a community of care, creativity, and can-do.

The tag-line for the plan “Equity is the Driving Force, Culture is the Frame, and Belonging is the Goal” operates as a guide to how we developed the plan. We focused on how Oaklanders realize their expressive life, a term coined by Bill Ivey the former Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, who states, “Expressive Life is composed of elements—relationship, memory, aspiration, belief”—which enliven community and creativity. Oakland’s expressive life is remarkable and vigorous. It is where aesthetic voices, community visions, and the social imaginary of how we live together inform the value and belief in our public good and a robust democracy.

The following plan provides an overview of today’s Oakland and the planning process, offers us a vision of culture for the City, and suggests pathways to lift up the role of culture in building a just and equitable city. It is not a document that operates as a typical strategic plan or SWOT analysis that cages itself in a technocratic assessment of the Cultural Affairs Division. It is a narrative that offers up a different lens and a different approach to understanding our city and how an alignment of culture and equity is required for Oaklanders to realize their potential.

We’ve listened to many stories of experience and looked at how Oaklanders communicate their knowledge, assess problems, offer remedies, and move through the messiness inherent in group processes. We’ve engaged in research and discovery into the conditions that shape Oakland’s expressive life—e.g., governmental leadership, philanthropy, financial investments, social capital, the space crisis, equity issues, cultural districts, organizational capacity, affordability, opportunity, and a desire for connections. These multiple concerns animate Oakland’s civic narrative that is best characterized by the lyric of Oakland’s Pointer Sisters’ “Yes, we can, can.”

I often think about how imagination and policy influence each other—whether it’s cultural or public policy; or the imagination of an individual or group. As the Cultural Affairs Manager, my work with artists, community leaders, and elected officials engages me with the entanglements of will at play in civil society—public will, political will, and poetic will, which function as a wind behind the actions of policymaking and imagination. Given that policy aims to *fix* via management guidelines and rules and culture is *fluid* as it develops new knowledge and brings to life our possibilities—how to do work with

these forces in the development of Oakland’s Cultural Plan has kept us on our toes. We know that policy follows meaning, and what the plan has revealed is that Oaklanders find deep meaning in being able to live in an equitable society. Living in an ethically just and aesthetically diverse and rich city is the democratic charge we must address. To that end, the plan’s orientation to equity and culture feeds an action agenda that entails a behavior shift: one that sees Cultural Affairs’ embrace of connectedness and intersectionality as key to realizing belonging. The future work of Cultural Affairs, as presented in the following pages, is to serve the civic narrative of belonging in all its beauty, temperaments, and complexities.

Vanessa Whang was given the charge to do this: to listen deeply to the stories of Oaklanders and to assert a strong analytic perspective, not an anemic exercise that avoids difficulties but instead offers up a voice that is about the social rigors and concerns that affect Oakland’s daily life. She has written a plan that is a recalibration: less about a government agency and more about governance—and the ways Oaklanders enact meaning in their lives. I deeply appreciate Vanessa’s stewardship, grace, and tenacity in writing this report—she has reflected the reciprocity, relationships, and learning we in Cultural Affairs experienced from Oaklanders, both during the planning process and each day as we do our work to support belonging and well-being in the city.

—Roberto Bedoya, Cultural Affairs Manager

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Oakland has an opportunity now to create a new civic narrative about the importance of recognizing and engaging its full array of people and cultures. Everything that happens in the city is infused with culture—in its broadest sense, that is, ways of being. The new vision takes this concept of culture as the frame through which diverse practices, expression, and creativity should be seen, respected, and supported throughout the city. This is the strength that Cultural Affairs can bring to the City's work to establish equity for all Oaklanders. Its goal is to ensure that the people of Oakland not only feel a sense of belonging in the city and to each other, but know that the city belongs to them—with the rights and responsibilities that entails. The guiding vision of this plan is:

Equity is the driving force. Cultural is the frame. Belonging is the goal.

Thirty years have passed since Oakland last had a cultural plan. The current plan is intended to serve as the first of two phases of a reset for Cultural Affairs that is relevant to today's Oakland. This reset needs to begin with adopting the new vision of culture for the City and establishing its role in advancing equity and belonging, with the ultimate outcome of community well-being. Adopting this vision will redefine the purpose of Cultural Affairs and its work. Once this step is taken, phase two can begin.

Phase two will entail prioritizing, developing, and revising the recommended strategies in the *Grounding the Vision* section of the plan. These implementation steps will require additional resources to be realized. The principal aim of this plan is to secure the acceptance of a cultural vision for Oakland that acknowledges the impacts of sustained public policies and institutional practices, both conscious and unconscious, that have resulted in unequal access to education and resources for people of color (i.e., Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders) and other marginalized communities in Oakland. This systemic unequal access to opportunity has resulted in generations of unjust and inequitable outcomes for these communities and points to the new internal and external resources and position Cultural Affairs needs to be effective in achieving equity.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process began in April 2017 with a research and discovery phase that included individual interviews and small group meetings with over 60 people, and an extensive field literature and City document review. From late August through early November, fourteen community meetings were held throughout the city and in every council district. Seven meetings were targeted to the cultural community; seven were marketed to the general public. An online survey was offered as an additional vehicle for community input. Approximately 300 community members attended the meetings and about 450 surveys were received.

Members of the cultural community voiced concerns about **shrinking investments in the cultural sector**, both by the City and in the field generally; **retention of cultural spaces in an over-heated real estate market** and the **lack of adequate performance venues**; and the need for more **equitable funding for disinvested communities**. Other frequently mentioned concerns included bureaucratic barriers to accessing funding, support of cultural districts, and community benefits in new developments.

Members of the general public were asked about what they liked best about Oakland. Aspects mentioned most often were: **diversity**—cultural, ethnic, and racial; **good weather and the beautiful**

environment of Oakland; and **the character of the city's people**—one of unpretentious local pride, of resilience, and of being progressive/open/supportive. When asked about their ideas of how to strengthen community in Oakland, people's comments revealed a **desire for connection** to build unity and understanding; the importance of **orienting newcomers** to the history and culture of Oakland; equitable cultural **funding for communities of color** and other marginalized communities, **diverse cultural education for young people**; **gathering spaces and other resources** for all neighborhoods; and being able **to take greater ownership of their communities**.

A CULTURAL VISION FOR OAKLAND

Equity is the Driving Force: In 2015, the City of Oakland adopted a bold ordinance that states explicitly the government's will to integrate on a Citywide basis, "the principle of 'fair and just' in all the City does in order to achieve equitable opportunities for all people and communities." The goals of this ordinance form the foundation for this new cultural plan.

There are disparities among people, neighborhoods, and institutions that keep Oakland from being a fully fair and just city—particularly those underlain by race. To achieve equity, not only must disparities in access to and allocation of resources be addressed, but also the barriers built into both the physical and policy landscapes of Oakland. A new understanding of culture in the context of equity building can create powerful tools for surfacing the "habits of mind" and practices that keep disparities in place, and for finding creative strategies to remove them.

Culture is the Frame: Reaching well beyond the confines of the arts and artmaking, culture is the embodiment of forms of knowledge and wisdom people have gained through their different lived experiences of how to survive and thrive. The interwoven population of Oakland with its expansive range and mix of cultures and knowledge is the city's greatest gift and what makes it resilient, inventive, and irrepressible. The key to unlocking more of its potential is in the pursuit of cultural equity—creating a city where space and resources are allocated to allow diverse expression to flourish.

Because all aspects of civic life are infused with culture, having a shared understanding of it throughout the halls of the City is necessary for achieving equitable well-being. Cultural Affairs' new role will be to promote that shared understanding and to help inform departmental strategies with principles of cultural equity. This role goes hand-in-hand with its ongoing work to strengthen the ability of diverse communities to express themselves and build their sense of belonging.

Belonging is the Goal: People's sense of belonging tied to their ability to lead meaningful lives, to be connected to the place they live in and the people they live among, and to feel a part of something bigger than themselves. To cultivate belonging, there must be more equitable racial and socioeconomic conditions for self-expression, mutual respect, empathy, and acceptance. These conditions cannot be fulfilled without an understanding of the breadth of cultural diversity and how different forms of expression have different needs. Fostering belonging in a diverse civic realm is complicated and often contentious, but this is what needs to be done to make the city both equitable and whole.

The charge of working to ensure there are culturally equitable spaces—both physical and attitudinal—in which people can develop their sense of belonging is one that Cultural Affairs seeks to undertake in concert with its colleagues across the City.

GROUNDING THE VISION

To implement the vision for cultural equity, Cultural Affairs needs a change of orientation and scope. Below are the new and revised areas of emphasis for Cultural Affairs and initial steps to take as it works to prioritize strategies and build resources for phase two. It is important to note that Cultural Affairs' capacity is challenged to meet current needs, so any reorientation or new work will require support from internal and external sources.

Cultural Spaces, Neighborhood Places, and Culture in the Civic Commons

Cultural Affairs can reshape its work areas to be more responsive and focused on community issues. Given that the leading edge of change in Oakland concerns spaces and places, place-oriented programs and strategies should be identified as a main work area and organized into three general categories:

Cultural Spaces: These spaces tend to have been created or adapted specifically for the purpose of cultural production, presentation, and other uses by creatives and are generally concentrated in commercial areas. They include non-profit and for-profit spaces; some are formal and some informal; some are permitted for their uses, some not. For example, studios, galleries, theaters, live/work space, small scale commercial entertainment venues, etc.

- *Create a permanent position that continues to facilitate cross-departmental and City-community relations that are relevant to the creation and retention of robust cultural spaces in Oakland (FY 2018-19)*

Neighborhood Places: These are places in neighborhoods that generally have little in the way of formal cultural spaces or infrastructure, but where community-based non-arts organizations have filled cultural gaps and residents have created improvised cultural and gathering spaces, such as social service and faith-based organizations, small for-profit gathering space, etc.

- *Create grantmaking opportunities to support neighborhood voice, that is, ones that promote neighborhood empowerment, cultural self-determination, aesthetic accomplishment, and community health and well-being through neighborhood-based collaborations (FY 2017-18)*

Culture in the Civic Commons: The civic commons are the spaces that belong to the public and where people can gather and connect, and express, experience, or learn about their culture or those of others. These include libraries and recreational centers, open space, educational institutions, streets and sidewalks, other public spaces, etc.

- *Strengthen the Public Art Program's capacity to responsibly manage ongoing and new public arts projects and initiatives, and steward the City's collection of public art (FY 2018-19)*
- *Pilot a creative fellows program to embed arts and cultural practitioners into a variety of departments to nurture cultural equity across the work of the City (FY 2018-19)*

Strengthening Oakland's Cultural Ecosystem

Cultural Affairs has long supported a diverse range of non-profit cultural organizations and individual artists to enhance cultural vibrancy across the city. A focus on equity that is based on the particular conditions in Oakland and their underlying history is the impetus to recalibrate programs and policy to be more context-specific and driven by local circumstances and data. Taking an asset-based approach

will entail nurturing community-initiated efforts and on-the-ground realities that exist in Oakland’s non-profit ecology and the independent artist/culture bearer/maker realm.

- *Strengthen the orientation of current grantmaking and technical assistance toward cultural equity and asset-based approaches (FY 2017-18)*

Building Infrastructure for Cultural Equity

Internal Infrastructure: The internal infrastructure of Cultural Affairs will need to be strengthened to align its work with the new vision to address historic injustices. The reorientation of Cultural Affairs’ work towards racial and social equity framed by culture is a fundamental shift that requires building new “habits of mind” and organizational culture. Additional staffing, racial equity training, information technology and communication tools, and program-related funding will be required to operationalize the new vision in a meaningful way. Repositioning Cultural Affairs to facilitate communications and collaboration with department heads is advised.

- *Ensure new administrative hire has the skill sets to collect and analyze data, do community and field research, and to communicate effectively with stakeholders (FY 2017-18)*
- *Strengthen Cultural Affairs capacity to reorient to asset-based approaches (ongoing)*

External Relations: The reactivation of the Cultural Affairs Commission will require a clear charge, work plan, and membership that are aligned with the new vision and priorities in order to be effective. The duties of other citizen advisory bodies related to Cultural Affairs should also be aligned with the vision and reactivation of the Commission, with an eye toward efficiency and timeliness of decision-making. Keeping direct lines of communication open between the City and community is essential. The Cultural Affairs Manager’s maintaining regular “office hours” in different neighborhoods is recommended.

- *Reanimate the Cultural Affairs Commission, ensuring it has a clear charge and scope of work aligned with the new vision (FY 2017-18, once new hire is in place)*
- *Align Funding and Public Arts Advisory Committees’ membership and work plans with the new vision, implementation strategies, and Cultural Affairs Commission’s charge and scope of work (FY 2017-18, in concert with Commission reanimation)*

INTRODUCTION

This is both a critical and an opportune moment to be thinking anew about the cultural life of Oakland.

It is a critical moment because Oakland is teetering on a fulcrum of change: between fulfilling a long-awaited promise of economic prosperity on the one side and retaining the long-standing “minority-majority” ethos of DIY ingenuity, activism, and community solidarity on the other. Must Oakland lose one in order to have the other?

It is an opportune moment to look at how culture can help answer this question because fissures in social conditions are cracking open and creating space for a kind of discussion that has long been needed.

This plan is a call to the City to consider a new vision of culture—one that is broad and encompasses not only what is made by Oaklanders, but what makes Oaklanders who they are. It is a vision of culture that makes it the greatest strength and the greatest challenge that the City has in establishing equitable opportunities for all.

Cultural Affairs has a unique role to play in furthering equity—by promoting a new cultural narrative throughout the City, and by supporting and connecting the expressive lives of Oakland’s many communities to deepen their understanding of each other.

The diverse cultures that exist in Oakland, with their intermingled joys and tensions, must be distinguished and respected to be served effectively, and understood holistically to be served justly.

A new cultural plan has the challenge and the duty to jump headlong into this complex and charged landscape—or risk irrelevance. Cultural Affairs seeks to ensure that the people of Oakland not only feel a sense of belonging in the city and to each other, but know that the city belongs to them—with the rights and responsibilities that entails. Creating spaces for authentic expression is necessary for people to be heard and to listen, to be understood, and to build agency for stewarding Oakland’s resources for everyone’s well-being.

The principal aim of this plan is to articulate a holistic vision of culture for the City, redefine the role of Cultural Affairs in promoting equity for all the people of Oakland, and outline ways for Cultural Affairs to embody this new role.

What is a Cultural Plan?

Purposes of a Cultural Plan: Municipal cultural plans can take various forms. In different cities, they can change in structure and focus as local conditions and priorities vary and national urban planning and cultural theories rise and fall. A cultural plan can be a multi-year, stand-alone planning tool for an office of cultural affairs that takes as given the value of arts and culture to the quality of community life. Such an office might typically address how to promote, support, develop, and sustain the work of artists and arts organizations—principally within the nonprofit sector. A cultural plan can also be realized as part of a city's comprehensive or general plan that incorporates a role of arts and culture in achieving a city's overarching goals. It might suggest ways for arts and culture to be integrated into other departments' strategies in order to meet needs—be they ones of economic and workforce development, community development and land use, education, housing, etc. A cultural plan can be used to revise arts and culture priorities when conditions have shifted in ways that warrant course corrections. It can also present a new vision for the importance of cultural life in a city and the role it plays in making a city who and what it is. This last function of a cultural plan is the main focus of the present endeavor.

Processes of Cultural Planning: There are processes to make a plan—having meetings in the community to hear concerns and ideas; using surveys to cast the net wider; doing research about what happened before and what conditions are like now; and scanning the broader environment for field learning that can shed different lights on the local landscape.

Tools for Realizing the Plan: There are practical tools and the methods for using them that ground the values and framing concepts of a plan. Some of these involve the allocation of funding to support the expressive life of the people of a city, such as festivals, murals, learning arts skills, going dancing, hearing music or poetry slams, and seeing performances, exhibitions, and films. Some of the tools are ones that concern the creation, retention, or management of spaces where cultural activities occur or the neighborhood places where people feel most at home to be who they are—to gather with their friends and family, eat the food they like, and find the culture they relate to or want to learn more about. Mapping where community strengths and resources are present and are not, and having systems to gather data to analyze racial and socioeconomic disparities are also necessary for assessing the progress of creating equitable opportunities for all people to realize their full selves.

The Work of Cultural Affairs: The current portfolio of work of the City of Oakland's Cultural Affairs Division is similar to many of their colleagues across the county. It includes supporting cultural and educational activities and the creation of art works throughout the city by:

- providing grants and some technical assistance to artists and non-profit arts organizations
- administrating percent-for-art programs that shepherd the creation of permanent and ephemeral art (principally visual art) within public works and private development projects
- producing, supporting, and/or subsidizing cultural programming in public space (i.e., the Art + Soul Oakland festival, historical walking tours, neighborhood street fairs/parades/runs, and official City events), and
- providing logistical support for film/video projects making Oakland their backdrop.

These are the tools Cultural Affairs currently has do its work. This plan seeks to redefine the purpose of these tools and hone them for more effective use.

Why Oakland Needs a New Cultural Plan

The last time the City of Oakland had a formal plan for cultural development was 30 years ago in 1988. On the face of it, that seems like reason enough to take a fresh look at what cultural life in Oakland looks like now—who makes it what it is and what relationship the City should have to it. A lot has happened in Oakland and to Oakland since 1988—for better and for worse, much has changed while some things have stayed the same. One thing is clear: Oaklanders care about culture in their city, not just the people directly involved with the arts and culture scene—but those from every neighborhood and every walk of life.

91%
of people surveyed responded
“Essential” or “Very important”
to the question:

How important are arts and cultural activities to your life?”

No one responded “Not at all important.”

One would expect artists, makers, and arts professionals to be motivated to take an online survey about a new cultural development plan, so it’s significant that 50% of respondents said they were not professionally involved in the arts. They were teachers, office workers, librarians, bartenders, nonprofit administrators, nurses, personal chefs, lawyers, public servants, IT consultants, community organizers, sales managers, coaches, caregivers, restaurant owners, professors, youth developers, gardeners, hairstylists, and at least one self-described “jack of all trades”—though given the number of hyphenated career responses, that “jack” was in good company.

[illegible]

In order to take a careful, wide-angle, contemporary look at the health of the city's cultural life—what is valuable about it, what drives it, what endangers it, and most crucially, what defines it—it is necessary to do some planning, and do it in a way that is in tune with this place and this time. The critical question is not whether to create one—because for many Oakland

Some progress was made on these goals in the context of those times, but all of these aspirations remain relevant today. One could ascribe prescience to the then-planners, but the contemporary resonance of these goals may speak more to the stubbornness of the ongoing challenges to achieve them as well as the underlying history and systemic inequities that keep those challenges in place. So though it seems like the year on Mayor Wilson's plan could simply be updated to 2018, it would be a mistake to walk away from the chance to rethink cultural life in Oakland through a new lens.

A Different World

Oaklanders don't live in the same world as they did in 1988. How much and how quickly things would change would have been difficult to fathom 30 years ago. Geopolitical and economic turbulence has affected the U.S. in countless ways—from the global migrations impacting our cities to the off-shoring of what used to be domestic jobs; and the internal turmoil of growing income inequity to the seemingly endless wars in real and virtual space. Events closer to home turned many lives upside-down: the Loma Prieta earthquake, the Oakland Hills fire, the dot.com eras 1.0 and 2.0, the mortgage crisis and banking debacle, and climate change-triggered disasters. Political disruptions have shaken both the towers and the squares with our first Black president followed by the first private sector president in the White House, and the grassroots activism fueling movements from the Tea Party to Occupy, marriage equality, Black Lives Matter, transgender, #MeToo, and #Never Again. Our new ways of being more connected, ironically, are also the causes of our being more divided. The 24-hour/1440-minute news cycle and the ever-present influence of the Internet, wireless, and mobile technologies have captured us in their inexorable embrace—and will not be letting go.

Shifting Demographics: In 1988, the population was on the rise: then it was about 370,000, having risen from just under 340,000 in 1980; about the same growth from 2010's 391,000 to a 2016 estimate of 420,000. The gendered income gap persists, though is somewhat improved, with a woman making about 80 cents on a man's dollar—up from 66 cents in 1988. Then, the median age was about three years younger and a larger percentage of households were families, and more of them with children under 18. No one needs to look at census data, however, to see one thing that has gotten alarmingly worse: many more people are having to live on the streets. Instability ignited by subprime lending was exacerbated by the severe lack of affordable housing—in the decade from 2005 to 2015, jobs and the population in Oakland grew by the tens of thousands, but fewer than 1,000 housing units and effectively no commercial space was built.¹ Growing income insecurity and a host of other factors have driven people into tent camps across the flatlands of Oakland, with Blacks being significantly over-represented on the streets based on their proportion of the population. The official percent of those living in poverty has risen to 20%—higher than recent rates in Alameda County generally (17%) or in California overall (14%)—a number which belies a much larger share of people struggling because of the extraordinarily high and oppressive cost of living in the Bay Area.²

“...the homeless population in Oakland jumped by 25 percent to 2,761 between 2015 and 2017, according to a recent point-in-time count.

The count also provided a distressing portrait of who's on the city's streets: Nearly 70 percent of homeless people are black, although African Americans made up 28 percent of the city's 2010 census population.

More than 60 percent of Oakland's homeless people lived in homes in Alameda County for more than 10 years before they landed on the streets. And nearly 60 percent said money problems, not addiction or mental health issues, were the primary cause of their homelessness.”

—“Homeless camps becoming entrenched in Oakland,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 28, 2017

¹ Source: Oakland Department of Economic and Workforce Development, 2005-2015.

² Statistical sources: 2012-2016 ACS 5-year Estimates, US Census Bureau; City of Oakland-Alameda County, Bay Area Census, MCT-ABAG; Poverty in California, Public Policy Institute of CA.

Race and Ethnicity: One of the main shifts from the '80s that makes today's lived experience in Oakland different is the change in the city's racial/ethnic and therefore cultural makeup. The often-cited 1980 census statistic of the peak percentage of Oakland's Black population—that is, 47%— is a proxy for what is often thought of as its defining identity. Not only has the city been known nationally as a historic stronghold of radical Black culture,³ but for many Oaklanders, this is the essence of the city, that is, what gives it its unique spirit of defiance mixed with a “we’re in this together” solidarity.

It is likely impossible to measure accurately just how much the Black population in Oakland has decreased since that benchmark 1980 census because of significant changes in the way the Census Bureau began to recategorize race and ethnicity starting with the 2000 census.⁴ But what can be said is that from 2000 to 2015 the population of people who identified as Black and not multiracial experienced a dramatic decline from over 142,000 to about 106,000—a net loss of over 36,000 people or a 25% drop. A substantial part of that drop happened from 2000 to 2010, partly driven by the mortgage crisis, which hit Black homeowners at a rate more than double any other racial or ethnic group.⁵ The precipitous decline of the Black population in Oakland is all the more stark because most other racial/ethnic groups counted by the Census have on balance grown.

Population and Economic Shifts in Oakland

OAKLAND	1990	2000	2010	2015	Change from 2000 to 2015	% of Change
<i>Total Population</i>	373,242	399,484	390,724	408,073	+8,589	+2%
White	120,855	125,013	134,925	159,650	+34,637	+28%
Black	163,526	142,460	109,471	106,302	-36,158	-25%
Asian	54,012	60,851	65,811	65,696	+4,845	+8%
American Indian & Alaskan Native	2,325	2,655	3,040	3,150	+495	+19%
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	1,320	2,002	2,222	2,401	+399	+20%
Other race	30,204	46,592	53,378	45,311	-1,281	-3%
Two or more races	not counted	19,911	21,877	25,563	+5,652	+28%
Hispanic/Latino (of any race)	49,267	87,467	99,068	106,643	+19,176	+22%
Foreign born	19.8%	26.6%	28.2%	27.3%	+7%	+3%
Living in poverty	18.5%	19.4%	18.7%	20%	+6%	+3%
Median value of owner-occupied unit	N/A	\$235,500	\$428,200	\$557,000	+\$321,500	+137%

Sources: 1990/2000/2010 Censuses, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates of One Race populations; City of Oakland-Alameda County, Bay Area Census, MTC-ABAG. Note: Hispanic/Latino is an ethnicity that can be identified with any race and is not counted as part of the population totals.

³ Mahler, Jonathan, “Oakland, the Last Refuge of Radical America,” *The New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 1, 2012.

⁴ Starting with the 2000 census, one could choose more than one racial identity and clarifications were made regarding choosing Hispanic/Latino as an ethnicity that crosses all races, not a race itself. All had to choose a single racial identity in 1980 and 1990, but now can choose two or more races, which makes comparisons of counts before and after the 2000 census particularly difficult.

⁵ “Housing Crisis Hits Blacks Hardest,” Tami Luhby, CNNMoney.com, Oct. 19, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/10/19/inam.housing.foreclosure.money/index.html>

Migration In and Out: Underlying some of the growth and shifting demographics of Oakland is the churn of in- and out-migration. For example in the five years from 2010 through 2014, about 104,000 people left and 108,000 people moved into Oakland.⁶ In those comings and goings are changes in the racial/ethnic and old-timer/newcomer make-up of residents—ebbs and flows keenly observed and felt by the community. First fueled by the attraction of affordability and job opportunities, the population changes were then pushed by the escalating real estate market brought on by the chronic space shortages for living and for working coupled with the state’s prohibition on commercial and various forms of residential rent control,⁷ among other factors.

The percent of domestic renters in Oakland is high—about 60% compared to 36% nationally—so displacement due to rising rents have hit Oaklanders disproportionately, especially those with lower incomes.⁸ Stories of residents moving to the outer reaches of Contra Costa County and beyond but commuting back to Oakland to reconnect with what feels like home have become too familiar.⁹

History Matters¹⁰: A planning process—particularly a cultural planning process—presents the opportunity to reflect on current conditions and recent context as well as the chance to reach further back to trace the steps of how we got where we are. This plan can’t take the place of a history book (or several), but it can serve as a reminder that places have memories that do not disappear. There are traces of traditions and practices, of power and dominance, of erasures and of reclamation.

Cultural diversity in the place that is now Oakland was a reality long before this century or the one before that or the one before that. Before the Spanish arrived in California in the 1700s, there were hundreds of different tribes and subtribes of Native Americans, perhaps mirroring the biotic diversity of the land they inhabited. The radical changes wrought by the invasion of the Spaniards and its consequences caused the near decimation of the population of indigenous people in California and beyond by the end of the 1800s. But what we find in places like the Intertribal Friendship House and the American Indian Child Resource Center is a tenacious grip on the maintenance of culture, identity, and systems of values that still has much to teach.

This is true of the many kinds of people who throughout history have wanted to find in Oakland just a place to be—to find work, start a business, make a home, build a community—and be treated fairly. They were Mexicans who “didn’t cross the border but had the border cross them,” Chinese who found Oakland through the pull of the Gold Rush and railroad building or the push of the San Francisco 1906

⁶ Allen-Price, Olivia, “How Many Are Being Displaced By Gentrification in Oakland?”, KQED News, Feb. 9, 2017.

<https://www.kqed.org/news/2017/02/09/how-many-are-being-displaced-by-gentrification-in-oakland/>

⁷ “Rent control in California: Proposal to lift restrictions blocked in committee,” Katy Murphy, The Mercury News, Jan. 11, 2018.

<https://www.mercurynews.com/2018/01/11/california-considers-repealing-rent-control-restrictions/>

⁸ Geographical Mobility in the Past Year by Individual Income in the Past 12 Months (In 2015 Inflation-adjusted Dollars) for Residence 1 Year Ago in [Oakland, CA] the United States, Census Reporter,

https://censusreporter.org/data/distribution/?table=B07410&geo_ids=16000US0653000,05000US06001,04000US06,01000US&primary_geo_id=16000US0653000

⁹ “An Oakland Diaspora: What Drives Longtime Residents to Leave?” Devin Katayama, KQED News, Mar. 2, 2016.

¹⁰ Many thanks to Jacque Larrainzar of Oakland’s Department of Race & Equity for this reminder and for sharing many resources that informed this brief walk through Oakland history: Native Americans in Oakland:

<https://oaklandplanninghistory.weebly.com/early-history.html>; Chinese labor: <http://library.csueastbay.edu/ghosts-dam>,

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3147; African Americans in Oakland:

<https://www.oaklandlibrary.org/blogs/from-main-library/african-americans-establish-growing-community-early-oakland>

earthquake and fire, and African Americans who found a chance for change on the Central Pacific Railroad, and then in Oakland's factories and shipyards. There have been countless waves of immigrants and migrants: some fleeing wars, some looking for better work, some joining family, some looking for a freedom they didn't have before. They brought with them knowledge, skills, wisdom, ingenuity, entrepreneurship, perseverance—and amazing creativity. Among them were people of color who came to Oakland and stayed—despite not being able to get a fair hearing in court, to own property, to become a citizen, to start a business, to access decent education, or to live where they chose—and then fought for change. People were removed from thriving enclaves in West Oakland by the building of freeways, the post office, and BART—but created new places in what is now Chinatown, Fruitvale, downtown, East Oakland, and other pockets of the city.

The cultural and infrastructural legacies of Oakland's communities of color are everywhere—in the music we listen to (influenced by the Black Arts Movement), in the food we eat (the grocers of *calle siete*), even in the water we drink (reservoirs built by Chinese labor). Yet, the legacies of racialized public policies and institutional practices, both conscious and unconscious, continue to haunt us as well, all of us.

Today's Diversity: Today, a surprising 36% of Oaklanders speak a language other than English, more than 14 points above the national average. Though the majority of those are native Spanish speakers (the next largest group speaks Chinese), the breadth of linguistic variation is eye-opening.¹¹ Within the rising foreign-born population of Oakland is an intricate tangle of languages, customs, and belief systems that is difficult to grasp on paper, let alone on the ground. Multiply that by the inter-cultural practices that are only superficially represented in the 63 possible census categories¹² of Oakland's multi-racial canvas—and you get a deeply layered and interwoven picture. As Oakland grows, so does its population's complexity. "Two or more" is the order of the day regarding race, ethnicity, gender, marital history, families, incomes, religions, disabilities, and job holding.

But even as the multiplicity of cultures grows, the lessons of how to make space and provide equitable opportunities for that multiplicity of talent and knowledge still need to be learned. Disproportionate poverty rates, lower median income, school segregation, and educational achievement gaps based on race and ethnicity are all indicators of the potential that is being lost to the city and to society at large.

Like the multi-colored puzzle pieces of a video game, the people coming to Oakland keep tumbling into place—some fitting better than others, some landing wherever and however they can, some filling in top layers while others disappear at the bottom. The question we must answer is: how do we get all the pieces, existing and new, to fit together well while retaining the best of what Oakland is as well as strengthening its potential?

¹¹ Diversity: Non-English Speakers, 2015, DATA USA: Oakland, CA, https://datausa.io/profile/geo/oakland-ca/#category_heritage

¹² "Questions and Answers for Census 2000 Data on Race," US Census 2000, March 14, 2001, <https://www.census.gov/census2000/raceqandas.html>



Languages Spoken in OUSD, 2013-14 (Source: OFCY, Oakland Youth Demographic Profile, Strategic Investment Plan 2016-2019 Appendix)

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Context

This planning process was not one that could build on accomplishments of a recent cultural plan, but neither did it need to start from scratch.

Some targeted action planning by the City had already taken place to learn about the state of artists and cultural organizations and the factors influencing their displacement from Oakland. A significant piece of research was done by the Mayor’s Artist Housing and Workspace Task Force in the form of the “Strategies for Protecting and Creating Arts & Culture Space in Oakland” White Paper (Spring 2016) and its extensive artist survey (with over 900 respondents). Also, the work of the Planning & Building Department in relation to its Social Equity Assessment of the Downtown Specific Plan was already underway and its scope included a look at the role of arts and cultural activity in the downtown area. These were stepping stones on the path to assessing the current conditions in Oakland for the cultural sector and the openness and collegial attitude of those working on those internal efforts made the initial steps on the path smooth.

The planning was spurred on by the hiring of a new head of Cultural Affairs through a national search—after a number of years of interim leadership. His experience on the national scene as well as in the Bay Area brought both wide-angle and zoom lenses to the scope of the planning process.

Research & Discovery

An initial research and discovery phase was conducted to assess how conditions might help or hinder the realization of the community’s wants and needs with regard to the cultural life of the city. An aim of this process was to make best use of existing resources and learning—both in the city and in the field—and to try and avoid duplicating efforts as much as possible.

The early part of this research included a review of Cultural Affairs current and historical program and grantmaking reports, City documents from various departments, and relevant parts of the City Charter as well as a broad range of field literature regarding various aspects of cultural policy and placemaking. The literature review continued throughout the planning process as resources emerged.

Interviews were conducted with City personnel, community members, and field colleagues across the country involved with cultural policy and planning. Meetings of City citizen advisory bodies as well as community cultural meetings and cultural events were attended as part of the research process.

The scope of the research and discovery activities for the cultural planning process included:

- 60+ individuals interviewed individually or in group meetings, including the Mayor, all Cultural Affairs staff, City policy advisors, various department heads and staff, arts and community leaders, community/real estate developers and planners, cultural colleagues in other cities, and funders
- Attendance at several City, community, and field meetings for information gathering and possible coordination with relevant City and community initiatives

- Attendance at cultural events such as Art + Soul Oakland, various street festivals, walking tours, the Art Murmur, Fridays Nights @ OMCA, performances, and exhibitions
- Document review of current and historical Cultural Affairs reports, publications, statistics, funding guidelines, past plans, Funding Advisory Committee & Public Art Advisory Committee notes, relevant ordinances, and consultant reports
- Document/website review of City governance structures, planning initiatives (e.g., area specific plans, departmental strategic plans, etc.), census data and demographic data analyses for the city and region, and comparative city demographic and economic data
- Field literature review of recent cultural planning documents of other cities; creative placemaking case studies and research; policy papers and studies on cultural space, cultural districts, percent-for-art ordinances, public artists-in-residence programs, community benefit agreements, race and equity policy, cultural equity policy, belonging, well-being, community development, housing/ displacement/rent control/gentrification; recent news stories; and histories of Oakland.

Research Findings

In addition to the broader environmental scan of some of the shifting social and economic conditions in the city described above, a number of culturally-related findings emerged from the research and discovery phase that informed the next steps of the planning process. They include:

- **Oakland's Cultural Ecosystem:** The non-profit cultural sector of Oakland defies typical narratives of who the institutional anchors are in a city. There are no granite-heavy behemoths that house the symphony, opera, ballet, and museums; and the reality of these organizations looks a lot different from what one might expect. Oakland's cultural stalwarts are an unexpected mix of community-grounded organizations usually with small to medium-sized budgets; and though they have challenged infrastructures, there is no lack of ingenuity, integrity, passion, and commitment in their make-up.
- **Social Capital:** What Oakland lacks in historic, large-budget cultural institutions, it makes up for in small-but-resilient organizations and committed individuals—some native to the city with deep histories and some with deep loyalty to their adopted home. The organizational and disciplinary fluidity of Oakland's cultural scene is informed by its nimbleness, entrepreneurial spirit, and connectedness. The city's strong bonds of social capital are a significant part of its asset base and should be recognized as tangible strengths in assessments of capacity.
- **Creative Small Business Activity and Visibility:** The growth and vibrancy of local entrepreneurship is putting Oakland on regional and national cultural maps, such as the Oakland Art Murmur, the makers movement to promote industrial arts, leading-edge multidisciplinary environmental projects, a burgeoning restaurant and food production scene, and the Oakland Indie Awards to spotlight the many progressive local businesses and arts endeavors that make the city unique.

- **Ongoing Cultural Community Organizing:** Organizing and advocacy by the arts community helped to expedite the hiring of the Cultural Affairs Manager, supported the social equity assessment of the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan (DOSP), and spurred the increase of resources and staffing for Cultural Affairs.
- **Space Crisis Spawns Placekeeping Solutions:** Sky-rocketing rents and real estate prices have spawned a variety of methods to address placekeeping in the cultural, maker, and small business communities—including proactive engagement in promoting historic cultural districts, saving live/work spaces after the Ghost Ship fire, experimentation with collective/community property ownership models, creative production zoning protections, and negotiating community benefits agreements in changing neighborhoods.
- **Arts & Culture-Friendly Leadership in the City:** There is demonstrated concern and leadership from the Mayor and a number of City Council Members around issues impacting artists, makers, culture bearers, and the cultural community, which has led the attraction of outside resources as well as culture-related policy revisions.
- **Key Allies and Funders:** The city’s cultural sector is receiving support and attention from local and external allies, for example, Bloomberg Associates has provided technical assistance to Cultural Affairs that helped to jump start and inform the cultural planning process; funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts made the planning process possible; substantial support for the retention and development of cultural spaces has been given by the Kenneth Rainin Foundation in conjunction with the Community Arts Stabilization Trust; and a number of local, regional, and national funders have supported and/or have ongoing interest in the current community and cultural development in Oakland.
- **Cross-Cutting Initiatives:** New and established cross-cutting policy, initiatives, and plans provide Cultural Affairs with opportunities to advocate for a cross-sectoral, cultural equity agenda across the City and in the community—e.g., establishment of the Department of Race & Equity and Oakland’s membership in the Government Alliance on Race & Equity; the new Department of Transportation and its culture-conscious strategic plan; the social equity assessment of the DOSP; Oakland’s inclusion in the 100 Resilient Cities cohort, PolicyLink’s All-In Cities initiative, the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation’s new strategic plan with its Healthy Neighborhoods Approach and The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative in East Oakland (both of which incorporate arts and culture dimensions), the S.H. Cowell Foundation’s place-based investments in East Oakland, Family Independence Initiative’s presence in Oakland, among many others.
- **Timely, Relevant Policy Research and Planning:** A great deal of recent research can usefully inform how cultural sector work in Oakland moves forward, including *The CAP Report: 30 Ideas for the Creation, Activation & Preservation of Cultural Space* by the City of Seattle (a valuable companion to the Task Force’s White Paper), the deep research of the Social Impact of the Arts/UPenn team on natural cultural districts, the assessment rubric “Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change” released by Animating Democracy, the “Policy on Belonging Toolkit” from the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, the *Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy* report by Helicon Collaborative, along with numerous recent cultural plans from other cities that are focusing on cultural equity.

Community Engagement: In-Person

Once a deeper understanding of the current issues and conditions and the historical context for creating a cultural plan for Oakland was in place, a plan to engage with the community was designed and implemented. The Oakland-based Communities in Collaboration consultancy took the lead on organizing and facilitating all the community engagement meetings.

The following factors informed the design of the community engagement process:

- Finding a way to sound out both the cultural community (i.e., artists, arts educators, arts and culture organizations) as well as the general community about their needs and desires with respect to cultural life in Oakland
- Supporting people from different parts of the city to give their opinions in accessible ways
- Providing the new Cultural Affairs Manager a way to strengthen his relationship with the community and vice-versa, and
- Sharing some of the findings from the initial research and getting input on them.

The planning process was called “Belonging in Oakland” to signal that it embraced the broad scope of the changing dynamics and culture of Oakland’s communities. Two kinds of community meetings were designed: “Cultural Conversations,” which focused more on the cultural community (though anyone was welcome to come), were opportunities to interact directly with the Cultural Affairs Manager, and “Community Dialogues” were an open call to the general population to share their thoughts about cultural life in Oakland. Given the different target audiences, the two kinds of meetings had different formats and forms of facilitation. All meetings were located in neighborhoods to recognize that all areas of the city are valued parts of Oakland and to have people be able to speak from their home base.

By the Numbers: All of the community meetings took place in 2017 and were launched in late August and continued through early November. There were fourteen meetings in all: seven Cultural Conversations and seven Community Dialogues. The meetings were in thirteen different neighborhoods and took place in each of the seven council districts. At least 300 people attended, with a few people attending multiple meetings.



**Hosts &
Locations
of
Community
Meetings**

Cultural Conversations with the Cultural Affairs Manager

- E. M. Wolfman Bookstore (Downtown)
- Farley's East (Uptown)
- Intertribal Friendship House (East Lake)
- Peralta Hacienda Historical Park (Peralta Hacienda)
- RBA Creative (Laurel)
- Red Bay Coffee (Fruitvale)
- Zoo Labs (West Oakland)

Community Dialogues

- Dimond Branch Library (Dimond)
- East Oakland Boxing Association (Deep East)
- Eastside Arts Alliance (San Antonio)
- Flight Deck (Downtown)
- Heartlands Merchant Association (Central East)
- Oakland Asian Cultural Center (Chinatown)
- Rockridge Branch Library (Rockridge)

Short written surveys asking principally for demographic information were given to attendees of the community meetings. (The return rate was over 75%.) From this we know:

- **Oaklanders:** 90% of respondents were Oakland residents, a few listed cities close by.
- **Age:** 66% were in their 40s-60s, 27% were under 40, and 7% were 70 or older—with the youngest participant being 14 years old and the oldest 93.
- **Gender:** 69% of attendees identified as female
- **Race/Ethnicity:** 61% were POC/Multiracial—Blacks and Pacific Islanders were proportionally represented compared with Oakland's overall racial census data¹³, Whites and Native Americans were over-represented, and Latinos and Asians were under-represented. 2% identified as Middle Eastern and 8% as multiracial.
- **Sexual Orientation:** 23% identified as LGBTQ+, 17 percentage points above the general population of the SF/Oakland/Hayward area.
- **Disability:** 10% identified as having a disability.
- **Education:** 85% had college degrees, over double the percent in the general population of the SF/Oakland/Hayward area.
- **Arts Professionals:** 40% identified as being in an arts-related profession.
- **Income:** 43% earned \$40K-\$99.9K, 39% earned \$100K or more, and 18% earned less than \$40K.

¹³ 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates of races alone or in combination with one or more other races, US Census

What is Valued: Included in the survey was a poll in which people were asked to rank the importance of a number of things about cultural and civic life in Oakland. Below are the top three rankings of the 56% of attendees who participated in the poll:



Without using the term “cultural equity,” people made it clear that was a value. They also demonstrated interest in participating in civic life—whether through governance or caring for neighborhoods—and have a healthy interest in participating in the cultures of others, not just their own.

Cultural Conversations

The Cultural Conversations were planned as informal discussions with the cultural community and were facilitated by the Cultural Affairs Manager. The meetings served both as a forum to hear from the community and as a vehicle for Cultural Affairs to share information about the planning process and to answer questions about its services. The meeting format was designed to be easily replicated in the future to help maintain good City-community communications beyond the planning process.

The conversations were wide-ranging. A number of areas of concern kept arising, though there was not necessarily consensus on what was at issue or what the solutions should be. The following reflects some of the range of community comments:

- **Shrinking Investments in the Cultural Sector:** Arts and culture funding has been on an overall downward trend, not only in terms of the City’s history of investment, but in the philanthropic field more generally. There are rising costs of doing business without a rise in investment. Small organizations and emerging artists are abundant, but because funds are so limited, they are less able to compete with the more established. The growing development and business interests in the city don’t seem to be translating into noticeably more resources for arts and culture even though that’s what makes the city attractive. Cultural vibrancy doesn’t just come from non-profits; small businesses and volunteers are critical too. Are there different kinds of investments

for different types of organizations? Can small, community-conscious for-profits band together to attract social impact investments?

- **Space Needs:** There needs to be more space for cultural activity, not just downtown, but all over the city. How do we get developers to invest in cultural spaces? How can unused spaces be animated? Can Cultural Affairs be a stronger advocate for more and better cultural spaces? Can it help make spaces more affordable? Can something be done to make City-owned cultural spaces more accessible and other city spaces more available for cultural uses? Can the City provide benefits to commercial spaces that are willing to accommodate cultural uses?
- **Equity Issues:** How can there be more bottom-up decision-making about resource allocation? City contracting and permitting processes are very difficult to negotiate. How can barriers to access be reduced? Dividing resources by district is not necessarily equitable because people's work crosses borders, but resources need to be shifted to East Oakland—there is not enough cultural infrastructure there. We need to map the invisible assets across neighborhoods. Seniors are not considered in equity discussions. There are not enough resources for traditional cultures. Cultural equity is when people are able to be seen and heard by everyone else.
- **Cultural Districts, Community Benefits, and New Development:** How can city government connect better to community vitality? What resources and policies need to be included in cultural districts to help stem displacement? Can developers be required to meet with constituents in cultural districts? Cultural districts across the city need to band together to support placekeeping efforts.
- **Capacity Building:** Artists need to learn more about how to be small businesses. A local intermediary is needed for insurance and other needs of small cultural organizations—this is an equity issue for Oakland. Having artists in decision-making and problem-solving positions could be empowering for the City and the community.

Community Dialogues

While the Cultural Conversations tended to focus on issues directly related to cultural organizations and artists, the Community Dialogues were designed to elicit broader perspectives on the city's cultural life. The target audience was the general population and the meetings were facilitated by the community engagement consultant team along with different community-based facilitators. The same group of questions were posed at each of the meetings to stimulate dialogue. These were meant to get people thinking broadly and talking together about the quality of life in the city, their experience of it, and their agency in it.

- **Best Things About Oakland:** In almost all the Community Dialogues, attendees were broken up into small groups, and yet the answers to the question about the three best things about Oakland were in some aspects very consistent. **Diversity**—cultural, ethnic, racial—was the top attribute mentioned uniformly over all meetings. A consistent second was the **good weather and the beautiful environment** of Oakland—its being sunny and warm, Lake Merritt, the green spaces, the views, the built environment. Third place was occupied by more of a variety of factors, but a cluster kept emerging related to a sense of unpretentious local pride, of resilience, being progressive/open/supportive—that is, **the character of the city's people**. Some other

often-mentioned features included the vibrant arts scene, good food, transportation and location, and youth culture.

- **Making the Community Better:** When asked about what would make the community a better place to live, ideas flowed from all directions. Some needed to name serious community troubles before moving to positive actions: displacement, affordable housing, and the homelessness crisis often headed the list. Chronic neighborhood disinvestment and the need for better mental healthcare, more equitable schools, healthy food, and clean and safe streets were not far behind. But it didn't take long before an abundance of positive ideas were shared. Many focused on **neighborhood-based resources**—meaningful, organic, and authentic activities in which people define what they want; settings that bring people together to get to know each other and problem-solve; and mechanisms for **people to take greater ownership of their communities**. Accessible neighborhood arts activities, street fairs and block parties, and community murals were named as ways people come together; public places like schools, parks, and libraries were named as **welcoming spaces and potential community hubs**. There was concern about barriers to people's **ability to work together or contribute what they have to offer**—sometimes because of bureaucracy, sometimes because people don't know how to connect to each other, and sometimes because people don't know what resources are out there and how to tie them together.
- **How the City Can Help Residents Thrive in Place:** When asked what the City could do to help residents thrive in place, general suggestions ran the gamut from solving homelessness and assisting with home buying/keeping, livable wages and local business supports, improved schools and early childhood services, to free citywide Internet and training citizen consultants to work in neighborhoods to help solve problems. With respect to cultural life and community connection, the range of ideas was equally wide: better arts education and after-school **programs for youth**, more and different kinds of **public art**, consistent **support for long-standing cultural organizations and neighborhood heritage** resources, cultural programs to **integrate newcomers** (including developers), **art activities for marginalized populations**, producing Oakland Museum-type **Friday Nights across the city**, night **farmer's markets with entertainment**, more **marketing support for cultural groups** and neighborhood events, facilitating **cross-neighborhood volunteerism** through a community involvement website, having a **City interdepartmental liaison** to help navigate things like event permitting, and **protecting cultural diversity** through City policy.

Can the City love us as much as we love the city?

—Resident at a Community Dialogue meeting

Community Engagement: Online

An online survey was offered to give the community an additional way to voice their opinions and ideas for the cultural plan. The survey format was mostly open ended to allow community members the opportunity to express themselves in their own words. To be sure, it's harder to analyze comments that are free-ranging, but it gave people the chance to be creative, expressive, specific, and more authentic.

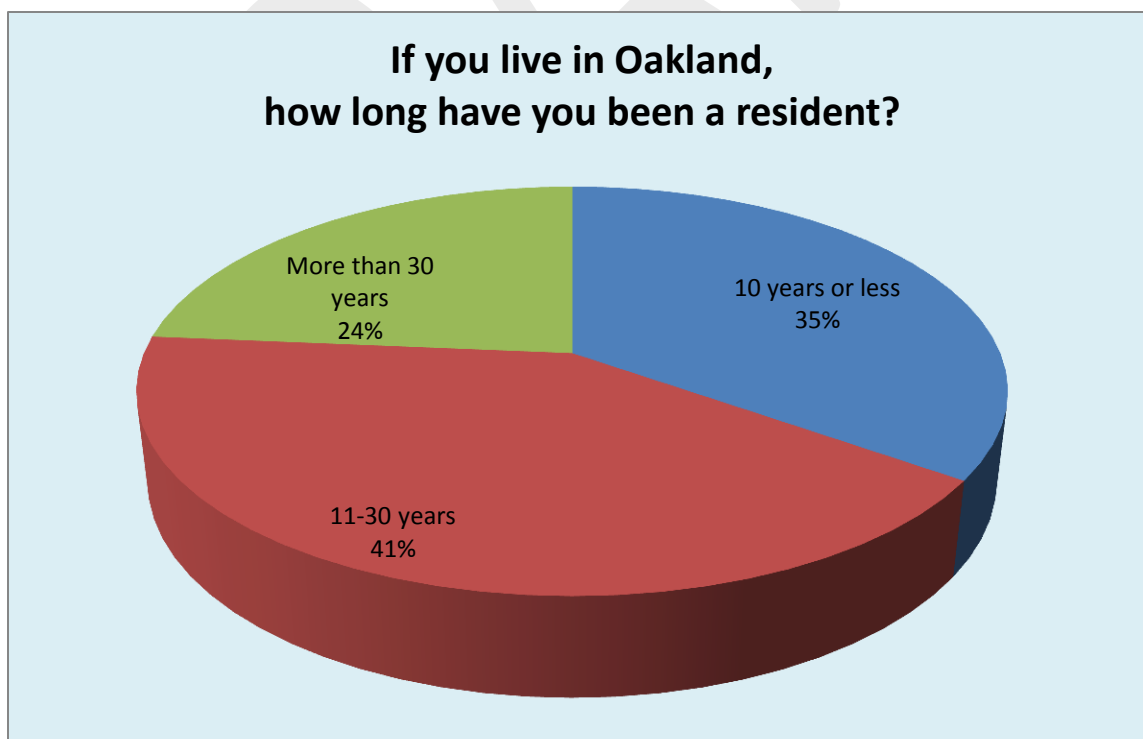
Building on the format of the Community Dialogues, the survey sought to reveal what people like best about Oakland, whether they think Oakland is a welcoming place, where they feel most at home, how they celebrate or preserve their culture, how important arts and cultural activities are to their lives generally, what particular kinds of cultural activities are most important to them, and what they thought would make the community stronger and welcoming. Demographic information was also collected from respondents.

Who Responded

By the Numbers: There were 444 responses to the online survey. Respondents could choose to opt out of answering any of the opinion questions and still submit their survey. Between 90% and 99% of total respondents answered all, except one, of the opinion questions that had to do with what they like about Oakland and the importance of culture in their lives. The demographic questions had a more varied response rate depending on the question. In general, none of these questions received answers from less than 80% of respondents.

Oaklanders: As one would expect, the vast majority of respondents to the online survey were Oakland residents—**87%**. (A number of non-resident respondents indicated they worked in Oakland or used to live there.)

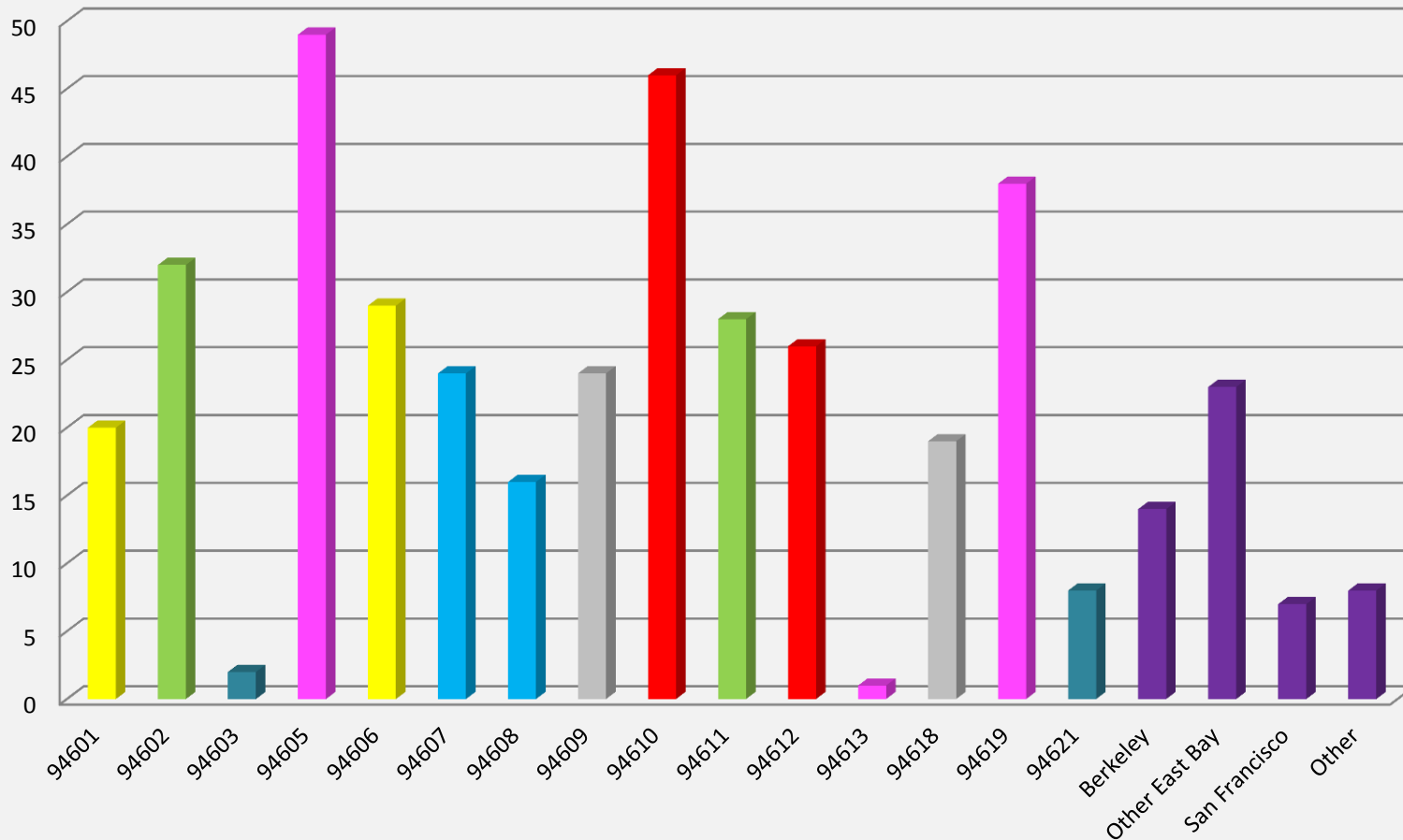
Length of Residence: Of the residents, **65% have been living in Oakland for more than ten years** and 24% more than 30 years. Almost half of those very long-term residents were native Oaklanders.



- **Age:** Almost half were 45-65 years old; 35% were 25-44; 14% were 65+, and 3% were 24 or younger.
- **Gender:** 71% of respondents identified as female, 27% as male, and 2% preferred to self-describe.
- **Race/Ethnicity:** 53% were POC/Multiracial—that is three percentage points below what this population is compared with Oakland’s overall racial data according to the census¹⁴. This can mostly be accounted for by Whites being over-represented and Latinos under-represented in the respondent pool. 4% identified as Middle Eastern, and 16% as multiracial.
- **Native Language:** At least 14% had native languages other than, or in addition to, English or were multilingual.
- **Sexual Orientation:** 22% identified as LGBTQ+, 16 percentage points above the general population of the SF/Oakland/Hayward area, and 3% preferred to self-describe.
- **Disability:** 12% identified as having a disability.
- **Family Status:** 51% were adults without children (29% married/partnered and 22% single); 40% had children (33% married/partnered or 7% single).

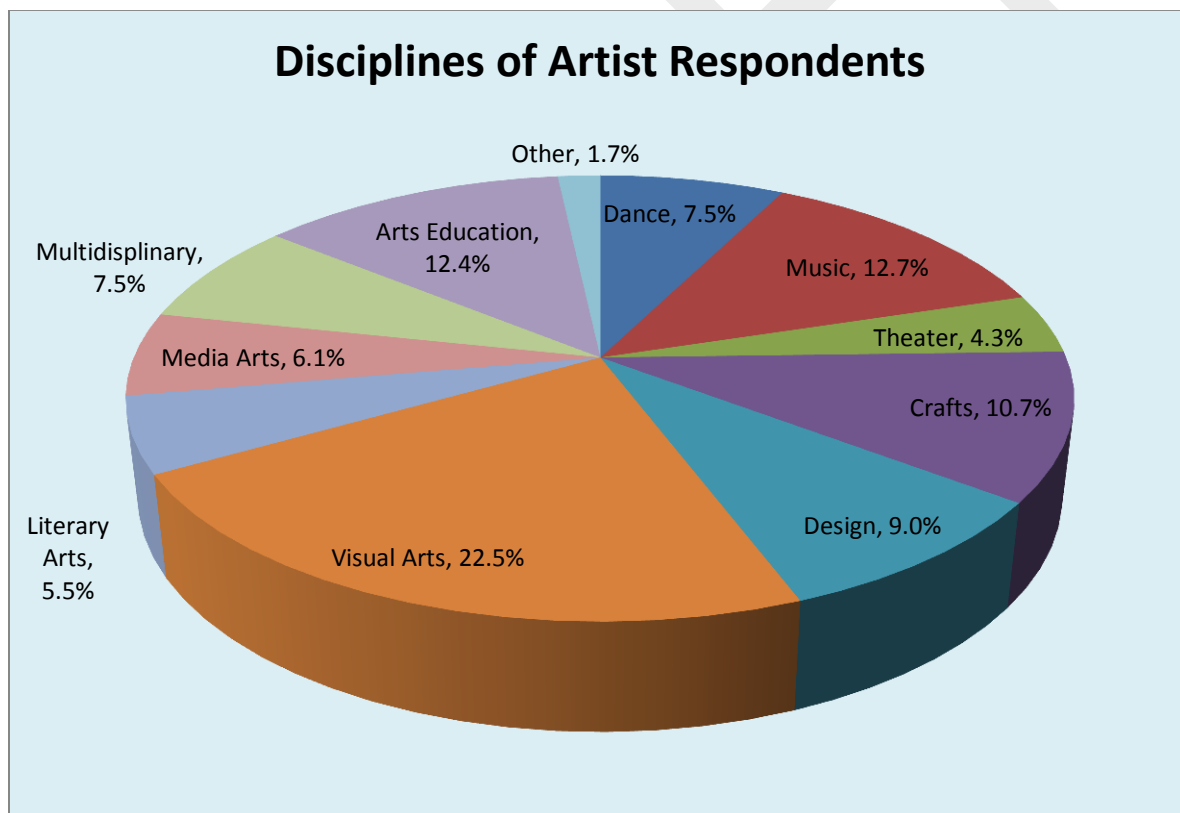
¹⁴ 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Yr Estimates of races alone or in combination with one or more other races, US Census Bureau

Zip Codes of Survey Respondents



Fruitvale/Peralta/Fairfax, San Antonio/Clinton/Cleveland Heights ♦ Dimond/Lincoln Heights, Piedmont Ave/Montclair/Skyline ♦
 Elmhurst/Stonehurst, Coliseum/Hegenberger ♦ Frick/Millsmont/Bancroft/Eastmont, Mills, Maxwell Pk/Laurel/Allendale/Merritt ♦
 Prescott/Lower Bottoms, Golden Gate/Santa Fe/Gaskill ♦ Temescal/Bushrod/Pill Hill, Rockridge/Hillier Highlands ♦ Lakeshore/
 Grand Lake/ Crocker Highlands, Lakeside/Uptown/Downtown ♦ Outside Oakland ♦

- **Neighborhoods:** 21% of respondents live in Central East Oakland; 17% in the Downtown/Uptown area; 15% in the Dimond/Piedmont Ave./Montclair area; 12% in the Fruitvale/San Antonio area; 10% in North Oakland; 10% in West Oakland; 2% in Deep East Oakland; and 13% outside of Oakland.
- **Education:** 85% had college degrees, over double the percent in the general population of the SF/Oakland/Hayward area. Over half of those were advanced degrees.
- **Total Household Income:** Over half earned \$60K-\$149.9K, 27% earned \$150K or more, and 22% earned less than \$60K. (20% of respondents chose not to answer this question.)
- **Employment:** 66% of respondents worked in Oakland. Almost 60% were employees, 30% were self-employed, and 10% were retired.
- **Arts Enthusiasts:** About half of all respondents make art or participate in artistic activities as an amateur.
- **Professional Artists:** 43% identified as being professional artists. 42% in visual arts/design/crafts; 25% in the performing arts; 19% in literary/media/multidisciplinary arts; and 12% in arts education.



Caveat: The demographic information about who responded to the survey gives us a lens with which to view what they had to say about the cultural life of Oakland. The survey respondents only represent a tiny fraction of the people in the city: it's important to remember that many others might have opinions that converge or diverge with what is expressed below. Planning and implementation efforts must always strive to keep bringing more voices to the table.

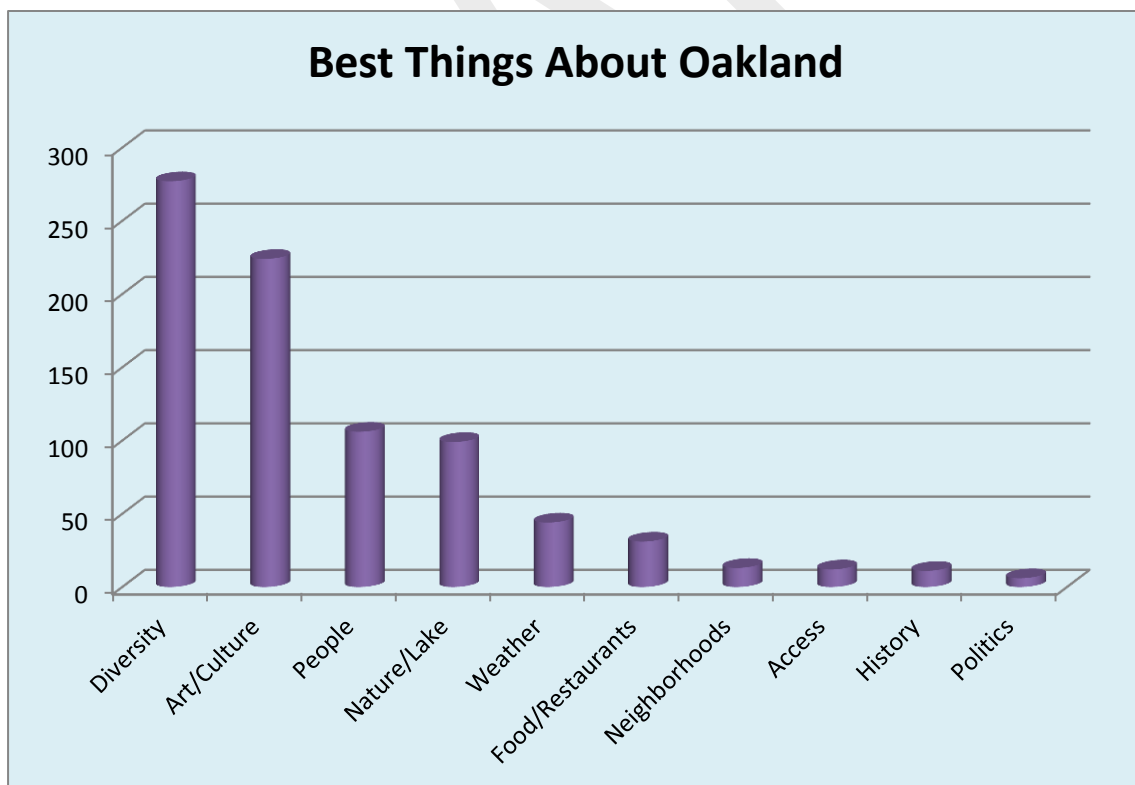
What They Had to Say

The rest of the survey mostly consisted of open-ended questions about how people feel about Oakland, their values, and what ideas they have about strengthening the community.

What are the three things you like best about Oakland?

It was hard for many respondents to just name three things, so they just went above and beyond. But as with the comments from the Community Dialogues, the **diversity** of Oakland came up more than any other characteristic and was most often ranked first on the list: diversities of all kinds—of races and ethnicities, cultures, immigrants, cultural activities, food, beliefs, lifestyles, neighborhoods, and geographies. Many specifically named **arts and cultural activities** as being important: the music, street festivals, murals, the cultural vitality, “the cool arts scene,” and arts and activism. Also as in the Community Dialogues, various aspects of **the character of the city’s people** were frequently mentioned. In addition to what arose in the Dialogues, favorite things about Oakland included: generative energy; how communities stand together; the spirit of resistance and social justice; Black culture leading and creating; being gritty, hardworking, and caring—“the culture of TRUE Oakland.”

Just behind comments about Oakland’s people were ones about **the environment**—particularly about Lake Merritt, the parks, the city’s natural beauty, and the convenience of its location.

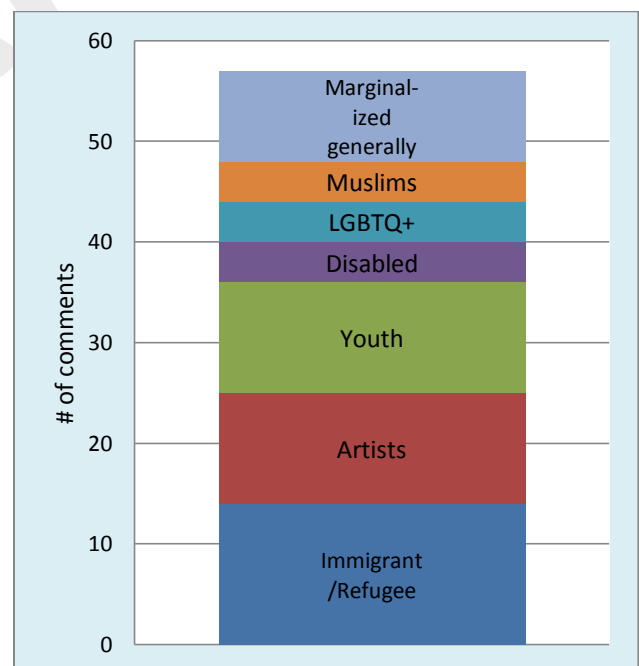
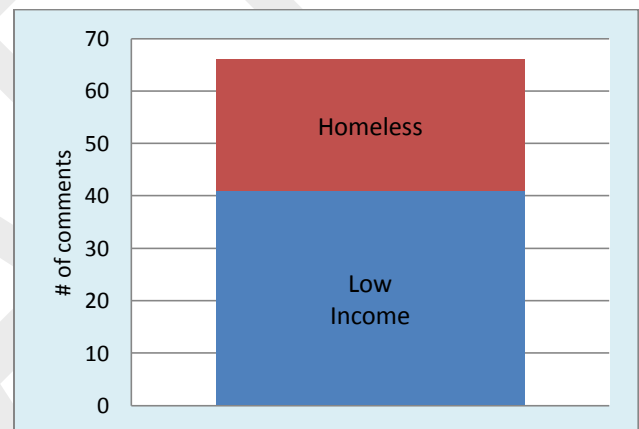
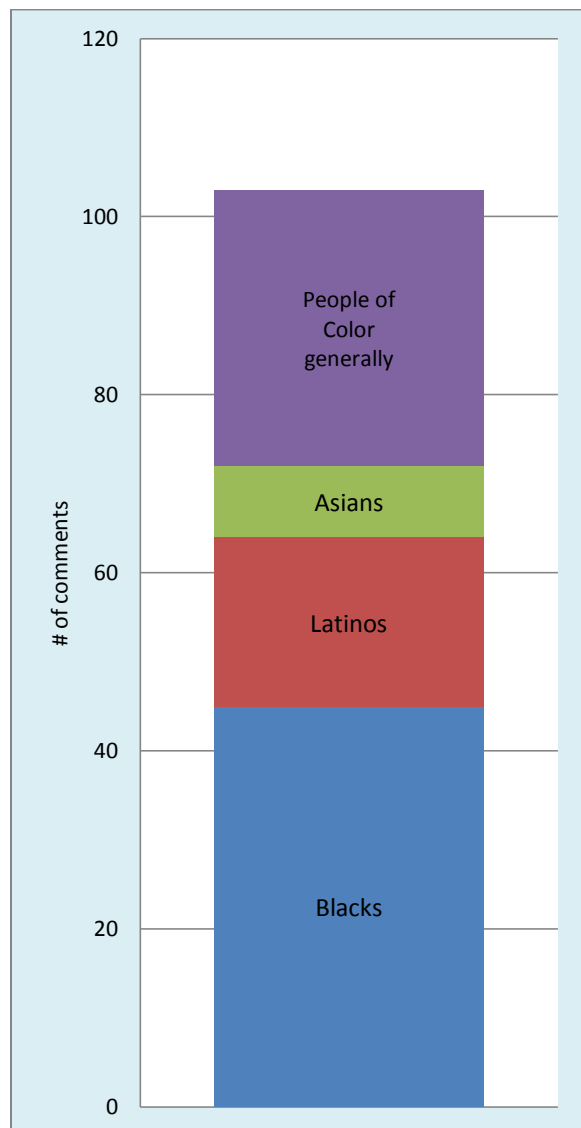


“I feel all cultures are welcome in Oakland.”

Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement that all cultures are welcome in Oakland. Though **87% agreed** with this statement (either strongly or somewhat), over two-thirds of respondents went on to describe who they felt was being left out (even if they strongly agreed that all were welcome).

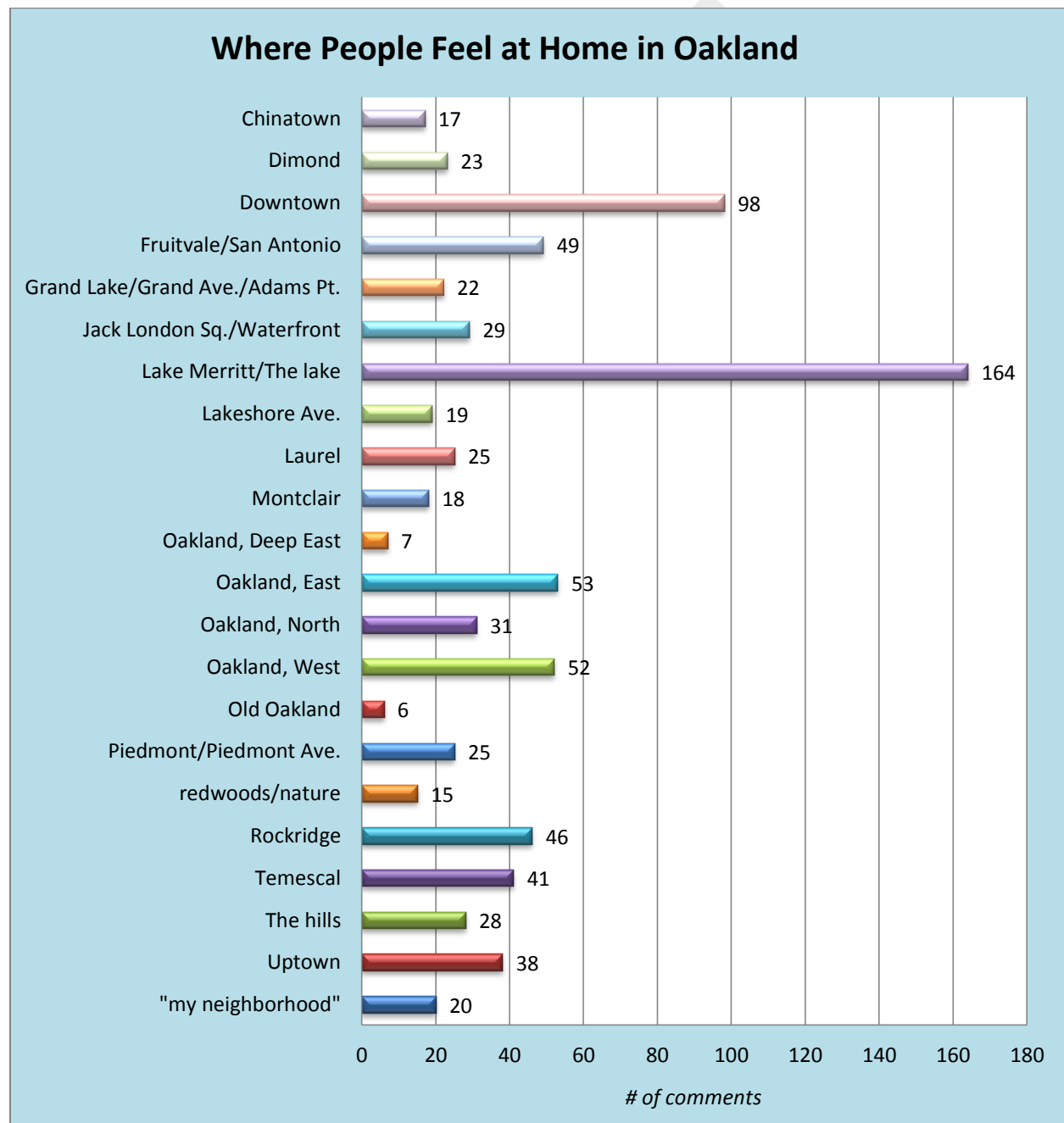
If you don’t feel all cultures are welcome, who is being left out?

Feelings about affordability in the city and its connection to race and class ran high in respondents’ answers. The highest number of comments about who was being left out addressed race/ethnicity, with displacement as an indicator of not being welcome. Growing homelessness and low income people being driven out of their homes or out of Oakland were other great causes of concern. A number of other populations were named as being marginalized—by lack of support, acceptance, and/or respect, or a negative policy environment.



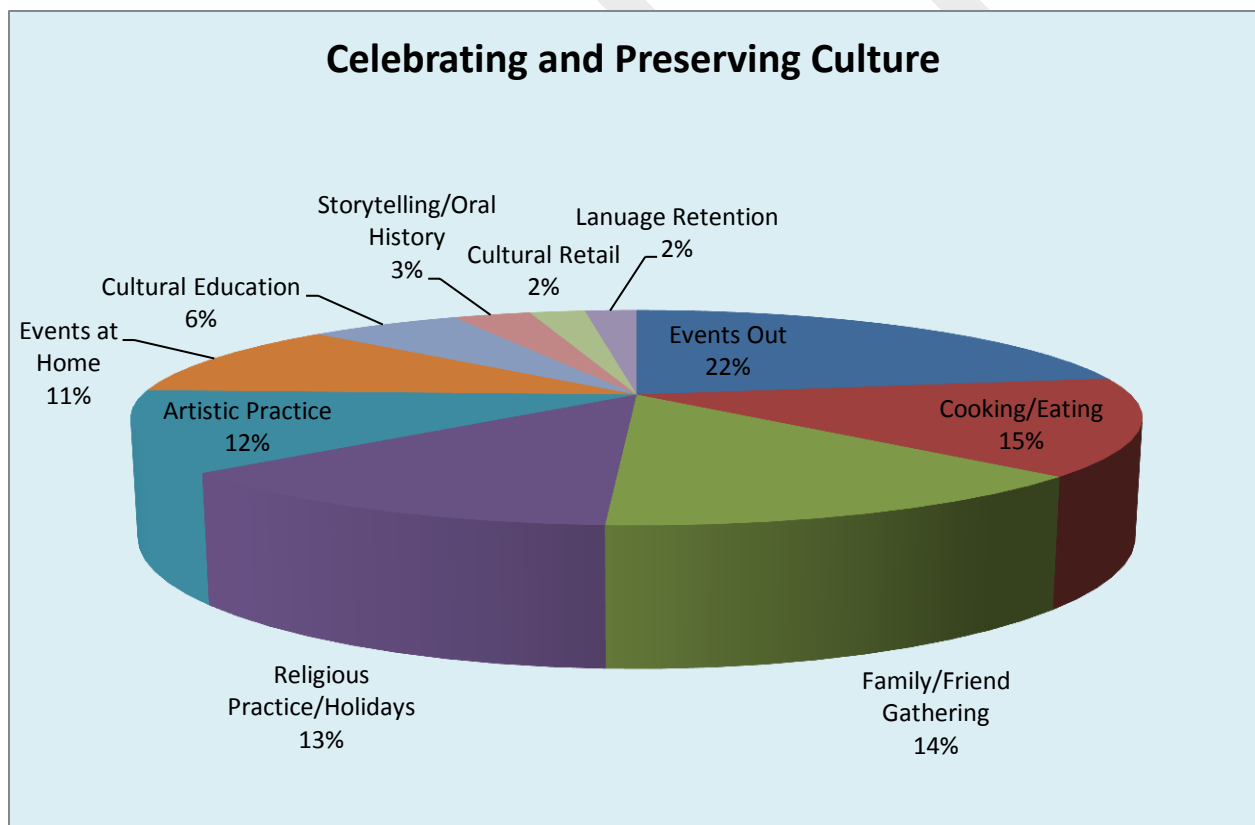
In what parts of Oakland do you feel most at home, and why?

The 20+ places listed below were mentioned most frequently—the reasons why were many. Often it's the place where respondents live or work, but sometimes it's just a place that's easy to get to. People mentioned feeling at home where they visit friends or family and where they're used to shopping and socializing. Some are comfortable where people know them, where they have history, or where they feel their culture is respected and reflected. Feeling at home can also come from finding solitude or beauty, or being greeted with eye-contact and a smile on the street. (See p. 43 for some quoted comments.)



How do you celebrate or preserve your culture?

Of the 83% of respondents who answered this question, 60% mentioned multiple activities that they engaged in to celebrate and/or preserve their culture. Many of these blended into each other and often involved family, friends, and food—sometimes out, sometimes at home. Going out to events included going to places to hear music from one’s background or to dance, going to culturally-specific festivals or venues, attending events to make things communally, and celebrating holidays publicly or privately. Going to a place of worship or to practice a faith at home were also commonly mentioned as were engaging in specific artmaking practices. Other activities included getting together with elders, sharing stories, passing on cultural traditions or language to young people, and shopping for culturally-specific products. Many went on to describe their interests in learning about other cultures or that they came from culturally-blended families and so participated in a range of practices. (This question had the lowest response rate of any of the opinion questions. A notable 17% of respondents variously said that the question was not applicable to them, that they weren’t sure how to answer it, that they didn’t feel like they had a culture, or simply skipped the question.)



How important are the following things to cultural life in Oakland?

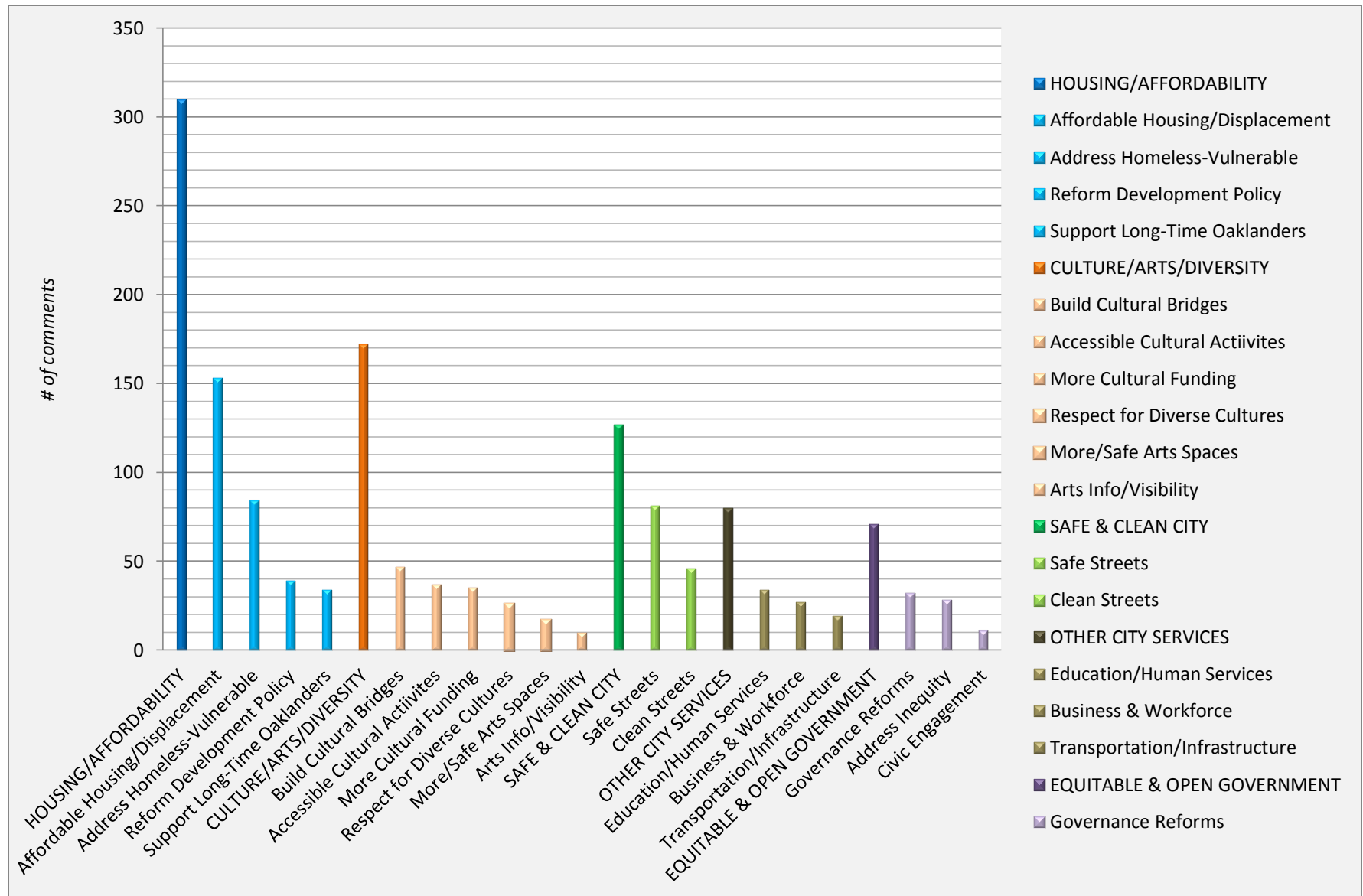
Respondents were asked to rank each of the following by their level of importance (“Essential” to “Not at all Important”) to them. The features of cultural life that received the highest number of “Essential” and “Very Important” rankings are in priority order below.

1. **Arts education in schools for children & youth**
2. **Places to enjoy arts & culture**
3. **Support for local artists & arts projects**
4. **Community centers for neighborhood use**
5. **Community celebrations (street fairs, festivals)**
6. **Art in public places**
7. **Cultural classes in the community**
8. **Neighborhood beautification**
9. **Support for national/international artists & arts to come to Oakland**
10. **Making Oakland a top tourist destination**

What would make Oakland a stronger community?

Given this last question was a general one, it prompted wide-ranging answers that addressed concerns at the top of people’s minds. As evidenced in the chart below, the inter-related issues of housing, affordability, development policy, displacement, homelessness, and support for long-standing Oaklanders who are losing their foothold in the city had an over-shadowing presence in the comments. Just beneath the surface of these practical worries is the **palpable fear of the irretrievable loss of the character of Oakland**.

But beyond the fear was a multitude of ideas about how to maintain and strengthen the cultural life of the city—both its character and the kind of activities that would sustain and build it. Many comments revealed people’s **desire for connection** with their neighbors and with other neighborhoods across the city to build unity and understanding. Others emphasized the importance of **orienting newcomers** to the history and culture of Oakland to facilitate entering into the community respectfully. Equity in terms of cultural **funding for communities of color** and other marginalized communities, **diverse cultural education for young people**, and **gathering spaces** for people in their own neighborhoods for self-determined purposes were all cited as important ways to strengthen Oakland.



Major thematic categories are in CAPS and represent the total number of comments about the themes; subthemes that make up the total follow each theme.

Chances to talk about the issues that seek to divide us, celebrations of the unique contributions made by Oakland's diverse communities. □ Bring in international artists from the myriad of countries that represent our immigrants' countries such as Ethiopia, Korea, etc. □ More collaborative experiences amongst community providers and more readily accessible information to arts resources in the community. □ How do we create a culture of accountability and community responsibility as well as a respect for and understanding of the history of the city and how do we communicate this to newcomers? □ Real arts funding for communities of color and arts organizations of color. □ That all children and youth have strong participation, through the schools, in building community through the arts. □ Places for everyone to celebrate what they consider important. □ 100% commitment to equitable government planning and legislation to ensure cultural retention and diversity; specific arts initiatives such as zoning for arts spaces, credits for cultural-oriented retail, and affordable housing and office/studio spaces for cultural practitioners. There needs to be a major push for acknowledging and preserving local history and culture in areas undergoing rapid change. And some sort of cultural education initiative to better inform new residents about what has come before them. Adhering to a minimum requirement of 25% affordable housing while also securing below market rents for cultural retail spaces in new developments would help keeps the arts thriving and sustainable. □ I would love to get to know my immediate neighbors better—perhaps there are ways to unite us such as more public gardens, parks, and other community events that are small-to-medium sized and encourage arts participation and dialogue. □ Continue to support local artists and activist to be visible in the community. Truly invest in youth organizing to create leaders who will work to make Oakland better. Divest in OPD and reallocate resources to the community. Invest more resources to develop deep east Oakland and west Oakland. □ Ensuring that new people moving into Oakland understand the history and different communities of the city, and take part in building community TOGETHER. □ I think cultural hubs and opportunities for organizations and artists to connect - there's a lot of people struggling to do way is great, but if more people collaborate and share resources, scale. □ Policies that enable new people or those who have back to the community, either regulations that don't let their \$ come in and take over. □ A re-the City to ensure that the existing driven out or further silenced. □ I resettled in Oakland, it would be more one-on-one programs to welcomed. I'm sure many more would love the opportunity to help and to make friends. □ Arts education in public schools where the kids are exposed and learn about significance of culture, identity building, and community building through celebrating culture. □ Community building activities in neighborhoods that facilitate discussions between new and old neighbors. □ I think supporting local businesses and grassroots organizations as best as we can is a crucial strategy. The people that lead those entities represent the diverse cultural communities that reside here. As a result, these businesses and organizations have an innate understanding of what services to offer that are culturally valued, but they also provide spaces for those different cultural communities to feel grounded, safe and welcome. □ Open conversation between people who live in different neighborhoods, gatherings where people who live in different parts of the city have an ice-breaker dialogue with those whose lives are different from them. □ Community town halls, open houses, and inter-pollination between industries, people, neighborhoods, artists, kids and everyone in between. □ Support for cultural and artistic expression: addressing unequal access to resources; addressing gentrification and the cost to established communities; addressing racism and bias. □ Seeing people in city services throughout Oakland who represent our population. □ Easier access to renting city spaces i.e. parks and recreation facilities for artists and people from the community to rent. □ More significant funding for arts organizations/artists that use public spaces for cultural place keeping. □ Make Oakland a community that celebrates the arts and "lifelong learning" with open community college courses, public arts events at the museum and the library, coordinate and connect institutions of learning and opportunities for community to listen to lectures, create and participate in making meaningful experiences in Oakland, and foster a degree of connectivity.

*What would
make Oakland
a stronger
community?*

their own thing - which in a could come together and maybe the impact would generative gentrification, so access to capital are giving financially or through alone dictate their ability to prioritization of resources in diversity of cultures isn't know a ton of refugees are wonderful if there were help those families feel fully established Oaklanders

When talking about culture...

What does your mind think?

What does your heart need?

What does your soul want?



Questions and responses from the community meeting at the Flight Deck (District 3)

A CULTURAL VISION FOR OAKLAND

Oakland has an opportunity now to create a new civic narrative about the importance of recognizing and engaging the full array of people and cultures that make up the city.

The traditional purview of the Cultural Affairs Division has been to support what is thought of as the arts and culture sector. But what is needed now is a holistic vision of culture for the City of Oakland.

Everything the City does is infused with culture, in its broadest sense—that is, ways of being. The City’s responsibilities to support people’s ability to have shelter, work, and to care for their families; to ensure neighborhoods are healthy and safe; to promote responsible and productive business that is part of the community fabric; to create welcoming spaces for learning, expression, and recreation; to ensure mobility and connectivity; and to assist the most vulnerable among us—all of this is made difficult and beautiful by the complexity of culture. The inherent interconnection and interdependence of the work to achieve well-being in a city, and especially one like Oakland, calls for an intentional and shared understanding of the assets and challenges of cultural diversity.

This vision is to have a broad concept of culture as the frame through which diverse ways of being, expression, and creativity are seen, respected, and supported. This is the strength that Cultural Affairs can bring to champion the establishment of equity and to build common cause with those who share that work. The goal is to ensure that the people of Oakland not only feel a sense of belonging in the city and to each other, but know that the city belongs to them—with its rights and responsibilities. This is the guiding vision of a new plan for cultural equity.

***Equity is the driving force.
Culture is the frame.
Belonging is the goal.***

Equity is the Driving Force

The City of Oakland, like a growing number of jurisdictions around the country, has adopted the long-term goal and operating principle of achieving racial and social equity.¹⁵ In 2015, the City adopted a bold ordinance that states explicitly its will to integrate “the principle of ‘fair and just’ in all the City does in order to achieve equitable opportunities for all people and communities.”¹⁶ The vision of this ordinance forms a foundation for the new cultural plan for Oakland.

Determinants of Equity: The ordinance describes what conditions should obtain if equity were achieved in its list of “determinants of equity.” A clean environment; affordable and safe housing; and quality healthcare, food, education, transportation, and public spaces are among the characteristics addressed, as well as good jobs and fair possibilities for asset development. More intangible aspects of daily life are also described, such as having “neighborhoods that support all communities and individuals through strong social networks, trust among neighbors and the ability to work together to achieve common goals that improve the quality of life for everyone in the neighborhood.”

The aspirations of the determinants of equity point the City to its north star. The ordinance also recognizes the critical importance of understanding the following points to fulfilling these aspirations:

- 1) having a “fair and just” city entails the elimination of inequities—“differences in well-being that disadvantage one individual or group in favor of another,”
- 2) existing inequities have as root causes certain “past and current decisions, systems of power and privilege, policies and the implementation of those policies,” and
- 3) to eliminate inequities these root causes must be addressed because they are “systematic, patterned and unfair and can be changed.”

Resource and Rectify: The three points above are at the heart of achieving equity, but as with other ethical mandates, are easier said than done. The historic, codified systems of advantage and disadvantage are so foundational to many policies and practices that they are hard to recognize and even harder to root out. The quickest way to start is by changing the allocation of resources and directing more toward disinvested communities. But inequity cannot be remedied *only* by adding more resources to chronically underserved areas if the playing field is not a level one to start with. The necessary complement to more robust funding of under-resourced communities is to identify and rectify the underlying policies that established the disparities in the first place, along with the even harder work of eliminating the entrenched practices and habits of mind that maintain them. These are long-term, challenging, and ambitious goals; and the work of the Department of Race & Equity is breaking a path to get there. Even with trainings to recognize implicit bias and privilege, program policy audits, and other accountability measures, it will take the vigilance of all the City’s workers to truly succeed in this effort.

Equity Goes Beyond Inclusion: In its deepest sense, achieving equity is not a matter of the assimilation or inclusion of those left out of the advantages our society currently has to offer. Those advantages were built on systemic racism, sexism, and other forms of inequality and exploitation, and do not reflect

¹⁵ Oakland is a part of the Government Alliance on Race & Equity’s network of 84 local and regional jurisdictions working on achieving racial equity for their communities. See, <http://www.racialequityalliance.org/about/>, for more information.

¹⁶ Oakland, CA Code of Ordinances, 2.29.170: City Agencies, Departments and Offices/Department of Race and Equity. https://library.municode.com/ca/oakland/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT2ADPE_CH2.29CIAGDEOF_2.29.170DERAEQ

what societal benefits would be if they had been built on principles that recognized the value of everyone's ability to realize their potential. It will take insight and imagination to discover and create the workable pathways to get to the truly equitable society that is desired. Exactly what that society looks like may still be obscure, but the determinants of equity provide a strong outline of the picture we have yet to fill in.

CULTURE AND THE PURSUIT OF EQUITY

So what does the pursuit of equity have to do with culture and what does culture have to do with achieving equity?

The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.

—David Harvey, *The Right to the City*

As diverse peoples increasingly inhabit the shared space of cities, and different ways of living life intermingle and bump up against each other, we get the rich blendings and fields of contestation that constitute urban life. This all happens within layers of social construction—many that were built on unlevel ground. Tensions can begin to be resolved by seeing that all cultures are complete systems unto themselves that need to be recognized and respected as such.

“Fair and Just” in a Culturally-Diverse Landscape: When we look at equity through a multicultural lens, it is like light hitting a prism: it breaks up into a diverse array of realities that color all our social spaces. Equity must be pursued with a sensitivity to the fact that what we judge to be fair and just or the right way or wrong way to do something is conditioned by our specific cultures. If the goal is to work together to create fair and just communities, we cannot shrink from speaking plainly about the existence of dominant and marginalized cultures and the need to put the recognition of all cultures on an equal footing. To do this well, civic space is needed to debate and negotiate among them, knowing that extra care must be taken to find balance, in particular where the racial scales have been tipped; and to enact policies that gain the support and esteem of a range of people who represent the city's true diversity.

Celebration and Contention: We also have to accept that some customs and value systems have significant points of incompatibility with others and therefore not everything about each culture can be a matter for mutual celebration. The reality of cultural contention is under-recognized in city narratives and in arts and culture philanthropy generally. But it needs to come out of the shadows in order to have negotiations and resolutions be transparent. If eating animals in one culture is forbidden and in another is permitted, who decides what's allowed? If you think playing live music in your backyard is reasonable, but your neighbor doesn't, who's right? Is an oil painting that hangs in a museum worth more than one spray-painted on the side of a building—and more to whom? Should a particular right be framed as

positive (e.g., the right to participate in cultural life) or negative (e.g., prohibiting activities considered to be social nuisances)?

Shared Space is Ethical Space: All shared space is ethical space—space to which we bring our respective values—and requires that we enter with mutual respect and a willingness to entertain ways of knowing that are different from our own. Reducing a way of life to a festival, food, and a flag makes for an easy entry point to cultural difference, but it can gloss over the underlying meanings and intents of a worldview and sidestep real engagement with deeper issues. So in addition to spaces of encounter that can be entered easily, we also need to create the ethical spaces where democracy can be meaningfully deliberated, not just celebrated for a day.

When we talk about the ethical space, that is, the space where strangers can meet...we have to talk about a vision of how humans treat each other. That's what ethics is all about—how do we engage each other across cultures, across religions, across tribes. We cannot hide behind institutions. We cannot hide behind systems. We have to stand up as human beings and be counted as a human being who has children, who has ancestors, who has the right to walk this earth.

—Willie J. Ermine, elder and educator (Sturgeon Lake First Nation)

WHAT IS CULTURAL EQUITY?

What cultural equity ultimately looks like and how it is achieved needs to be negotiated in a society that aspires to be democratic. What is fluid and rigid about culture makes shared space also contested space that requires opportunities for interface, dialogue, and deliberation. Cities with a critical mass of demographic diversity and change, like Oakland, are of necessity the first responders and innovators for these endeavors. There are no formulas for how to create cultural equity, but there is growing recognition that it is needed.

A straight-to-the-heart-of-it question was asked by a community member at the first public engagement meeting of this planning process:

As a native Oaklander I'm trying to figure out what people's definitions are to move forward, so when you say "equity," what are you talking about? The City of Oakland is talking about equity, equity, equity, I'm like, what does that mean? Are we talking about cultural equity, are we talking about gender equity, what are we talking about?

—Community Member at Peralta Hacienda Historical Park's
Center for History and Community (District 5)

Answers from the Field: The City of Oakland is not the only one talking about equity and its relationship to culture. There has been a lot of cultural planning going on in cities across the country in recent years that has directly addressed cultural equity. A few of these cities are: Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Nashville, New York, and closer to home in Berkeley and San Francisco. The need to define and address cultural equity has been a recognized priority not just for city governments, but for national organizations whose core business is to support the flourishing of the arts and culture sector.

There has been a great deal of research, thought, and earnest debate over the ideas expressed in emerging definitions of cultural equity. But there remains a general need to broaden the scope of discussion beyond to the confines of the arts, artists, arts organizations, and arts policy to get at what is of critical importance about it.

The Need for Reframing and Behavioral Change: As will be seen in the “Culture is the Frame” section that follows, limiting the scope of cultural equity to the realm of the arts side-steps the power culture has to advance the cause of equity. The lack of progress made in the arts and culture field with respect to racial parity and cultural equity¹⁷ in leadership positions and curatorial/program staff, organizational capacity, and municipal and philanthropic investment is a stark testament to the reality that without a change of how we see and how we behave, we cannot expect the outcomes to change for the better.

Cultural Equity in Oakland: This plan proposes the following definition of cultural equity for Oakland that values diverse cultures and cultural practices; acknowledges their right to exist and be expressed, accessible, and self-determined; the need for the full range of diverse peoples to be engaged in the civic realm; and it points to the necessity of fair and just resource allocation and the rooting out of institutionalized disparities:

Cultural equity in a democratic and diverse society recognizes: that all cultures have value; that a society is made more resilient by the collective knowledge of its diverse cultures; and that all cultures should have equal access to opportunities to achieve social esteem and civic parity. These opportunities include self-determined cultural expression and learning, appropriate and accessible spaces for cultural participation and production, and engagement in cultural policy development and resource allocation. Achieving cultural equity entails fair and just distribution of resources and the need to identify and remedy institutionalized norms that have systemically disadvantaged categories of people based on, e.g., race, ethnicity, customs, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, and socioeconomic or citizenship status.

Articulating a definition of cultural equity is just a first step, but a necessary one, for attaining it. Understanding the distinction between what the arts are and what culture is is key to reframing the issues to effect real change in action and policy, and eventually results.

Culture is the frame

When cities look at arts and culture, more often than not, they first look at the arts—dance, design, literature, media, music, theater, visual arts—and who makes them, who enjoys them, where they are experienced, and how they contribute to cities’ livability. On a second look, one might ask about how one learns about art and how to make it (particularly with respect to children and youth), where artmaking happens, and how it is supported. Looking out past artmaking proper can raise still other questions about how the arts can make cities attractive to visitors, how they contribute to the economy,

¹⁷ Schonfeld, Roger C., Sweeney, Liam, *Diversity in the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Community*, ITHAKA S+R, 2016. http://www.sr.ithaka.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/SR_Report_Diversity_New_York_City_DCLA_12716.pdf, *How Boston and Other American Cities Support and Sustain the Arts*, The Boston Foundation & TDC, 2015, https://www.tbf.org/~media/TBFOrg/Files/Reports/Arts%20Report_Jan%207%202016.pdf, and Helicon Collaborative’s *Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy*, 2017. http://heliconcollab.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NotJustMoney_Full_Report_July2017.pdf

and how can they creatively help problem-solve issues such as stimulating civic engagement, activating an abandoned park, attracting sustainable jobs, or incentivizing public transit.

THE PRIMACY OF CULTURE

But when we consider what constitutes the cultural life of the city—its vitality, diversity, conflicts, and complexity—looking through a frame of artmaking is too limiting, quite literally, to do it justice. We need to step back and take a wide-angle view of what is at stake in serving a city that became “majority-minority” before most people knew what that meant, where over 40 different languages are spoken,¹⁸ and where historic achievements have sometimes been tied to historic racial discrimination and disparities.

In removing the “and” that has so long conjoined culture to the arts and putting aside the connotation of the word “culture” that equates it with the arts collectively—what is left?

A Definition of Culture: What is left is much more comprehensive than what is typically considered to be the world of the arts—culture reaches beyond museums and cultural centers, street celebrations and sculptures in town squares, gallery walks, dance recitals, symphony concerts, and film openings. A culture is nothing less than a system of knowledge, wisdom, and practices that a people have embodied and constructed through their lived experience of how to survive and thrive.

The culture we grow up in makes us who we are—the language we speak, the food we eat, what we wear, the shelters we live in, how we rear children and how we treat elders, how we celebrate and how we mourn, what we believe is good or bad, right or wrong, and what gives our life shape and meaning. And at some points in our lives, our culture may also be something we question or rebel against.

Culture is what gets negotiated each time we encounter people who have different beliefs, values, and ways of being from our own. Culture is also what we have to negotiate inside of ourselves when we live in a multicultural society—particularly if we are part of a minority culture that is circumscribed by a dominant culture. Whether easy or difficult, simple or complex, all the activities of our lives take place in the realm of culture. The social milieu of Oakland is a dynamic organism of internal and external negotiation, translation, and inter-relation.

Each culture is made up of subsets of customs, practices, and bodies of knowledge that relate to the different interlocking systems we have for relating with other people and to the place where we live: systems of cosmology/worldview, ethics, politics and power, economics and the marketplace, aesthetics and artistry, and education and the transmission of knowledge as well as all the institutions and material culture in which these social constructs and related practices manifest themselves. And within each culture (in this sense, an ethnicity) are numerous subcultures that can be based on gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, social status, and many other features.

Aesthetics & Artistry as a Part of Culture: The aesthetic realm of culture conditions our judgments of what is beautiful or ugly, attractive or repellent, acceptable or not. It imbues objects, gestures, symbols, colors, sounds, and shapes with meaning. In one culture a white dress might signify purity, in another,

¹⁸ *Oakland Youth Demographic Profile, Strategic Investment Plan 2016-19 Appendix*, prepared by Bright Research Group for the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth, May 2015.

death. A house that blends into the surrounding landscape could be considered elegant in one culture and unexceptional in another. A cricket might be captured for good luck, eaten as a delicacy, crushed as a pest, or left to fulfill its purpose in nature and be observed.

The aesthetic realm is where the arts commonly take their place within a culture. Some cultures may value the process of artmaking more than the thing made—considering “art” as the skill or practice that retains something essential about how life should be lived. Some value an artwork for its functionality and ability to infuse a refined awareness into everyday life; some think of arts experiences as exceptional, precisely the sort of thing that takes you outside the quotidian. In each case, the value of artistry must be assessed within its cultural context or risk being misunderstood.

The Arts as a Tool of the Status Quo: Thinking of the arts as a single unified body—such as “the fine arts”—without considering their specific cultural context, stifles the attainment of cultural equity. Whether intentionally or as a matter of unquestioned custom, arts gatekeepers can point to what is already in museums, theaters, and concert halls to set standards that ensure the perpetuation of more of the same. Establishing equity in a multicultural society requires acknowledging that “excellence,” “quality,” and “innovation” can only be meaningful within a specific cultural system. If one culture values the accidental or improvised in artmaking whereas another values pre-planned precision, what is considered high quality or innovative will necessarily be different. Adhering to singular fixed standards without context reinforces the status quo; and inequities will continue to persist when positions of leadership and resource allocation are populated by like-minded people with a bias toward the dominant culture.¹⁹ Centering attention on culture and equity is long overdue—not to diminish the deep value of the arts, but to greatly enlarge the understanding of their scope and diversity. Opening space to imagine standards differently, based on the diversity of cultural systems, will help to free the arts from being used as a tool for maintaining inequity.

The Arts Unbound: When the cultural aperture has been widened, the disciplines of dance, literature, media, music, theater, visual arts, and combinations of these not only take on many more forms, they also multiply in terms of purposes. Artistic endeavors can run the gamut from being a distillation of a culture’s essence that serves to preserve traditions to a provocation from the margins that taunts the establishment and compels a questioning of what is “normal.” They can inspire awe and wonder, surprise, or deep reflection. Some artists find their inspiration in creating astute ways of engaging other people to find and use their own voice; some have a highly cultivated practice that only those deeply in the know will understand. The arts can create bonds between people of the same culture through the power of shared sensibility and memory or to provide bridges between cultures through kindling the emotions that make us aware of our shared humanity. Recognizing the multiplicity of cultural systems in communities vastly enlarges the scope of the arts and opens the door to supporting the creative potential of all people—not just those who see their values reflected in the current cultural sphere.

Public arts and culture agencies have the inherent mandate to serve all their constituents and so are well positioned to lead efforts in the arts and culture field to move the needle on cultural and racial equity. In the case of Oakland, the diverse array of arts, artists, culturists, and activists can serve as a gateway into the various worlds contained in the city’s communities. Collectively, they hold a breadth of distinct understandings that can help better align City policy with community practices. Incorporating

¹⁹ Helicon Collaborative’s *Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy*, 2017. http://heliconcollab.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NotJustMoney_Full_Report_July2017.pdf

cultural practitioners into policy formation and practice could bring a creativity of mind that challenges and informs new ways of thinking and problem-solving in the City.

Belonging is the Goal

Belonging is about building the human capital of people as placemakers. Not only individuals, but also the collective “we.” And not simply the collegial “we” of “me and my friends,” but the “we” of those we don’t know—which includes neighbors, passersby on the street, and fellow residents of our city. It is this democratic ideal of “We the people”—we who belong to a just and equal society.

—Roberto Bedoya, Cultural Affairs Manager, City of Oakland

Do you know your neighbors? Do you rely on them to keep an eye out when you’re out of town or look out for your kids as they play in the street? Do you stop to chat with fellow residents in the lobby of your apartment house or pick up the trash left on the front steps? Do you volunteer at the local school or lend a pair of gloved hands to the community garden? Do you go to the local coffee house to see the regulars and hear the latest news? These are some of the ways we build social networks with the people we live among and connection to the place we live in. The more networked and connected we are, the greater sense of community we have and the better placed we are to face whatever the future brings because we are not facing it alone. The responsibility we feel toward one another is a part of what it means to belong.

A Definition of Belonging: Belonging is considered as basic a human need as food and shelter. It can give meaning to life through feeling a part of something greater than oneself—a family, a neighborhood, a community. Belonging is related to the closeness to others one can experience—such as feeling understood, accepted, and respected. The proximity of people with whom one shares a faith, a home country, or language can contribute to a sense of belonging. Resiliency can be created through belonging and connection that are fueled by shared experiences, cultural understanding, history, and place, as well as being in stable relationship to others.

Belonging in Policy: Belonging is a familiar concept in psychology, but it has been gaining traction in cultural policy discussions because of what it could mean for cities. There are calls to recognize belonging as an intrinsic feature of placemaking and placekeeping²⁰ or as a cultural right to be included in policies of cultural agencies and organizations.²¹ Some are analyzing how belonging and related concepts, such as social connectedness or a sense of community, can be broken down into their constituent parts so specific actions to promote them can be developed and measured.²² Whether invoking its objective or subjective attributes, belonging has a fundamental importance to human

²⁰ Bedoya, Roberto, “Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-belonging,” *GIA Reader*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Winter 2013), Grantmakers in the Arts, Seattle, WA.

²¹ Goldbard, Arlene, “The Policy of Belonging,” excerpt from “Belonging as a Cultural Right,” *Othering and Belonging: Expanding the Circle of Human Concern*, Issue Two, Spring 2017, online publication, The Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California, Berkeley <http://www.otheringandbelonging.org/belonging-cultural-right/> and *Policy on Belonging Toolkit*, U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017. There are also number of examples of place-based projects that have incorporated belonging into their approach that are listed at the end of Bedoya *ibid*.

²² See the City of Santa Monica’s Wellbeing Project, <https://wellbeing.smgov.net/>

development that gives it as-yet untapped reserves in the fields of urban planning and social policy. Belonging could play a role in initiatives for building community wellness (for example, those of The California Endowment and Cal Wellness), indices of well-being (in the City of Santa Monica, Canada, the UK, et al.), and how aesthetic experience can flow through and connect facets of each of these.

When we think about fostering belonging, community, and connectedness, the fine-grained details of what makes them possible arise. How long people have lived in their home, on their block, or in their part of town can make a difference to how comfortable they feel and how committed they are to the place they live. People's knowledge of their neighbors and neighborhood are often intangible assets to a city's well-being. People's agency in determining the features of their community can strengthen their sense of commitment to place.

How people enter neighborhoods is also important to their building connectedness. Knowledge and understanding of local context and history not only contribute to people's ability to establish relationships, but also to their capacity for compassion as opposed to suspicion of new neighbors or unfamiliar ways of being.²³ Suggestions arose across different planning meetings and in surveys that proposed having ways to orient actual and potential newcomers to Oakland neighborhoods.

Q: In what parts of Oakland do you feel most at home, and why?

- I feel comfortable in any part of Oakland. People smile and speak to you passing by. Most folks know each other and you can cross paths several times a day with friends in different parts of town.
- Prescott neighborhood in West Oakland, because I have lived here for 30 years, though I feel less welcome now by unfriendly new neighbors.
- My immediate neighborhood—it's been diverse for a long time and has people who have lived there 50 years or more, but still welcomes newcomers.
- East Oakland because it is still socially and culturally diverse. We talk to our neighbors and do not call the police on each other's mentally ill family members.

Excerpts from the online survey

To say that belonging is a goal of this plan serves both as a powerful metaphor as well as a pragmatic commitment that entails the creation of strategies that:

- value community, connection, and commitment to one another and the place one lives in and provide and promote opportunities for building them;
- protect and enhance cultural diversity as an overarching asset to the life of the city; and
- approach people of all cultures with the dignity and respect they deserve and promote reciprocity.

The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.

—Maya Angelou, poet

²³ Medina, Jennifer, "Website Meant to Connect Neighbors Hears Complaints of Racial Profiling," *New York Times*, May 18, 2016.

I am a West Oakland resident, who grew up in the same neighborhood I live in, and the only place I feel "at home" is in East Oakland where the gentrification isn't as rampant...yet. ☐ I feel most at home when I am at diverse events where there are a lot of Black people. East and West Oakland are the most comfortable for me. Fruitvale near MacArthur and the Laurel aren't bad. Because deeper East Oakland is less well cared for it is less comfortable. ☐ My neighborhood, though it is rapidly changing and this feels disorienting, esp because of the amount of construction. ☐ East flats, Chinatown - no pretensions - folks just are. too much of the downtown uptown, jack london square areas are trying too hard to be something, chasing something, a yelp review? ☐ East Oakland areas like Dimond/Fruitvale areas, Temescal, West Oakland, Lakeshore, Laurel, East 14th/International streets. Each area offers something different, wonderful shopping, a variety of restaurant types, parks, walking areas, bike riding ease, people, people, people, varied and intriguing. It has gotten too focused on millennials mindset, leaving a lot of folks out of the mix. I love the beauty and quiet of my neighborhood. I enjoy seeing the businesses that have popped up on E. 10th, Red Bay Coffee, A&I Industries, the artist lofts, the Latino community businesses, the Indigenous gatherings, pow-wows, the festivals, like I listed above, the cultural centers, and events. ☐ North Oakland, around Lake Merritt, JLS, and in the regional parks. I guess I feel most at home in those locations because I am white. It is hard to feel at home in different cultural areas, since I am not of that culture. I don't feel threatened nor unwelcome, I just wouldn't use the words that I feel at home. ☐ Jingtletown. I live here. It is inclusive, has been (past tense) filled with artists and creative, has a vibrant working class culture in the undeveloped parts, is a great balance of mixed/industrial use and residential. The neighbors have historically been heavily involved in connecting and keeping the neighborhood clean. Although we are getting taken over by market rate condos which is changing this environment rapidly. ☐ I feel most at home at home in the places of music because that is where I feel most creative and alive. ☐ East Oakland - my parents were both immigrants from different parts of the world who met and married and lived in East Oakland. ☐ The parts where community leaders have fought to protect their cultural institutions. ☐ West, Diamond Park, Temescal, Rockridge, Uptown, Grand Lake, Piedmont Ave. I'm most at home in those areas because I'm a middle class white male. ☐ East Oakland - it's diverse, the people are scrappy, it's not pretentious. ☐ In artist studios and performance venues. Interesting hole-in-the-wall locations where people of all types can gather and share and create. ☐ East Lake: trees, families, small businesses, lake access. Jack London: water views, town guests. West Oakland: full of ☐ All parts. I have lived and socialized in W. Oakland, love the Lake and Like the warehousey areas of W potential. Love all the neighborhoods doing what they do. Like, in parts of my particular ways they observe key life of my 'hood, or people in a wide range outside working on cars, laughing and like Eastside Cultural Center. Fruitvale, wonderful. I was born in near downtown oakland, raised on the border of Berkeley and north oakland, and west oakland as a child and moved to east oakland as an adult. When i was younger i was afraid of east oakland because of the violence i had heard about. When i moved there i realized it wasn't as bad as i had heard. I feel comfortable in any part of oakland. People smile and speak to you passing by. Most folks know each other and you can cross paths several times a day with friends in different parts of town. Lots of beautiful plants and fruit trees everywhere. If there is gonna be trouble most folks with warn you to leave the area. Serious Family vibration! ☐ I feel most at home in the Fruitvale because there is Authentic Food, Dia de Los Muertos Celebration... that celebrates life and culture. West Oakland is where my family is from but is now gentrified and property is being sold to the highest bidder... with no regard to residence and community atmosphere. ☐ Temescal. Downtown, West, North. I don't go to East Oakland much nor the hills. I like where city streets have different things: shops, restaurants, services and residential all together. The streets feel alive. You pass people from different walks of life, different backgrounds. That's what I love about Oakland. I like the diversity of Ethiopians, African Americans, Italians, Koreans, Caucasians, artists, etc. restaurants, close to green space, the bart stations nearby macarthur, & Rockridge, farmers market, east bay reuse. ☐ Feel most at home in cultural venues during cultural events, because that is where my people are, expressing themselves. Geographically, this might be downtown, uptown, Jingtletown, Fruitvale, Laurel, or elsewhere. ☐ I like where city streets have different things: shops, restaurants, services and residential all together. The streets feel alive. You pass people from different walks of life, different backgrounds. That's what I love about Oakland. ☐ Lake Merritt because it is safe and beautiful. Since its huge renovation it has grown in popularity. Oakland could beautify more districts to achieve the same results in popularity. ☐ All over, because I work with artists I am involved in the East, West and North. I think Chinatown and West Oakland are my primary zones of comfort as that is where I engage people the most. Fruitvale because it's the part I'm most familiar with and where I can find three generations of a family walking together down the street on any given day, thriving community, La Clinica, lack of pretentiousness, not to mention the great food. I hope it doesn't become gentrified. ☐ ALL the annual street fairs. Weekends at ANY of the farmer's markets. ☐ Downtown, because it is the most diverse and active, and therefore less judgement or inquiry. ☐

*In what parts of
Oakland do you
feel most at home?*

fun events, feels comfortable to out of friends, art, diverse culture, creativity. in E. Oakland, spent much quality time generally wander all over and love it. Oakland as they brim with creative where regular folks are living life and neighborhood S. Asians have many events and that is part of the richness of cultural dress, or folks hanging playing music... Love the cultural areas and so much more. It is a truly

Place Matters

Essential to understanding a sense of belonging is an understanding of the role of place.

We make places: from a path trod through a grassy field that arrives at a creek's edge to Haussmann's massive makeover of crooked medieval streets to the boulevards we know as Paris. The landscape is a palimpsest we write on over time. We inscribe and reinscribe on the land through our never-ending comings and goings, our ways of making shelter and creating commerce, and the spaces we leave open to find each other or to find solitude. We tweak, renovate, abandon, or sometimes try to erase what was there to make something anew. But the traces of the past, like on a scraped parchment, never really quite disappear from the environment or in the memories of inhabitants. This is exactly what we need to remember as we plan and alter the places we live in. We have begun to learn that we need to look at the environmental impacts of what we do to places, but we have yet to fully acknowledge and understand the social and cultural impacts of what we do, and the fact that places make us as much as we make places.

Place and Identity: Continuity with respect to the physical features of a landscape or neighborhood can contribute to a sense of belonging as can resident longevity in a place. Gathering spaces have indelible memories and shared feelings written on them—such as churches, barber shops, corner cafes, playgrounds, library reading rooms, and venerable trees with well-worn benches beneath them—these spaces have meaning and “deserve special attention in urban design decisions because they contribute to place identity and ultimately to self identity, health, sense of community and sense of place.”²⁴ When we fill in, tear down, and generally redevelop, place identity is also being remade—hopefully for the better—though it can land well for some and not so well for others. A city that strives to be fair and just must recognize that such changes make a difference in different ways for different people.

Almost a quarter of the respondents to the online survey have lived in Oakland for over 30 years and an additional 32% for 20 to 30 years

Place and Equity: Place matters to equity as well as belonging. As social research increasingly trumpets: who we become, what we are able to learn and do, and how we can realize our potential all have much to do with where we grow up and live. Our Zip Code, more than genetic code, turns out to be a better predictor of life outcomes²⁵—success in school, career opportunities and upward mobility, illnesses suffered, and longevity. Those fighting for social equity are increasingly seeing how socio-economics inhere in geography and how this conditions the maintenance of injustice or the fostering of well-being.

²⁴ Hull, R. Bruce, Mark Lam, Gabriela Vigo, “Place Identity: symbols of self in the urban fabric,” *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 28 (1994) 109-120.

²⁵ Wolfers, Justin, “Why the New Research on Mobility Matters: An Economist’s View,” *New York Times*, May 4, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/05/upshot/why-the-new-research-on-mobility-matters-an-economists-view.html?_r=0
Phram, Hong Van & Fuentes, Rey, “Indicators that Predict a Child’s Life Outcomes,” *Next Generation*, Aug. 14, 2013. <http://thenextgeneration.org/blog/post/mapping-loss-of-opportunity-in-ca-indicators>; *Equitable Development Toolkit: Access to Healthy Food*, PolicyLink, January 2010. http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/access-to-healthy-food_0.pdf

How do we create the quality places²⁶ we want to live in when we are not starting from scratch? How do we take into account that layers of positive memory *and* stubborn inequity are mixed together and literally cemented into the landscape? Can we make room for new businesses and good jobs that can help build a more sustainable economy, strengthen infrastructure and remedy chronic patterns of degradation, while keeping neighborhoods culturally-recognizable and robust, and retain the best of our diverse values and histories? Will we be able to avoid a 21st-century version of the mistakes perpetrated in the last century's urban renewal? These are the quandaries of people involved with placemaking—city planners and community developers, socially-conscious architects and builders, and increasingly, collaborations of local government, philanthropy, community-based organizations, and artists. But most critically, it is the dilemma of the people who live in the places being made.

What is Placemaking?: People have been “making places” since we went from hunting and gathering to putting roots down in a place with the advent of agriculture (no pun intended). But the conceptual frame around placemaking has only been around for about 50 years, and entails more than just how to construct buildings, make roads, and design housing tracts. There is an implicit political stance in modern placemaking that makes community assets and aspirations central.

With community-based participation at its center, an effective placemaking process capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well-being.

—The Project for Public Spaces

Within a contemporary definition of placemaking are the following principles:

- a hierarchy of value: “first life, then spaces, then buildings”²⁷
- a recognition of the importance of “place identity,” which involves the meaning that places have for the people who live in them, their sense of self, and their ability to build community
- the knowledge that places are social constructs that can mirror power relations in society, and therefore
- bottom-up, community-centered processes should be at the heart of placemaking.

Eight years ago, a new dimension for placemaking was advanced: creative placemaking.

Creative Placemaking: In the 2010 white paper called *Creative Placemaking*, authors Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa crafted a definition of the concept that has been used broadly since (though with some variation): “In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures

²⁶ “Quality places” in placemaking are, for example, safe, clean, connected, accessible, welcoming, authentic, sociable, and human-centered and scaled. See Mark Wyckoff’s “Definition of Placemaking: Four Different Types” and the work of The Project for Public Spaces.

²⁷ “First life, then spaces, then buildings—the other way around never works.” Jan Gehl, Danish architect and urban designer.

and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.”²⁸

This is a capacious definition on the one hand, but limiting in another.

Naming arts and culture as key players on the placemaking field is an important addition to the earlier placemaking definition. Culture in all its manifestations—including arts—has been left on the conceptual sidelines for too long in community development and urban planning. Business, housing, health, education, transportation, and public infrastructure have always been in the main line-up without enough recognition of how culture influences the degree to which they can advance.

But limiting the shaping of places “around arts and cultural activities” can obscure the “first life” principle, and shift focus away from the well-being of the people who are most impacted by placemaking policies and decisions. Calling out “arts and cultural activities” without descriptors tying them to the specific residents of a community can give the impression that any such activities will do—opening the door to potential gentrification and displacement. This ambiguity, which glosses over community context and place identity, gives rise to the need to differentiate some types of creative placemaking from placekeeping.²⁹

The trap of creative placemaking is it can't figure out whether it's a property rights movement or a human rights movement. It really is often dominated by it being a property rights movement, so that feeds gentrification. If you can create agency and try to talk about placemaking/placekeeping as a human rights movement, there's a difference in strategies that can come out of that frame, and that's really what we need to do.

—Roberto Bedoya, Cultural Affairs Manager, City of Oakland

Creative Placekeeping: What looks like a slight linguistic turn from “placemaking” to “placekeeping” actually points to a significant reorientation of meaning—placekeeping puts the people who live in a place at the center of the frame as well as their right to make and keep the places where they live. Inside this shift in perspective is the shadow of displacement—often exemplified in Oakland as the losing of one’s home or grassroots business to rising rents caused by seriously out-of-kilter space supply-and-demand and forms of gentrification. The challenge in the question of “who has to leave and who gets to stay”³⁰ must inform creative placemaking in Oakland for it to be a force for equity.

People’s ability to stay in their community is linked to their ability to keep their culture and connectedness alive and retain the meaning that resides in place. Artmaking that is a part of creative placekeeping must take into account existing place identity—without that, it could act as an erasure, a disappearing of history and culture—even if an unwitting one.

²⁸ Markusen, Ann and Gadwa, Anne, *Creative Placemaking*, a white paper for The Mayors’ Institute for City Design, National Endowment for the Arts, 2010. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf>

²⁹ Bedoya, Roberto, “Spatial Justice: Rasquachification, Race and the City,” *Creativetime Reports*, Sept. 15, 2014. <http://creativetimereports.org/2014/09/15/spatial-justice-rasquachification-race-and-the-city/>

³⁰ Allen-Price, Olivia, *ibid.*, p. 6.

Clearer distinctions between different types of creative placemaking and creative placekeeping, their respective approaches to the social construction of space, and how they are related to equity and justice need to be drawn to determine if human rights or property rights are at play.

The Civic Commons

The Tangible and Intangible Commons: The space people share who live, work, and play in Oakland is the space in which community is created. Much of that space is physical and public: it is built—the plazas, recreational centers, libraries, City offices, streets, and sidewalks; and it is natural—neighborhood parks, Lake Merritt, Lake Temescal, Sausal Creek, Joaquin Miller and Redwood Regional parks, among others. These are all tangible spaces that make up part of what is known as “the civic commons”—that is, the public spaces made for people to connect with each other.

There is also an intangible part of the civic commons.

The space created by society for public dialogue, deliberation, and negotiation; the elbow room made for various ways of life and expression; the acceptance there is for new ideas about business and livelihood, education and lifelong learning, and what constitutes public safety and well-being—these are also part of the civic commons. It’s the mental and emotional space people make for relating to each other.

Everyone brings their culture with them to all the tangible and intangible spaces of the civic commons—which is why culture is the primary frame for addressing diversity and equity in Oakland, and why that frame is relevant to all of the City’s many areas of responsibility. It’s time to release culture from the side closet of civic endeavors and allow it to assume its rightful role as what clothes life, not something that merely accessorizes it.

Building Connection in the Civic Realm: With this new culture narrative, the purview of Cultural Affairs becomes conceptually broader and more inter-connected with all the work of the City. Its goal then is to answer the question of how best to infuse cultural knowledge into all aspects of City efforts and to strengthen community belonging, well-being, and resilience through increased sharing of cultural wisdom in its many forms.

Culture, understood as ways of being, is not something that is an add-on; it already exists in everything people do in the city. It doesn’t have the problem of being seen as “a frill”—something a focus on the arts can suffer from. So, the work becomes how to consciously and equitably make space for and support the cultural assets that every community has to offer.

Cultural Affairs will explicitly embrace all the diverse forms of cultural knowledge—including history and customs as well as artmaking and creative expression—that positively contribute to the civic commons and common good. In this way, it will seek to lift up considerations of culture diversity and equity in all areas of City responsibility: how it supports places and ways to live and work, to learn and play, to be mobile, and to feel safe, healthy, and connected. Having an integrated culture, equity, and belonging-based vision for this work is essential because we need as many voices and perspectives at the table as possible to grapple with these complex issues in fresh and fair ways.

PLAN VALUES

The main outcome of this plan is to strengthen Oaklanders' sense of belonging and to establish it as a necessary element in Oaklanders' sense of well-being. "Belonging" and "well-being" may sound more poetic than concrete, but research, policy development, and governmental efforts to identify and track meaningful indicators for these do exist, and can support the feasibility of embracing these outcomes for communities. Many efforts are nascent, but Oakland could be a part of the global efforts to make these a reality for communities.

Moving the needle forward on residents' sense of belonging and well-being will be an ongoing endeavor as the people and conditions in the city change. But creating ways of thinking, acting, and developing policy that focus on these long-term outcomes that put people and quality of life at the center of concern will clear the path to achieving them. Culture has an essential, yet under-recognized, role to play. The central aim of this plan, which is a first step in a longer process, is to lift up culture with an equity orientation as a key to achieving a sense of belonging, and that, in tandem with efforts to strengthen well-being, are what will build community resilience and the capacity to realize potential.

How to take practical steps toward increasing people's sense of belonging requires surfacing the values that underlie the strategies to address them. Below are the proposed values to drive those strategies.³¹

- **Cultural Self-Determination and Affirmation**—To cultivate the ability to construct, express, and validate group identity and meaning (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, customs, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, place, shared interest, etc.);
- **Aesthetic Practice and Accomplishment**—Have equitable resources, appropriate spaces, and accessible opportunities to learn about, engage in, and share accomplishments in cultural and arts practices and production in their own culture or those of others;
- **Connection and Bridging Difference**—Have meaningful opportunities and appropriate spaces to create connections among the city's diverse peoples and places, and to promote cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and engagement;
- **Stewardship of Place**—Have opportunities to engage actively in caring for the physical and culture-related attributes of the place and environment where they live, work, and play; and
- **Community Empowerment & Civic Engagement**—Have diverse opportunities to express their civic voice and acquire the knowledge and skills required to advocate effectively for community benefit.

Cultural Affairs will promote these values to enhance belonging in Oakland and align with the City's efforts to strengthen the dimensions of well-being for all Oaklanders.

³¹ Informing this frame was the work of Maria Rosario Jackson and Roberto Bedoya who articulated a version of these for the PLACE Initiative of the Tucson Pima Arts Council <https://artsfoundtucson.org/advocacy/dashboard/> the PLACE Report, p. 8.

GROUNDING THE VISION

In adopting this new vision, the City can more fully recognize, engage, and serve the rich diversity of people and cultures that make up Oakland—and Cultural Affairs can become a stronger asset for that work. To implement the vision effectively, Cultural Affairs needs a change of orientation and scope.

To reiterate the conceptual foundations for the cultural plan presented in the previous section:

Equity is the Driving Force: To more effectively move Oakland toward becoming the fair and just city it strives to be, Cultural Affairs' work needs to be intentionally integrated with other City efforts to achieve equitable opportunities for all Oaklanders.

Culture is the Frame: Everything that happens in the city is infused with culture—in its broadest sense, that is, ways of being. This broad concept of culture is the frame through which diverse practices, expression, and creativity should be seen, respected, and supported throughout the city. The achievement of equity requires better recognition and understanding of those many cultures because what is perceived as equitable will be seen through multiple lenses, and those perspectives need to be reconciled.

The arts can be an effective point of entry into the cross-talk of cultures. But to focus on the arts without consideration of their cultural contextualization can serve to reinforce the dominant cultural paradigm and detract from achieving cultural and racial equity.

Belonging is the Goal: People's sense of belonging informs their ability to lead meaningful lives, to be connected to the place they live in and the people they live among, and to feel a part of something bigger than themselves. To cultivate belonging, there must be equitable conditions for self-expression, mutual respect, empathy, and acceptance. These conditions cannot be fulfilled without an understanding of how cultures differ and how diverse forms of expression have different needs. Myriad cultural perspectives make fostering belonging in the civic realm complicated, but this is what is needed to make the city both equitable and whole.

Working Across Government: The reorientation of Cultural Affairs' work toward equity, framed by culture, and aimed at belonging broadens the scope of its work. Offering a new narrative about the importance of culture to the realization of an equitable city, Cultural Affairs can work across government to foster greater understanding of this narrative and ground it in all the City does—whether it concerns human, community, or economic development; the built or natural environment; or the non-profit realm, the for-profit one, or what is in between.

An Implementation Approach: There are many ways the City could move forward to operationalize this vision. In what follows, there are suggested approaches that will need to be prioritized by Cultural Affairs based on capacity and available resources. Any new orientation to work requires more time—to learn, reflect, revise, act, and evaluate as well as build new partnerships and the trust they require to succeed. A word of caution is offered to not underestimate the time and resources it takes to implement this kind of change, particularly with an orientation to addressing disparities and achieving racial equity.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles are suggested for Cultural Affairs to adhere to in how it does its work with the community.

Build Trust: Trust is an essential ingredient for achieving goals together—whether between the community and City, between leadership and rank and file, or between departments or colleagues. It is important to listen well, clearly communicate values and intentions through shared language, and build common cause. Integrity, transparency, accessibility, responsiveness, and accountability are the building blocks of trust.

Focus on Assets, Not Deficits: Taking an asset-based approach to community development honors the power and potential of the community to lead and make change. Oakland’s community has a proud history of taking the reins to help itself. Its DIY and mutual support ethos is one of its greatest strengths and should be nurtured through promoting positive collaboration and collective action. Seek to meet the community where it is and lift up and resource what is working and who is doing the work.

Leverage Resources: Look to leverage and build on existing resources—whether they exist in different parts of government, in the private or nonprofit sectors, or in the community. To do that, keep abreast of relevant efforts and learn from and align with them when possible, build complementarity, and avoid needless duplication. Remain open and curious—good ideas can come from across the Bay or across the globe. But be sensitive to the fact that not all good ideas are good in every context and ensure that what is adopted is “Oakland appropriate.”

Work Collaboratively: The issues the City has to tackle—the affordable housing and homelessness crises, game-changing business development as well as business displacement, safety, infrastructure, and many others—are too big and complex not to be approached holistically. Sharing information and working collaboratively with colleagues in the City, in the community, and in relevant fields is an effective way to find stronger, more interwoven, and creative solutions.

Look for Intersectionality: It is impossible to establish a fair and just society without understanding and working together to end all forms of discrimination. Build common cause with those working for equity in all its forms—including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, income level, and citizenship status.

Build Capacity for Civic Engagement: Exercising the right to the city requires knowledge of the civic realm. For people to participate effectively to make the change they want, they must have meaningful opportunities to learn how the City works. Cultural Affairs can play a significant role in facilitating community participation in government that is culturally and racially equitable. It can advocate for removing or lowering barriers to participation in government through culturally-sensitive analysis.

Continually Improve: Finding better ways to benefit the community is an ongoing process and responsibility. Continuous improvement is realized by encouraging meaningful input from those most affected by the City’s actions and policy, and by being able to measure and report on the progress of programs and strategies. This includes removing barriers to participation, streamlining processes, enhancing transparency, and promoting practices that increase equity and access.

Tools for Grounding the Vision

Reorienting Cultural Affairs' work will not only require new "habits of mind," it will also need new tools to help design and target strategies, develop indicators for them, and measure progress toward equity. At least two things are needed for a better understanding of what success looks like: having a consistent way of defining the scope of the sector and analyzing the elements that compose it as well as ways to locate where the many different kinds of assets are on which to build.

Cultural Affairs recognized its need to have more powerful tools to advance its work for equity and to establish the baselines required for measuring success. So part of the planning process included a broad look at what truly constitutes the dynamics of Oakland's cultural sector—whether in the non-profit or small business realms. The work included an initial analysis of what the economics of Oakland's cultural sector looks like with a more comprehensive definition of culture and where it happens, and a snapshot (using mapping technology) of Oakland's cultural assets based on a related, holistic definition of what counts as a community cultural asset.

Below are summaries of the efforts carried out within the limits of this process. It is a substantial start, and it would be a good investment to deepen the information and analysis presented here and to keep it updated. The work has potential to benefit other parts of the City's efforts and serve as a valuable community resource and tool.

The Economics of Oakland's Cultural Sector

Oakland's Arts and Cultural Economy is extensive, eclectic, and evolving. It's woven into every neighborhood and commercial corridor, leaving no part of the city or its communities untouched. It deliberates in the boardrooms of high rises. It toils in dimly lit studios and warehouses. It pops up in shoe stores and storefronts. It takes to the streets. It tags, tattoos, and transforms the skin of local residents and liquor stores alike. It sweats its prayers amidst the flashing lights and fancy cocktails of bars and nightclubs. It's commercial and communal, traditional and cutting-edge, refined and radical. It's none-of-the above. It's non-binary.

—Alex Werth, Research Analyst

As observed above, Oakland's Arts and Cultural Economy (ACE), like the city itself, is diverse. It includes the established non-profit arts organizations that make and present artistic works as well as the non-profit community-based social service, social movement, and youth development organizations that employ cultural activities as an integral part of their work. It's in the for-profit spaces where people listen to music, find dancing partners, watch films, take pictures, design apps, discover an emerging artist's work, look for an obscure chapbook, or enjoy a communal laugh in a comedy club. It includes hybrid spaces that are part experimental, part industrial, part artisanal; and the studios that make mass produced as well as one-of-a-kind objects. And, of course, it embraces the artists and performers who are employed or have gigs with non-profits, for-profits, and public entities (e.g., schools, libraries, and recreational centers).

One of the goals of this cultural plan is to draw attention to the fact that the vibrancy of cultural life in Oakland lives in all these different kinds of spaces—non-profit and for-profit ones as well as ones that don't think of themselves in those terms. This complex, inter-connected system should be looked at holistically by the City if the various pieces of it are to be understood and recognized for their respective economic impact in Oakland, and retained and supported for their collective contribution to the well-being of Oaklanders and the region.

Part of this planning effort includes a report by Alex Werth, *Portrait of the Oakland Arts and Cultural Economy* (forthcoming), which details the fresh take on how the City could consider an ongoing, integrated analysis of both the for-profit and non-profit branches of the arts and culture sector of Oakland. Some key findings based on the report are:

- **Existing Studies + New Research = A Truer Picture:** Americans for the Arts' (AFTA) Arts & Prosperity Project periodically conducts economic impact studies of the non-profit sector in cities and regions in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. These studies provide useful comparisons and methodological tools for informing an Oakland-specific approach that builds on this non-profit research by adding for-profit analysis that paints a truer picture of the scope of arts and culture sector. Tracking the dynamic flow between the for-profit and non-profit branches of the sector will reveal more accurately the vital impact the sector has on the economic health of the City.
- **More Economic Activity and Jobs:** AFTA's 2010 assessment of non-profit ACE in Oakland found nearly \$54M in expenditures, based on information from 53 organizations. Through using different data sources to identify a more accurate scope of Oakland's arts and culture non-profits and recognizing gross sales in the for-profit arts and culture sector, the report finds **\$83M of non-profit** and **\$390M in for-profit** economic activity and recognizes **1,272 for-profit and non-profit ACE businesses** creating over **5,500 jobs**.

A Snapshot of Oakland's Arts & Culture Economy ACE=arts & cultural economy ♦ FPs=for-profits ♦ NPs=non-profits

OAKLAND	# of ACE FPs/NPs Corporations	% of All Oakland FPs/ Alameda Co. ACE NPs	# of Employees*	% of All Oakland FP Employees/ Alameda Co. ACE Employees	For-Profit Gross Sales/ Non- Profit Expenditures
ACE For-Profits	1,055	4.8%	4,065	2.0%	\$390,581,776
ACE Non-Profits I	82	60.3%	1,153	46.1%	\$ 54,457,494
ACE Non-Profits II	135	N/A	336	N/A	\$ 28,262,052
Non-Profits Subtotal	217		1,489		\$ 82,719,546
TOTAL	1,272		5,554		

*Sources: ACE For-Profits data from EconoVue/Dun & Bradstreet, using a custom categorization of NAICS codes for Oakland; ACE Non-Profits I and Alameda Co. ACE Non-Profits data from 2014-16 DataArts profiles; ACE Non-Profits II data from Oakland's Cultural Funding Program and 2014-16 Form 990s in GuideStar. *Employee numbers are a mix of part-time & full-time, not FTEs.*

- **Non-Profits More than Pay for Themselves:** AFTA developed a sophisticated online calculator to generate estimates of indirect economic impacts on communities based on analyses of direct ACE organizational expenditures, numbers of event attendees and their non-arts spending

patterns including such things as eating out, paying baby-sitters, booking hotels, etc., and then how these dollars continue to circulate and further impact the economy. Based on the AFTA calculator, just the ACE Non-Profits in group I (82 of them) and their event attendees generated City tax funds that are triple what Cultural Affairs invests in grantmaking (~\$1M), and added substantially to state coffers as well.

Direct & Indirect Economic Activity

ACE=arts & cultural economy

OAKLAND	# of NPs/Attendees	Direct Expenditures	Indirect/Non-ACE Impacts	
			City Taxes	State Taxes
ACE Non-Profits I	82 NPs	\$54,457,494	\$2,052,503	\$3,001,697
ACE Non-Profits I - Attendees	787,621	\$22,705,633	\$1,015,396	\$1,443,851
TOTAL		\$77,163,127	\$3,067,899	\$4,445,548

Sources: 2014-16 Cultural Data Profiles of DataArts and the AFTA indirect impacts calculator

The *Portrait of the Oakland Arts and Cultural Economy* is a first step in creating an ongoing economic impact analysis that more accurately captures the vitality of the arts and culture sector of Oakland—and there is much more that can be done. Broadening the analysis will yield results that can include the direct and indirect activity of ACE non-profits in group II, the indirect impact of some of the ACE for-profit activity, and the significant economic impacts of artists/entrepreneurs whose unincorporated independent work is not reflected here. There is also a portion of cultural activity by non-profits, whose main purpose is not as arts and culture organizations, but employ such activities as a vital part of achieving their mission—such as youth development, immigrant, homeless, and other types of social service and wellness-related organizations. Even though it may not be possible to formally incorporate this into the analysis, this activity is a critical part of the cultural picture in Oakland, particularly in neighborhoods that lack formal cultural institutions.

Mapping Cultural Assets

An important complement to an analysis of the economic impacts of the cultural sector is a kind of asset recognition that goes beyond dollars and cents. A cultural asset map can help to identify and make visible a wide variety of tangible community strengths.

A significant first step in mapping the cultural assets of Oakland was included as part of this planning process and it provides a snapshot of community cultural assets defined broadly.³² Like the economic impact analysis, it seeks to move beyond only mapping arts and culture non-profits and recognizes that Oakland's cultural assets can be found in many additional places and function in many different ways. Here are some of the assets this mapping exercise sought to bring to light:

- Non-profit arts and culture organizations and spaces (e.g., performance spaces, exhibition spaces, studios/production space, arts training spaces, arts organization offices)

³² Alex Werth, research analyst for the economic impact report and cultural asset mapping, did the data research and design that informs the cultural asset and radius view maps. Many thanks to Julian Ware, Spatial Data Analyst of the City of Oakland, from whom he received extensive support and access to collateral mapping data.

- Non-profit community-serving organizations with programs and spaces for community cultural participation (e.g., social service, faith-based, and youth-serving organizations; senior centers; social halls; family associations)
- For-profit cultural venues (e.g., galleries, art studios, dance/movement studios, music recording/rehearsal spaces, theaters, ballrooms, clubs)
- For-profit spaces that allow for cultural activity (e.g., bars, some retail stores, farmer's markets)
- For-profit cultural retail (e.g., bookstores, music stores, art supply stores)
- Public cultural activity/gathering spaces (e.g., libraries, recreational centers, parks, plazas)
- Public and private education institutions (e.g., schools, colleges/universities, training centers)
- Public artworks

[The map](#) provides an initial baseline of information that displays 13 layers of cultural assets. It shows where cultural “hot spots” are and where areas are lacking formal cultural infrastructure. It reveals where public assets are more present than private ones, and where social service organizations might be serving as cultural surrogates in certain neighborhoods. The online platform the map utilizes can layer in socio-economic, demographic, and transportation data that help to demonstrate where investment and disinvestment coincide with on-the-ground realities and can aid in the creation of strategies to target investment and address inequity. A second mapping feature provides a [radius view of cultural assets](#). Users can type in an address to see what cultural assets exist within a near-by radius.

The cultural assets that were possible to identify for the maps given the scope of the project were collected through online research, public records, and analysis of non-profit organization and funder datasets. Engaging the public in a participatory process and doing street-level research remain a possibility to deepen the content of the maps in order to enhance policy and program design.

Systems for Tracking Disparity Data

It will be necessary to have information systems that can help in defining a concrete path toward creating equity. Doing an equity analysis of current programs, establishing baselines for creating realistic strategies and goals, and tracking progress are all necessary for doing equity work—and for this, being able to gather and disaggregate data by race, culture, other socioeconomic characteristics, and geography will be critical. Rigorous and meaningful data collection will also aid in setting resource needs for capacity and equity building, and will facilitate casemaking as well as being accountable and transparent.

Cultural Spaces, Neighborhood Places, and Culture in the Civic Commons

Cultural Affairs will reshape its work areas to be more responsive and focused on community issues and potential. Given that the leading edge of change in Oakland concerns spaces and places, place-oriented programs and strategies should be identified as a main work area, and could be organized into three general categories³³:

Cultural Spaces: These spaces tend to have been created or adapted specifically for the purpose of cultural production, presentation, and other uses by creatives and are generally concentrated in commercial areas. They include non-profit and for-profit spaces; some are formal and some informal; some are permitted for their uses, some not. They include spaces for:

- diverse forms of cultural production
- live/work space for artists/makers/culture bearers
- sharing of cultural work through participation, presentation, and exhibition
- education in hands-on skill-building
- commercial entertainment on a small scale (e.g., night clubs, bars, dance halls)
- community gatherings
- cultural organizations' administrative offices

Neighborhood Places: These are places in neighborhoods that generally have little in the way of formal cultural spaces or infrastructure, but where community-based non-arts organizations have filled cultural gaps and residents have created improvised cultural and gathering spaces, such as:

- non-profit multifunctional (often social service) organizations that provide some cultural programming
- churches and other faith-based organizations
- small for-profit venues for food/entertainment (bars, restaurants, cafes)
- for-profit businesses that function informally as community gathering spaces or create neighborhood identity through culturally-specific retail or other forms of retail clusters
- empty lots/spaces that have been informally repurposed

Culture in the Civic Commons: The civic commons are the spaces that belong to the public and where people can gather and connect, and express, experience, or learn about their culture or those of others. These include:

- natural open spaces, urban parks, plazas
- libraries and recreational centers
- schools and colleges
- other public buildings
- streets and sidewalks

Cultural Affairs recognizes people's right to and need for spaces to express, experience, and learn about cultures and will promote the creation, retention, and/or enhancement of safe and affordable spaces throughout the city that are accessible and culturally-appropriate.

³³ These categories are meant to be generally indicative of distinct space/place dynamics in the cultural sector. There may be some overlap between them as these are not mutually-exclusive by function.

Cultural Spaces

Context

The Crisis of Space: Oakland's recent economic growth, fueling high demand in a low-supply market of commercial space and housing stock, has resulted in an affordable space crisis in the city generally and for the non-profit and cultural sectors in particular because of their relative economic vulnerability in the business realm. The tragedy of the Ghost Ship warehouse fire then put the shortage of spaces for cultural production and expression under both a spotlight and a microscope.

The big picture concerns of where ongoing cultural activity takes place in the city—public, non-profit, or for-profit; owned or rented; compliant or non-compliant—have historically not fallen within the purview of Cultural Affairs. These issues are usually intertwined with commercial space, schools, parks and open spaces, arts and community centers, and private venues (clubs, theaters, galleries, bars, restaurants, hotels)—and so fall within a variety of jurisdictions concerned with zoning, business development, tourism, school and park districts, safety, and occasionally the area of “Nuisance Abatement”—whose name opens a view onto contested space.

The Cultural Affairs Division does not manage any of the city-owned cultural spaces—such as the Malonga Casquelourd Center for the Arts, Studio One Art Center, and the Digital Arts & Culinary Academy (which are managed by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Youth Development)—nor has it traditionally been deeply involved with the creation or retention of artist production studios, live/work spaces, or spaces housing non-profit arts organizations.³⁴

Protecting Oakland's Creativity: Recognizing the cultural sector's unique value to the vibrancy of the city, Mayor Schaaf convened a special task force in 2015 to examine and address the retention of the city's cultural assets, with a particular focus on its artists. The high level of input from the artist community to an online survey (over 900 responded) revealed the scope of anxiety and timeliness of the research. The resulting report³⁵ released in the spring of 2016 laid out a significant set of researched strategies to address the potential and real displacement of the city's creatives. The strategies were grouped in three broad areas of work:

- real estate acquisition and leasing,
- financial assistance, and
- technical assistance.

The report resulted in a number of important advances toward the goal of stemming further cultural sector displacement including: the creation of a Policy Director of Arts Spaces (PDAS) position to ensure the implementation of the report's recommendations; securing the critical support of the Kenneth Rainin Foundation to underwrite that position and to invest in and facilitate space retention; a partnership with the San Francisco-based Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST) to provide financial resources, technical assistance, and an acquisition fund to secure permanently affordable cultural

³⁴ Under Mayor Jerry Brown, the then-Department of Craft & Cultural Arts had a Facility Access Program that offered facility rental subsidy for public events through a competitive grants process, but did not manage or subsidize any spaces of its own.

³⁵ “Strategies for Protecting and Creating Arts & Culture Space in Oakland,” a white paper prepared for the Mayor's Artist Housing and Workspace Task Force, Spring 2016.

<http://www2.oaklandnet.com/oakca1/groups/ceda/documents/agenda/oak062138.pdf>

spaces; and active exploration of available space and new land use and zoning regulations to create and protect cultural spaces. Then disaster struck.

Ghost Ship and its Aftermath: The Ghost Ship warehouse fire in December 2016 that resulted in the tragic loss of 36 lives (almost all in their 20s and 30s, with one 17- and one 61-year-old) forced a shift in the City's priorities with respect to cultural spaces. This overwhelming event, which resonated across the country and around the world, shone a light on a multiplicity of deeper, more pervasive difficulties in the landscape. The issues to tackle include:

- the ability of people in Oakland with limited incomes to find safe spaces to live,
- the added complication for those who hope to make their living as artists or small entrepreneurs to find authorized spaces to make work as well as live;
- the scarcity of low-priced, permitted spaces to gather, revel, and share creative work;
- the need of populations marginalized due to income, identity, interests, or lifestyle to find and build community;
- bringing zoning and code regulations into alignment with shifting needs and uses in time to mitigate the current rate of displacement; and
- the challenge of holding the inherent tension between making long-term policy changes and dealing with immediate, life-changing situations with compassion—and not walking away.

Much good work—by the community and the City—has gone into trying to solve these complex problems. Notable grassroots efforts have strung up to address gaps in the space crisis and placekeeping environment—taking deep dives into City policies and regulations to advocate for compassionate compliance, performing triage in the community to combat evictions, and even crowd-sourced real estate acquisition that pioneered a joint ownership model. Some of the groups who have stepped into the breach include Oakland Warehouse Coalition, SaferDIYSpaces, Vital Arts, and Liberate the 23rd Ave. Community Building coalition, supported by a number of non-profits with technical expertise and resources (e.g., the Bay Area Community Land Trust, Community Arts Stabilization Trust, Northern California Community Loan Fund, Oakland Community Land Trust, POC Sustainable Housing Network, and the Sustainable Economies Law Center). These efforts are emblematic of the kind of passion, ingenuity, and solidarity that is in the community. Without the PDAS position and new Cultural Affairs Manager being in place, the interface with a variety of City departments would have made community efforts to effect change more time consuming and difficult.

The Enhanced Scope of Cultural Affairs: This is a new order of business for the City and the Cultural Affairs Division, but it is an important wedge that has opened up ways of working that are more collaborative, inter-sectoral, and better reflect the reality of the cultural community. The issues are complicated and agencies' priorities can pull in different directions. Some efforts could be accelerated with more investment, coordination, and/or cooperation. But the work that has started needs to continue in order to bear fruit and have long-term impact. The best solutions will come with the collaboration of the community. Entrepreneurial local efforts need to be supported, and finding new ways to support them will take fresh thinking, leveraged resources, and the capacity to use them effectively.

Recognizing that where culture flourishes has no hard boundaries³⁶—between non-profit and for-profit, experimental and traditional, or the cultural, social, and political—creates a fuller, truer picture of what makes Oakland the exciting, unorthodox, and inventive place that it is. Having public sector efforts more closely mirror the structure of on-the-ground reality will give a more accurate picture of where things are in order to clear the path to where the city wants to be.

New and Stronger Cultural Venues: There are other dynamics at play in addition to recent efforts to stem the loss of invaluable cultural contributors to the community. There are also long-standing needs and desires to strengthen existing cultural infrastructure as well as creating new assets.

During community meetings of the planning process, comments from the cultural community about the lack of affordable space to buy or rent were followed by calls for the development of more and better performance venues—particularly “mid-sized” ones. Though “mid-sized” was not clearly defined, the redevelopment of the Calvin Simmons Theatre, its auxiliary spaces, and the Kaiser Convention Center presents a near-term opportunity to ensure careful planning of the kinds of cultural spaces that are needed to complement what is already in place. Other redevelopment plans (e.g., California College of the Arts) or explorations by out-of-town arts organizations to have second homes in Oakland could also be opportunities to match new resources with community interests and create win-win solutions.

Recommendations

- **Create a permanent position that continues to facilitate cross-departmental and City-community relations that are relevant to the creation and retention of robust cultural spaces in Oakland**
 - Refine a position description, comparable to the current PDAS’, that aligns more closely with the new cultural vision
 - Develop and share the dashboard of cultural space creation/retention outcomes internally and externally
 - Advocate for and secure funding of the position

The PDAS has made significant headway in identifying and addressing many space and displacement issues of Oakland’s cultural sector. The work has been invaluable to:

- bringing together stakeholders across the community and City to develop policy that supports the ongoing activities and sustainability of the cultural sector and its workers (both in the non-profit and for-profit sectors);
- facilitating the identification and retention of spaces for cultural organizations/collectives/artists;
- researching and securing resources and technical assistance for cultural space improvements, retention, and acquisition;
- creating and leveraging resources and technical assistance for business development in the cultural sector; and
- facilitating the amendment of City codes, policies, and regulations that can be barriers to the community’s ability to engage in cultural activities.

³⁶ See *The Economics of Oakland’s Cultural Sector*, p. 48-50 that aggregates data from the non-profit and for-profit cultural sectors to present a more holistic picture of Oakland’s cultural economy.

The PDAS has a full agenda this calendar year to continue implementing the strategies put in place over the last two years. In many ways, the position already is conceptually and practically aligned with the long-term goals of this plan to move Cultural Affairs toward more cross-departmental and cross-sectoral collaboration as well as stronger City-community relations and accessibility.

The position is supported by outside funding until the end of 2018. It would be beneficial for the City to find the resources to continue support for this position (though somewhat restructured to reflect a broader purview)—both to ensure the success of activities already in the pipeline and to strengthen Cultural Affairs’ capacity for continued inter-departmental collaboration and City-community efforts to address issues that are arts and culture-related but not part of typical forms of grantmaking or non-profit technical assistance. For example, working with partners to implement the real estate acquisition strategy for permanently affordable arts spaces, supporting community communications with the Planning & Building Department around relevant zoning issues, facilitating lease negotiations for City-owned properties, streamlining special event permit acquisition, and identifying available real estate for short-term cultural projects—these are representative of the work that is taking place and needs to continue to create longer-term solutions.

Specific implementation suggestions:

- △ *Keep abreast of results from CAST’s pilot investments and real estate acquisitions work, determine next steps to promote the success of existing projects, as appropriate*
- △ *Cultural Affairs manager and PDAS work together to clarify division of labor and strategies for moving forward to sustain the PDAS position*

➤ **Support researched policy changes to enable local assets to thrive and to mitigate displacement**

- Identify and implement policy change in support of the retention and growth of the cultural/creative sector with relevant City colleagues
- Act as a liaison, when needed, to connect community stakeholders with relevant City colleagues to facilitate productive joint problem-solving
- Help to build learning communities to socialize information on effective community engagement with the City that advances cultural space retention

There are ongoing grassroots efforts to shift the policy landscape through thoughtful collaboration with relevant City entities. These on-the-ground efforts are necessary for addressing urgent community needs in flexible and timely ways and are an important complement to and impetus for longer-term government policy change and action. Cultural Affairs in concert with the PDAS should continue to act as a liaison to facilitate City-community collaboration to support productive community engagement in the civic space.

Specific leveraging suggestion:

- △ *The coalitions addressing the Black Arts Movement Business District, the Black Cultural Zone, Arts + Garage District, and the 23rd Avenue Cultural Plaza, and many others are demonstrations of community commitment to work to save and develop creative spaces in various parts of the city. Providing advice to these groups could inform citywide strategies and learning.*

➤ **Support naturally-occurring and Oakland-appropriate forms of technical assistance and convening that strengthen local capacity to address cultural space issues**

- Facilitate opportunities or provide direct support for community-initiated technical assistance provision and convening,
- Identify/marshal/partner with relevant resources from inside the City
- Advocate/advise/partner to secure relevant external resources

As a funder, Cultural Affairs is positioned to see where strengths and weaknesses are in the local community as well as emerging ideas and activities in the broader field. This “bird’s eye view” could be used to 1) initiate conversations with the community to “ground truth” observations and program ideas, 2) as appropriate, support naturally-occurring local resources and activities that harness and build community-based knowledge and skills, and 3) leverage appropriate field/outside ideas and resources to enhance local efforts.

Specific implementation suggestions:

- △ *Support existing technical assistance efforts related to cultural space displacement mitigation*
- △ *Collaborate with and convene the arts community, developers, and relevant City colleagues to assess specific space needs relevant to current and potential development projects (e.g., Calvin Simmons/Kaiser Convention Center, capital improvements to Malonga, CCA, out-of-town arts organizations possibly developing performance space in Oakland)*
- △ *Build on internal (e.g., EWD) resources for capacity building and technical assistance for cultural non-profits and small businesses/entrepreneurs—e.g., Small Business Week and other kinds of workshops, real estate assistance, etc.*
- △ *Collect external resources and information (e.g., CAST, City of Seattle Arts & Culture, ArtSpace, etc.) to create an information clearinghouse and enhance local capacity building*

Caveat: “Best practices” in technical assistance and capacity-building always need to be contextualized and appropriately fit to the situations at hand to be effective. Look for grassroots efforts to strengthen and match outside resources to self-identified local needs.

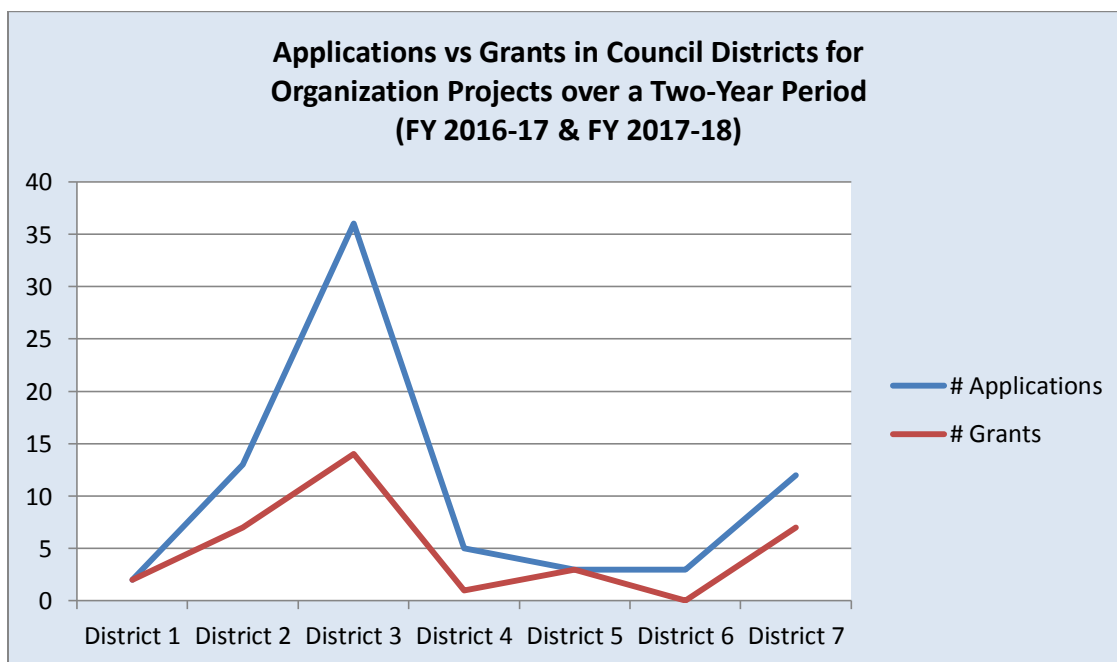
Neighborhood Places

Context

The Crisis of Place: Standing alongside the more visible crisis of the loss of non-conforming cultural space and the creative people in them is the quieter and enduring crisis of disinvested neighborhoods.

Places to express one's own culture and learn about those of others, to gather, and to connect in meaningful ways are necessary for building and reinforcing a sense of belonging. Non-profit cultural and community organizations, family and block associations, faith-based anchors, and after-school programs are some of the places where these activities can take place and are the necessary assets neighborhoods need to thrive. But what if some areas of the city have many more of these kinds of assets to depend on than others?

Dismantling Disinvestment: When a neighborhood is thriving and has a lot of community-serving organizations, it's easier to build capacity than starting from scratch. For example, responsive grant programs are designed to find ways to support what comes in the door and are therefore dependent on what resources are already in place. It's hard to give a grant to a neighborhood if no one there can apply.



Source: Cultural Affairs application data and grantee recommendation memoranda.

The chart above is a snapshot of just one of Cultural Affairs' grant programs that supports non-profits to provide cultural services to Oaklanders. But it is illustrative of the imbalance of capacity and resources among the different council districts of the city. If the allocation of resources are solely based on the strongest existing capacity, it tends to mirror, if not magnify, the disparities that already exist.

It is a common grantmaking practice in the field to employ context-impervious due diligence requirements that, unintentionally, can result in further disadvantaging those who are already under-resourced. Typical requirements that are not in tune with local realities and community attempts to get a leg up can include: restricting request amounts based on organizational budget size; requiring full-time paid staff; only supporting artists and organizations that have been recognized by other funders; making non-501(c)(3)s ineligible to apply for grants; and not allowing in-kind contributions as funding matches.

Cultural Affairs, to its credit, looks beyond the surface and asks if organizations serve areas of Oakland other than where they are located, offer activities that are free to the public to make them more accessible, and hire Oakland-based artists to support the local economy. However, more can be done to analyze barriers and find creative solutions for strengthening and not disadvantaging those who have sweat more than capital as their equity base. Below are some suggestions for ways to start.

There is another way to use culture to rebuild cities, not by placing a shiny veneer over crumbling decay, but by using culture to revitalize the urban grass-roots, its neighborhoods, and their residents' civic engagement.

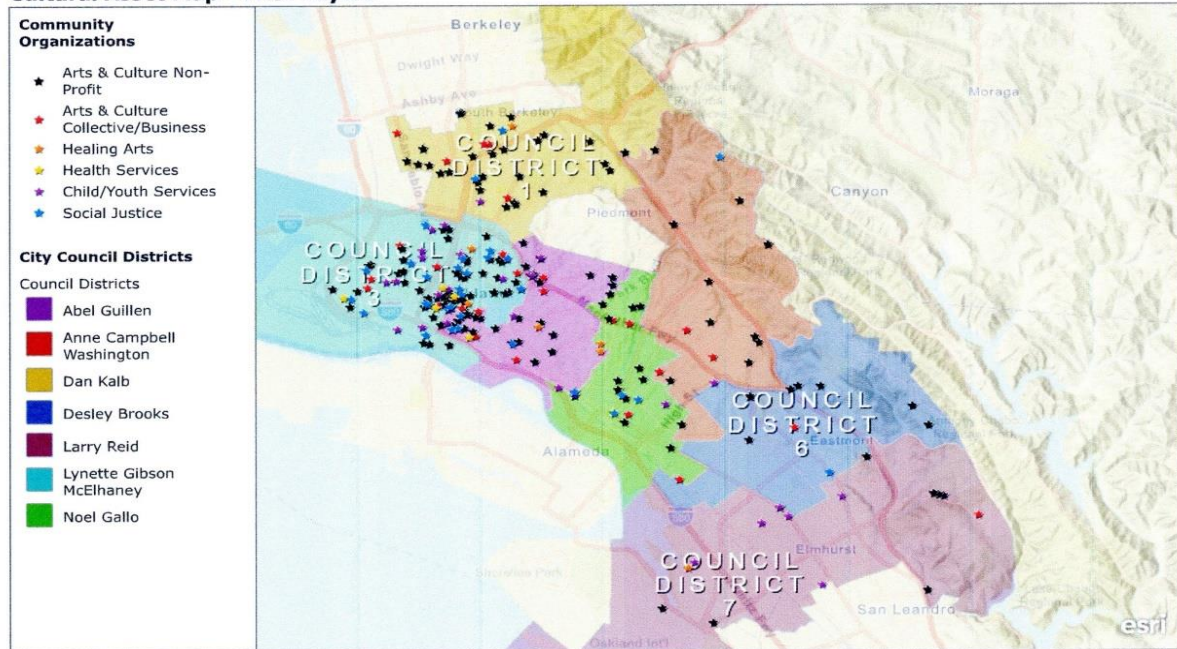
—Mark Stern & Susan Seifert, Social Impact of the Arts Project-U. of PA

Supporting Existing Assets: People find ways to express themselves, share culture, and teach their children their customs and values—whether or not there is a formal or convenient place to do so. Therefore, one strategy for could be to look for existing assets and building capacity where it can be found in disinvested neighborhoods. Cultural Affairs could work with the community to nurture the flowers growing in the cracks and help break through old barriers.

Multi-functional Community Organizations: Where non-profit organizations that are specifically dedicated to cultural activity may be lacking, there are often other kinds of organizations and entities that step into the void—such as health-focused, youth development, immigrant support, and other social service organizations—and provide cultural activities as a part of what they do. Asset-building strategies could include exploring new or deepened partnerships with community-serving organizations who are supporting neighborhood cultural activities as part of holistic approaches to foster well-being, and/or adjusting grantmaking to more proactively promote community-initiated, culturally-integrated programming in neighborhoods.

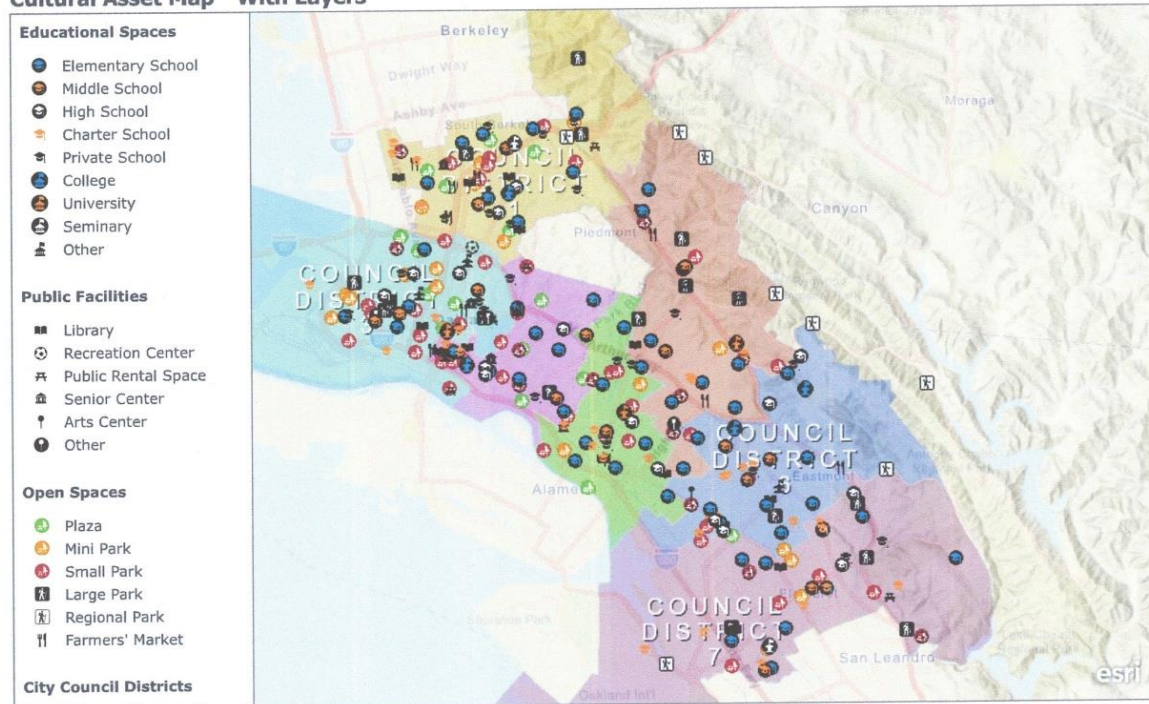
Naturally-occurring Cultural Districts: Clusters of culturally-specific neighborhood groups, non-profits, cultural organizations, retail businesses, and cafes and restaurants can naturally spring up in cultural enclaves and provide goods and services tailored to the needs and desires of that community. In looking to foster cultural equity, the City may need to adapt policies to activities and businesses that might not fit the typical mold in order to address under-resourced areas or remove barriers. Grant and loan programs, business and tax incentives, and zoning could be adapted to support the sometimes idiosyncratic ways businesses and organizations are actually thriving. Pilot programs could be delimited within an area to test policy potential before extending changes to other parts of the city or citywide, such as the use of community benefit districts. Experiments should be data-driven and targeted to underserved or vulnerable areas that have grassroots vibrancy and cultural asset strength, but may suffer from disinvestment or inhospitable regulation.

Cultural Asset Map - With Layers



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Cultural Asset Map - With Layers



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Public Assets as Equalizers: When there is an absence of private infrastructure in certain neighborhoods—such as non-profit community and cultural organizations—often civic spaces fill the void. Parks, recreation centers, libraries, and schools exist as critical mechanisms of the public sector to distribute and equalize access to resources. These can be the places that neighborhoods turn to when there are no cultural centers or other kinds of organizations for building community. It’s not a perfectly equitable system, but it is a foundation that stabilizes neighborhoods and helps them weather the vicissitudes of a skewed marketplace. In the spirit of collaboration and leveraging existing assets, Cultural Affairs could look to colleagues in Parks, Libraries, Human Services, OUSD and other agencies to see if there are ways to activate and strengthen public space collaboratively where private resources may be lacking.

Internal Capacity: To place a new focus on empowering neighborhoods to build on locally-initiated efforts and naturally-occurring assets will require a holistic review and retooling of the different mechanisms that Cultural Affairs has at its disposal in addition to new thinking about programs and partnerships. Cultural Affairs’ current capacity is already stretched to maintain existing activities, so it will be important to acknowledge that new approaches require more time and resources to implement.

Recommendations

➤ **Strengthen community capacity for self-determined cultural expression**

- Perform a cultural and racial equity impact analysis of current programs, policies, and procedures
 - Examine current practices for strengths and weaknesses in promoting cultural and racial equity, including program frames, eligibility and contracting requirements, applicant adjudication practices, outreach mechanisms, technical assistance content, etc.
- Leverage existing assets
 - Analyze where and what kinds of disparities exist in the community
 - Look for existing assets in the community and what services are being provided
 - Do a gap analysis relevant to Cultural Affairs strengths and potential for complementing existing resources
 - Make program adjustments based on new knowledge (see Caveat below)
 - Coordinate with community-based assets to maximize impact, as appropriate
 - Facilitate connections to advance productive, community-initiated efforts to retain and/or strengthen existing cultural assets
- Build partnerships
 - Build relationships with entities (in and/or outside the City) that share goals and have complementary resources
 - Explore coordination or partnership with relevant City colleagues/departments to leverage existing public resources to grow community capacity for self-determined expression and connection
 - Explore coordination or partnerships with community-based programs or initiatives in targeted areas that value self-determined cultural expression and/or foster asset-based approaches
- Pro-active resource allocation
 - Draft research-informed strategies to pro-actively address disparities and build on community assets

- Vet strategies with partners and constituents to strengthen and increase buy-in

➤ **Strengthen Cultural Affairs capacity to reorient to asset-based approaches**

- Ensure that the new administrative hire has the skill sets to help collect and analyze data, do community and field research, and to communicate effectively with stakeholders
- Increase capacity of Cultural Funding Program staff (through internal or external support) to review existing programs through an asset and cultural equity lens
- Coordinate with the PDAS and other staff on new neighborhood-oriented approaches

Specific implementation suggestions:

- △ *Analyze existing data on current allocation of resources to determine resource disparities by using, for example, cultural asset mapping with geographic/socio-economic overlays*
- △ *Meet with relevant community members to further ground assumptions*
- △ *Explore leveraging opportunities with City colleagues, such as Oakland Fund for Children & Youth with respect to resources for after-school programs, and Parks and Libraries with respect to programs or priorities alignment (e.g., to activate under-utilized spaces or give additional support to highly-utilized, but under-resourced ones)*
- △ *Explore partnership opportunities with ongoing place-based initiatives, such as The CA Endowment/East Oakland Building Healthy Communities, Family Independence Initiative, SH Cowell Foundation's East Oakland Highland initiative*
- △ *Share information/resources on promising practices in development & community benefits (e.g. examples of mutually-beneficial, well-negotiated CBAs and successful ordinances)*

Caveat: *Changes in grantmaking or other kinds of resource allocation that have an established history of expectation within the community need to be considered carefully for the impact they may have on vulnerable organizations whose existence or programming hangs by a narrow thread. Changes in long-term practice should be telegraphed to the field with enough time for them to prepare for the shift (or to give input)—particularly if resources are being redirected as opposed to added.*

Culture & the Civic Commons

Context

The civic commons is where people can build a sense of community and belonging. It is where we encounter one another on our travels between private spaces, where we congregate with friends and family or interface with strangers, celebrate or shop, connect with nature or to the Internet, and engage in the public sphere as concerned community members. It is also where cities create their sense of identity through what is promoted, allowed, and prohibited in the built environment.

A number of Cultural Affairs' programs are concerned with enabling a wide range of cultural expression—both permanent and ephemeral—within the civic commons:

- the percent-for-art program, established in 1989 through an ordinance that allocated 1.5% percent of public capital improvement projects for commissioning public art works and artist services as part of those projects;
- the public art in private development ordinance, passed in 2014, that requires .5% of residential or 1% of non-residential private development project costs to be dedicated to publicly accessible art (this ordinance went into effect February 2015);
- underwriting of the annual two-day Art + Soul Oakland festival that began in 2001 as part of downtown revitalization efforts and showcases local artists and entrepreneurs;
- fee offsets and logistical support for a variety of free annual community fairs, festivals, parades and runs that take place in different neighborhoods of the city;
- logistical support for a growing number of film crews using Oakland as their backdrop; and
- production of free weekly walking tours from spring through the fall that orient participants to a mix of historical and contemporary features of the downtown/uptown/waterfront areas of Oakland.

The Cultural Affairs Division was reorganized in 2015 when the new Division manager was hired. The Division currently includes the Cultural Funding and Public Art Programs along with the full-time Special Events Coordinator (festivals/fairs/runs/official city events, film office) and half-time Walking Tour Coordinator. The combination of all these disparate activities actually presents Cultural Affairs with the opportunity to see all of this work as inter-connected and in support of the city's capacity to express itself in the shared, celebratory, and sometimes contested space of the civic commons.

Using the frame of cultural equity and belonging around these place-based activities creates the opportunity to link them conceptually and deepen their scope and potential impact.

PUBLIC ART

Public Art in Public Works: Aesthetic expression and values of the City find their way into the civic commons proper—that is, the public sector spaces that people share and interact in—through the Public Art Program related to public works. Pieces of public art in Oakland may be subtly or boldly incorporated into public spaces—through a window, in the walkway, on a bench, as an archway or entrance, or as a sculpture in a public lobby or plaza. Such projects contribute to the visual cultural dialogue between the different parts of the city where public spaces exist—not just where private development is concentrated.

The process for incorporating public art into public works projects is typically long and complex—sometimes involving multiple agencies and iterative cycles of approval—and in recent times, regulatory requirements have only increased. But given these interfaces with different parts of government, Public Art projects can be a valuable entry point into cultural equity discussions with partner agencies, and open new opportunities for enlarging and diversifying the pool of artists knowledgeable about the intricacies and timelines of incorporating creative elements into public works. The new infrastructure bond measure KK should add resources to build equity of voice through the public art program.

Public Art in Private Development: Having successfully emerged from litigation, the ordinance providing for public art in private development projects has the potential to substantially increase resources for the creation of visual art or arts space accessible to the public and to help employ Oakland artists (an encouragement, though not a requirement of the ordinance). Incorporating inviting artworks and

cultural spaces at street level opens the possibility for visually relating to surrounding spaces, making reference to the history of the place, enlivening foot traffic, and giving passers-by a reason to interact. The ordinance can act as an important reminder to private developers that even if a building is privately owned, it still exists in the interactive space of the public commons. The process for managing this new program is still in development with the Planning & Building Department. It is a welcome opportunity for more public access to culture and cross-department collaboration, but strains the Public Art Program's reduced capacity.

Internal Capacity: The Public Art Program is staffed by one full-time person. The program recently lost a full-time position though the work load has increased due to State and City regulations and is anticipated to grow as clarifications related to Measure KK and the private development ordinance are made. The program previously had a staff of 2.5 FTEs. There is neither program capacity to complete an up-to-date inventory and assessment of the public art collection nor the resources to maintain it. At present, there are about a dozen public art projects in process involving ten different agencies, in addition to facilitating the meeting of private development requirements and handling new City agency and community-initiated projects on public property. With ongoing project and collection management duties and the anticipated rise in activity, the capacity of the Public Art Program to steward City projects and assets responsibly is severely challenged.

Recommendations

- **Strengthen the Public Art Program's capacity to responsibly manage ongoing and new public art projects and initiatives, and steward the City's collection of public art**
 - Reinstatement of qualified, adequate staffing to manage ongoing and anticipated new public art projects and program responsibilities
 - Allocate resources necessary to responsibly steward the City's public art collection, including the implementation of policies and procedures for the inventorying and assessing the collection, and the maintenance, conservation, and deaccession of pieces, as needed

Specific short-term suggestions:

- △ *Continue to advocate for the reinstatement of staff for the Public Art Program*
- △ *Hire an intern to assist with an inventory and documentation of the collection*

- **Strengthen the Public Art Program's ability to advocate for cultural equity**
 - Build a diverse, qualified pool of artists who are representative of Oakland's cultural breadth
 - Increase awareness of cultural equity and place identity in the civic commons with public sector and private development partners
 - Review ordinance language for barriers to cultural equity

Part of strengthening cultural equity considerations in the public art program is to work on recruiting a broader and more diverse pool of artists who understand the complexity involved in creating a durable piece of art constructed within the public sphere, particularly where multiple agencies may be involved. Building the capacity of new public artists will require technical assistance, training, and/or peer mentoring for artists without public art experience.

There are timely opportunities to advance the City's goals to achieve cultural equity through new public art projects in public works and private development. Clear communications with partners about these goals will aid in strengthening equity outcomes.

The Public Art ordinances should be reviewed for any potential cultural equity barriers or cultural bias.

Specific short-term suggestions:

- △ Issue a call for artists who are representative of Oakland's diverse population and are interested in learning how to participate in public art projects
- △ Offer workshops (or support a learning community) in what it takes to see a Public Art project through to completion
- △ Establish benchmarks for increasing the diversity of the qualified artists roster for public art projects
- △ Review ordinance language and public art program practices for equity considerations
- △ Develop a cultural/racial equity statement and procedural recommendations to share with colleagues in other departments and non-City public sector partners, as appropriate
- △ Encourage context-sensitive design of public art in private development

COMMUNITY EXPRESSION & CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Festivals and Street Fairs: Oakland has a rich and vibrant festival culture that reflects a broad array of celebration and commemoration. The City, through Cultural Affairs, currently plays a supportive role in facilitating the ability of diverse communities to express themselves in the civic commons. Festivals, street fairs, and parades are important to both validating the variety of cultures in the city as well as providing inviting opportunities for community connection and bridge building.

The City provides in-kind support to a dozen neighborhood-based festivals (including Chinatown Lunar New Year, Malcolm X Jazz Festival, Oaktoberfest, and Dia de los Muertos) that serve 350,000 people per year, and to the Art + Soul Oakland festival, that serves about 30,000 people annually.

Art + Soul originated as a downtown revitalization effort by the City in 2001 and was later spun off into its own non-profit. It features local talent and is the City's largest annual festival (taking place over two days and encompassing 10 downtown blocks); it is the only festival to be awarded cash support in addition to the subsidy of City services and fees. The 12 City-sponsored neighborhood festivals are a mixture of community-initiated events variously organized by business associations, non-profits, and community groups. The City's investment in these festival activities through the Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) is around \$250,000, a little more than half of which goes to underwriting such things as police, fire, and traffic control. Cultural Affairs' Special Event Coordinator provides support through his facilitation of community relations with the various City departments involved, management of the production of Art + Soul, and administration of the subsidies for the neighborhood festivals.

Over a dozen years ago, there was a competitive process to apply for the in-kind subsidies of neighborhood festivals that off-set City fees and services. However, the current group of festivals receiving City subsidy has been fixed for a number of years, providing the benefit of continuity with

respect to community expectations, planning, and neighborhood capacity building. The downside is that other neighborhood-initiated activities don't currently have access to this support.

In the community, there is a desire to understand better what the City supports in this realm, what possibilities there are for new ideas to be considered, and how decisions are made to allocate resources. In the spirit of equity, it would be good to share information about event history and decision-making rationales, and to open a dialogue about the possibility for increased access and transparency.

Walking Tours: The City walking tours have been around for over 20 years and help people deepen their knowledge of specific places in Oakland (e.g., of Old Oakland, Jack London Waterfront, Uptown/Lake Merritt, and the city's churches and temples). Having a knowledge of place can build a sense of connection and commitment. This program, offered from May through October, is run principally through volunteer initiative with coordination from a part-time Cultural Affairs staffer with a long history in Oakland. Tours are free to the public and were previously supported through redevelopment funds. This program is the only cultural product produced and presented by Cultural Affairs, and the lack of communications infrastructure within the Division makes marketing the walking tours a challenge. However, it has potential for growth, diversification, and updating. Increasing community involvement in curating themes, contributing content, and broadening the reach of the program to different parts of the city could enhance its scope and impact. Bringing a cultural equity lens to the program could make expression of community stories and history stronger and broader.

At community planning meetings, we heard that with all the new development and shifting demographics in Oakland, it would be helpful to have ways for newcomers to better understand the context and history of the city. The walking tours could be a tool for newcomer education as well as for visitors and residents. Virtual self-guided walking tours using mobile technology could make the content accessible year-round and increase capacity for content development.

Recommendations

- **Review history and clarify procedures for curatorial and resource allocation decisions regarding Cultural Affairs' support of community expression in the civic commons**
 - Review history, procedures, curation, reach, and resource allocation of Art + Soul Oakland, neighborhood festivals/fairs/parades/runs, and walking tours
 - Gauge community interest in existing activities and surface new ideas to support cultural equity and community-based expression
 - Do a local scan to understand program market share, and scan across sectors (nationally and internationally) for resonant and context-appropriate ideas to strengthen neighborhood expression and vibrancy
- **Revise, as appropriate, policies and procedures to strengthen community input and transparent, culturally-equitable decision-making and resource allocation**
 - Research civic tools for equitable resource allocation that activates community engagement (e.g. participatory budgeting-like process, community-reviewed poster presentations, etc.)
 - Ensure policies are designed to promote a balance of continuity and change that enhances chances for success from both cultural and economic perspectives

Specific implementation suggestions:

- △ *Consider the importance of building continuity for community events—it takes time to establish and grow participation and expectation*
- △ *Establish benchmarks for advancing cultural equity and strengthening capacity for community-initiated expression*
- △ *Consider a technical assistance workshop by the Special Events Coordinator for community groups who want to advice on producing a festival/street fair*
- △ *Work closely with City departments impacted by festivals/street fairs to discuss equity issues and respective goals*
- △ *Give fresh thought to the purpose of the walking tours in order to recalibrate priorities and strategies. Are they principally a marketing tool or an educational one? Should they be seen as Oakland boosterism or self-determined community narrative or something in between?*
- △ *Think broadly across cultural practices and sectors when doing research for ideas and resources for the walking tour program (e.g., Could a technology partnership enable walking tours to be uploaded to an augmented-reality platform? Could a partnership with the library deepen historical content?)*

CULTURE AND THE INTERCONNECTED CITY

With a new narrative about the importance of diverse cultural understanding to all of the City's efforts, Cultural Affairs has the opportunity strengthen its relationship across departments by creating incentives for colleagues to engage in new forms of context-sensitive design thinking and problem-solving.

Artist in residence programs housed at City agencies can be an effective way of reaching distinct communities and bringing new approaches to civic challenges and city service delivery.

—Bloomberg Associates

Multiple cities have been embedding artists into city agencies in a variety of ways. Boston, Detroit, Los Angeles, the Twin Cities, New York, and San Francisco are examples of where municipalities have instituted public artist-in-residence programs variously to experiment with new forms of community engagement, address blight, and inform planning studies, capital project designs, transportation initiatives, and policy improvements.

With a cultural equity focus, Oakland could enlist arts and cultural practitioners to be creative thought partners to bring insights into long-standing issues or new initiatives. Moving well beyond the idea of working with artists to create an artistic product or public event, agencies could examine new approaches and working assumptions that come from having creative thinkers with different cultural orientations and perspectives to help give context-sensitive ideas.

Embedded creative fellows could not only enhance the City’s understanding of community perspectives, but also serve to enrich community understanding of City processes and promote better community-City communications and civic engagement.

Cultural Affairs has already reached out to potential partnering agencies and received positive feedback on their willingness to participate in a creative fellows program.

This is just one initial idea for Cultural Affairs to build common cause with City colleagues once the vision is adopted.

Recommendation

- **Pilot a creative fellows program to embed arts and cultural practitioners into a variety of departments**
 - Gauge interest level of arts & cultural practitioners (with strong community/socially-informed practices) to participate
 - Solicit case statements of issues to address from interested City departments and develop and vet shared values, goals, and language for program guidelines
 - Seek additional investment where possible
 - Set desired outcomes, timeframe, and indicators of success

Specific implementation suggestions:

- △ *With initiatives like the BRT on International Blvd., there are opportunities to think together with local artists about creative solutions to, e.g., small business displacement or designing “complete streets” that conform to community needs.*
- △ *Ongoing development, with an equity lens, of the downtown specific plan could be a good opportunity for embedding a creative fellow in Planning & Building.*
- △ *Existing public places—such as parks or libraries—that are under-utilized could be animated in culturally-responsive ways through a collaboration with local culture bearers and/or creatives*
- △ *Rethinking engagement protocols to reach communities whose voices are not typically heard in planning processes*

Engaging the public through the arts and culture helps produce better projects and is part of building better places that are loved and cared for by a wider community of people.

—Transportation for America

Strengthening Oakland's Cultural Ecosystem

Cultural Affairs has long supported a diverse range of non-profit cultural organizations and individual artists to enhance cultural vibrancy across the city.

But like many municipalities its funding programs, guidelines, and requirements tend to mirror those of much larger cities and even those at the national level, since such places often set the standards for government practice. But the particular cultural realities in Oakland do not always conform to the one-size-fits-all circumstances that make such programming templates appropriate or feasible.

A focus on equity that is based on the specific conditions in Oakland can be the impetus to recalibrate programs and policy to be more context-specific and driven by local circumstances and data. Taking an asset-based approach will entail nurturing community-initiated efforts and on-the-ground realities that may or may not exist only in the non-profit ecology—particularly given trends to not adopt the 501(c)(3) business model.

How can Cultural Affairs better support emerging artists or immigrant artists and culture bearers who might find it challenging to access current programs? How can it encourage grassroots experimentation, particularly in underserved neighborhoods, and not raise unsurmountable bureaucratic barriers to the burgeoning efforts that make Oakland's cultural milieu rich? It should be acknowledged that finding cultural assets in under-resourced areas and creating strategies to support them appropriately is a more pro-active, and more labor intensive, endeavor than maintaining the status quo and will require added Division capacity to pursue. However, some adjustments may be able to be made sooner rather than later to better serve the community as it is. Lowering bureaucratic barriers where possible will be of benefit to the cultural community generally, not just to the most under-resourced.

Oakland's Cultural Ecology

Context

Not All Ecosystems are the Same: Underlying the waves of change washing over the socioeconomic landscape of Oakland is an enduring community substructure. This substructure has a different shape and history than the one of its neighbor to the west, though there is a tendency to look at San Francisco as a model to be emulated. Certainly, good policy ideas have sprung up across the bay, but with double the population and a lot more heft in terms of cultural institutions and funding, San Francisco is not always a good comparison for Oakland—particularly if taking a localized, asset-based approach to strengthening its cultural sector is desired.

To borrow lightly from a natural ecosystem metaphor³⁷, San Francisco's non-profit cultural community has stands of redwoods—groups of large cultural institutions whose budgets range from around \$20M to over \$100M. There is a substantial substrate as well—like the firs, oaks, and bays of a forest—that is, multimillion-dollar organizations, but at the next tier down.

³⁷ The metaphor of ecosystems is often used in the non-profit cultural sector without a lot discussion of how natural ecosystems actually function and compare to constructed cultural hierarchies. A deeper dive into the metaphor would be interesting but is beyond the scope of this plan.

The San Francisco Arts Commission's \$4M in competitive and operating grants, combined with the \$12M of Grants for the Arts (hotel tax fund) monies and other local government supports make San Francisco's one of the highest per capita city arts investments in the nation.

A more illuminating comparison for Oakland is with Berkeley, with less than 30% of Oakland's population, but half the grantmaking budget for its Civic Arts Grants Program (i.e., \$500K compared to Oakland's ~\$1M for its Cultural Funding Program). Interestingly, Berkeley has at least five cultural organizations with budgets over \$4M, whereas Oakland has one. At the other end of the spectrum, the small arts non-profits (with budgets under \$250K) that typically show up on funders' grantee lists in Berkeley are 36% of the total, while Oakland's share is 60%. Quite a few of Oakland's organizations in this tier are not emerging, but rather, well-established groups that have found their path to economic growth strewn with stumbling blocks.³⁸

Extending the ecosystem metaphor, Oakland cultural terrain has no redwood stands. The Oakland Museum of California is the only cultural non-profit with a multimillion dollar budget with eight digits (\$14,500,000 in 2015). There are a handful of cultural organizations that have budgets of about \$3M, with an additional small group hovering at about \$1-2M. So with a few oaks and bays, Oakland's non-profit cultural sector is populated by some tough manzanita bushes and then fields of wildflowers—some with amazing staying power that make the landscape recognizable and some that brightly appear and quietly disappear in the forest floor. In the current overheated environment, the cultural florae are more vulnerable than ever.

Redefining Terms to Fit the Context: In some ways, the cultural reality in Oakland defies typical narratives of who the institutional anchors are. The Crucible and Destiny Arts have larger budgets than the Oakland Symphony; and Project Bandaloop and AXIS Dance have larger budgets than Oakland Ballet. To see Oakland as it is, and not through the lens of another city's reality, could give rise to a different kind of understanding of "institution" and "community anchor." Rather than simply looking at budget size and paid staff FTEs as indicators of capacity, one might look at indicators of stability and horizontal connectedness, such as how long an organization has been serving the community and what its network of relationships is to other organizations or across communities.

What Oakland might lack in financial capital in its non-profit cultural sector, it often makes up for in social capital—a strong ethos of community and networks of relationships, and a willingness to show up for family, friends, and colleagues. Trying to support the sector by transplanting "non-native" assumptions and expectations into Oakland's cultural environment could result in negative, unintended consequences that weaken the infrastructure that resources were meant to fortify.

³⁸ Data sources: DataArts; *City of Berkeley Arts & Cultural Plan Update 2017-2027, Economic Impact Report-Appendix*; GuideStar; *Oakland's Arts and Cultural Economy*

Examples of SF Non-Profit Cultural Organizations

Operating Budget Size: \$20M-100M

Exhibition/Presentation: MOMA, Exploratorium, Asian Art Museum, Fine Arts Museums

Arts Production: SF Opera, SF Symphony, SF Ballet, ACT

Arts Education: SF Conservatory of Music

Media: KQED, ITVS

\$5M-19M

Presentation/Exhibition: SF Jazz, SF Film Society, Yerba Buena Ctr for the Arts

Arts Production: ODC, LINES

Arts Education: Community Music Center, 826 Valencia

\$1M-4M

Presentation/Exhibition: Intersection for the Arts, Stern Grove, SF Performances, MOAD, CA Historical Society, Yerba Buena Gardens, Brava

Arts Production: Philharmonia Baroque, Chanticleer, Kronos

Arts Education: Youth Speaks, SF Girls Chorus, Performing Arts Wkshp

Media: BAVC, New America Media, BAYCAT

Source: GuideStar – 2015/2016 990s

Examples of Oakland Non-Profit Cultural Organizations

Operating Budget Size: Above \$4M

Oakland Museum of California

\$1M-\$4M

Presentation: Paramount Theatre, Fox Oakland Theater, Eastside Arts Alliance

Arts Production: Oakland Symphony, Creative Growth, Project Bandaloop

Arts Education: The Crucible, Destiny Arts

Media: Youth Radio

\$500K-999K

Exhibition: MOChA, Peralta Hacienda

Arts Production: AXIS Dance, Oakland Interfaith Gospel, Cantare Con Vivo

Arts Education: Living Jazz, Attitudinal Healing

\$250K-499K

Exhibition: Pro Arts

Arts Production: Oakland Ballet, Ragged Wing Ensemble, Stagebridge, California Revels, Dimensions Dance, Kitka

Arts Education: Oakland Youth Chorus, Prescott Circus Theatre, Beats Rhymes and Life

Under \$250K

Arts Production: Crosspulse, Diamano Coura West African Dance, Community Rejuvenation Project, Savage Jazz Dance

Arts Education: Purple Silk Music Education, Oaktown Jazz Workshops, Oakland Public Conservatory of Music

Media: Oakland Digital Arts and Literacy Center

Source: GuideStar – 2015/2016 990s

Examples of Berkeley Non-Profit Cultural Organizations

Operating Budget Size: \$5M-19M

Presentation/Exhibition: Cal Performances, BAM/PFA

Arts Production: Berkeley Repertory Theater, California Shakespeare

Literary: Soc. For the Study of Native Arts & Sciences

\$1M-4M

Presentation: Freight & Salvage, Julia Morgan Center

Arts Production: Aurora Theatre, Berkeley Symphony, Shotgun Players, Kala Art Institute

Arts Education: CA Jazz Conservatory, Crowden Music Center, Cazadero Camp

Literary: Heyday Books

\$500K-999K

Presentation: Ashkenaz Community Center

Arts Production: Berkeley Ballet Theater,

Arts Education: Shawl-Anderson Dance, Luna Dance, Young Musicians Choral Orchestra

Media: Center for Digital Storytelling

Literary: Small Press Distribution

Source: City of Berkeley Arts & Cultural Plan Update 2017-2027, Economic Impact Report-Appendix

Bureaucracy is an Equity Issue: There are always more small organizations in a city’s cultural sector than large ones. But as observed above, many of Oakland’s smaller organizations (with budgets under \$500K and even under \$250K) are also its stalwarts—core organizations that have been contributing to the community cultural scene for many years, sometimes decades. But despite their resilience, they still have infrastructure challenges—such as no designated fundraising or communications staff, no assistants under directors, and no working capital reserves to provide a periodic cash flow cushion. When you have a sector that is characterized more by its sweat equity and social capital than its financial resources and infrastructure heft, complex guideline, contracting, permitting, and licensing requirements can prove to be insurmountable obstacles to making a simple project happen—and new organizations that are just starting to get their feet under them can struggle even more, particularly those from immigrant and low-income populations.

In a recent round of Oakland’s Cultural Funding Program grantmaking, two organizations decided to forfeit their grant because the contract requirements were too onerous to comply with given the award amount.

The community is vocal about its struggles: some with the front-end requirements of applying for a grant and some with the back-end contracting process that grantees must navigate in order to collect modest grant awards. The City’s contracts are formidable even for grantees who are college-educated and native speakers of English. There is a high bar with respect to the City’s (and state’s) insurance mandates—needing to secure a new policy can cost thousands of dollars—and small-budget grantees often struggle to front money for project expenses when complicated contracting processes delay payments. Cultural Affairs staff is well aware of these barriers to accessing City resources and has struggled to reduce red tape, but it has been a Sisyphean battle.

In a city where over 27% of the population is foreign-born and the majority of organizations applying for funds have small budgets, bureaucratic requirements that may not be fairly calibrated to the activity at hand becomes an equity issue to be examined. This is also true of community groups who wish to navigate the city to obtain permits for street fairs and festivals—use of the civic commons.

Oakland Cultural Funding Grant Awards by Program – FY 2016-17

	<i>Largest Award</i>	<i>Average Award</i>
Individual Artist Projects	\$4,999	\$4,799
Organization Projects	\$17,000	\$11,767
Art-in-the-Schools	\$17,000	\$16,053
Organizational Assistance (over 2 yrs)	\$37,500	\$20,711

Some creative thought into streamlining program design and guidelines, along with research into right-sizing contract requirements could help to restore some of the community’s faith in the City’s goodwill. These issues are not unique to Cultural Affairs and it could be helpful to build common cause with other departments who have similar challenges in contracting cultural organizations and artists, particularly for modest projects.

Valuing Individual Artists and Culture Bearers: The heart of the cultural sector in Oakland, or in any city, is in its community of artists and culture bearers. Oakland has been known for having a particularly large, diverse, and vibrant artist population—and one that likes to make the city its workshop as well as home. The survey done in 2015 by the Mayor’s Artist Housing and Workspace Task Force received over 900 responses from artists who work, live, or both work and live in Oakland. Over 80% of those surveyed lived in Oakland and 78% of those worked there as well.

How artists are working today has changed dramatically as technology, income inequality, and demographics have evolved.³⁹ They have more control over the means of production than ever before, but that new power doesn’t always translate into sustainable ways to make a living. Artists are no strangers to the gig economy: they are more entrepreneurial than the typical worker (they are 3.5 times more likely to be self-employed), they are more educated (to be competitive in a discipline often takes many years of study), they are less likely to have full-time, full-year employment, but also tend to be paid far less than others who are considered professionals in their field.⁴⁰

To value and support those who are essential to the creativity, vibrancy, and cultural identity of the city, the precarity of the working conditions for artists needs to be acknowledged and addressed. Not all cities offer grants to individual artists, but Oakland has for many years. However, the fact that artist grants have not increased in size since at least 2001, leaves artists in particularly vulnerable circumstances to complete their proposed projects given the skyrocketing cost of living and doing business in the Bay Area. The individual artist grants today would need to be at least \$7,000 just to be worth what they were in 2001, and contracting requirements make small grants barely viable.

Culture bearers may or may not make their living from their cultural work, but that makes their vocation no less valuable. The role of culture bearers in a community is integral to the retention of cultural memory and identity. Knowledge of cultural history, the practice of cultural activities, and the transmission of tangible and intangible cultural traditions are all a part of meaning making and sustaining community cohesion and belonging. This is not only important to culturally-specific communities, but to the city’s ability to understand the parts that make the whole. Broadening the cultural equity lens will entail making sure that supports, such as grant and technical assistance programs, can accommodate the particularity of cultural practices that may not fit typical artmaking categories.

Aligning with the Arts Learning Environment: Supporting arts education for school-aged children and youth has long been a priority of Cultural Affairs. The efforts to rebuild the once-exemplary arts education system in California have been a challenge for decades, making funding support from outside school districts a critical complement to what is available inside the gates.

For the past couple of years, Cultural Affairs’ investments through its Art-in-the-Schools grant program have been around \$200K or 20% of its grantmaking budget, with about \$200K-300K in unfunded requests. Cultural Affairs could determine how best to allocate its limited resources by scanning the

³⁹ *Creativity Connects: Trends and Conditions Affecting US Artists*, the Center for Cultural Innovation for the National Endowment for the Arts, Sept. 2016.

⁴⁰ “Artists and Arts Workers in the United States,” National Endowment for the Arts, NEA Research Note #105, Oct. 2011. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/105.pdf>

environment for new educational policies and priorities, and changes in resource allocations and conditions for teaching artists in the community.

In light of the significant cuts to the Oakland Unified School District's budget, it is important for the City's resources for in-school arts education to be aligned with emerging needs and new plans, such as:

- OUSD and its VAPA program priorities
- *Arts and Creativity: From the Margins to the Core* (Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership in the Bay Area)
- *A Blueprint for Creative Schools* (Create CA Coalition)
- Universal Design for Learning principles.

It would also be advisable to compare notes with other arts education funding programs to see how to fill holes, strengthen or extend good existing practice, or simply avoid unneeded duplication.

For out-of-school youth arts, it's important to be aware of what assets exist in the different neighborhoods in order to support community-initiated efforts and equitable resource allocation. Aligning program design to researched practices in youth development can also be helpful to strengthening the arts learning field.

The ability of children and youth to have access to diverse forms of cultural education in multiple disciplines is critical to their developing creative skills, critical thinking and problem-solving, and gaining a deeper understanding of their community and how to navigate and translate between cultures.

Recommendations

A number of these recommendations parallel those mentioned in the section on Neighborhood Places. The emphasis there was self-determined cultural expression. There is a pivot here to the related priority of taking equity-centered, asset-based approaches to resource allocation and technical assistance.

- **Strengthen the orientation of current grantmaking and technical assistance toward cultural equity and asset-based approaches**
 - Perform a cultural and racial equity impact analysis of current programs, policies, and procedures
 - Examine current practices for strengths and weaknesses in promoting cultural and racial equity, including program frames, eligibility and contracting requirements, applicant adjudication practices, outreach mechanisms, technical assistance content, etc.
 - Explore program/strategy alternatives to provide support to chronically under-resourced neighborhoods/communities
 - Do a gap analysis of grants-to-declinations, paying attention to geography and frequency of declined organizations to determine where chronically under-resourced areas appear
 - Do an environmental scan to determine where the assets exist in or for under-resourced areas—e.g. research service organizations and public sector resources in culturally under-resourced areas; convene in targeted communities to discover off-the-radar assets and potential strategies for support; convene City colleagues other Oakland funders to map out resources and promote holistic approaches

- Leverage existing assets
 - Amend programs to complement existing resources and test researched assumptions
 - Create partnerships to support local assets and to build synergies
 - Share learning with stakeholders
 - Create and vet new strategies and programs for resource provision that build equity and strengthen local assets
 - Create funding strategies and programs to increase equitable resource allocation and build local assets and strengths
 - Vet strategies with stakeholders, make corrections
 - Implement new strategies on a timeline that takes field adjustments into account
 - Review and revise technical assistance and capacity building for equity, access, and asset-based approaches
 - Assess existing feedback on current efforts, such as grant application/contracting workshops, and small business training and services and continue to improve current activities
 - Use available/acquire affordable technology to enhance information access and reduce labor
 - Support naturally-occurring technical assistance efforts
- **Explore longer-term solutions to equitable cultural resource allocation**
- Evaluate new program strategies, continue to deepen programs to achieve cultural and racial equity
 - Continue to build a learning community of practitioners and funders to develop stronger asset-based, equity strategies
- **Strengthen the Cultural Funding Program’s capacity to reorient grantmaking and technical assistance support toward cultural equity and asset-based approaches**

The reorientation of Cultural Affairs’ research, grantmaking, technical assistance, and other forms of field support will require a lot of time not only to rethink strategies, but to significantly redesign grantmaking and technical assistance. Standard practices in these areas are deficit-based and often emulate processes that have been designed for other contexts or to be generic. Efforts to take local context as the baseline for program design, to look for barriers to equity and remedy them, and to collaborate with City and field colleagues will be time-consuming and require a lot of reflection and new creative thought to be successful. Current staffing at fewer than 2 FTEs, though very hard-working, is minimally adequate for maintenance of the status quo.

Once this plan is adopted, strategies for building the capacity of Cultural Affairs generally and the Cultural Funding Program in particular will need to be aligned. In the meantime, bringing the Cultural Funding Program Assistant from part-time to full-time could be a good start, as the Program is currently under-staffed in the face of growing demand. Engaging outside resources for research and analysis could be a short-term solution for advancing the work while seeking a more permanent support.

Specific implementation suggestions:

- △ Interrogate eligibility requirements and other guideline strictures based on equity considerations and remove needless barriers to participation and access—e.g. examine Oakland-based fiscal agent requirement; unneeded federal language; funding hiatuses; funding requests limited by budget or staff size; one-size-fits-all contracting requirements for small grants; etc.*
- △ Create guidelines that value the strengths of the cultural community—e.g., build limited capacity; reward social connection and responsibility, and long-term commitment to community; use trust-based funding practices with proven grantees*
- △ Use webinar technology to make grant application/contracting workshops more accessible and available on an ongoing basis (This could also reduce labor costs and meeting expenses.)*
- △ Post program/application/contracting FAQs, sample applications, past and current grantee lists, and other forms of program information on Cultural Affairs website*
- △ Plan to convene Oakland funders, as appropriate, to determine a holistic picture of supports—in the arts and/or arts education sector and other related sectors, such as community/youth development, wellness, etc., e.g., Oakland Fund for Children & Youth, VAPA regranting program, Akonadi Foundation, Walter & Elise Haas Fund, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, etc.*
- △ Support existing peer learning communities, e.g., the OUSD Arts Partners cohort, and other forms of productive professional development*
- △ Leverage outside technical assistance, e.g., coordinate learning with NYFA/World Arts West Immigrant Artist Mentoring Program*

Building Internal Infrastructure for Cultural Equity

Context

The infrastructure of Cultural Affairs will need to be strengthened to align its work with the new vision. The reorientation of Cultural Affairs towards equity framed by culture is a fundamental shift that requires building new “habits of mind” and organizational culture as well as instituting behavioral changes that disrupt the status quo. Reviewing long-standing programs and practices through new eyes requires time to learn and reflect in order to make meaningful changes that are not pro forma. It will also take energy to build new relationships and trust across the City and in the community; capacity to collect data, create benchmarks, and measure and track change; and space to create strategies and programs that will promote sustainable capacity. The first steps will most likely be incremental, but having a clear vision of the goal will keep gradual progress on track.

The following recommendations will need to be prioritized by Cultural Affairs based on available resources, current constraints, evolving demands, and community conditions. So, these principally serve as suggestions for moving forward and signposts for operationalizing the vision in the next phase of work.

The Division has suffered from staff attrition and budget reductions or stagnation over a number of years. These are central challenges to Cultural Affairs’ capacity to make change.

Recommendations

STAFFING

Though some progress can be made with the personnel currently in place, the lion’s share of the implementation of the enhanced equity orientation is not possible without more staffing and the time for staff to internalize the new vision and consider how their work should be reshaped.

New Administrative Position: As a promising start, Mayor and Council, in response to strong community advocacy, approved a new position in Cultural Affairs to enable the reanimation and ongoing support of the Cultural Affairs Commission, which has been on hiatus for half a dozen years. Given Cultural Affairs’ objective to work cross-departmentally and in new ways with the community, this position will be critical for keeping communications and community relations healthy.

- **Fill the new administrative position to support the reanimation of the Cultural Affairs Commission as soon as possible**
 - Suggested duties for this position include:
 - Supporting the Cultural Affairs Commission (i.e., meeting scheduling, memo and report generation, subcommittee management, etc.)
 - Supporting other citizen advisory bodies related to Cultural Affairs, i.e., the Funding Advisory Committee and the Public Art Advisory Committee
 - Collecting and analyzing data relevant to Cultural Affairs goals, programs, and partnerships to support research and case-making
 - Researching possible policy approaches for cross-departmental/partner collaboration to advance goals

- Supporting cross-departmental and external relations (i.e., meeting scheduling, memo and report generation, etc.)
- Supporting Cultural Affairs' communications (e.g., help maintain web and Facebook pages, liaise with City communications personnel, help produce press releases and marketing pieces for outreach/activities)

Policy Director of Arts Spaces (PDAS): As recommended above (see the *Cultural Spaces* section), making this position permanent in order to establish and sustain working relationships across City departments and with the community, particularly as regards facility/space issues, is a high priority. Fortunately, this position is being subsidized through 2018 by private philanthropy, which gives Cultural Affairs and the PDAS some time to make the case for sustaining the position. The position currently resides under the Mayor's Office as a policy position, but with the new orientation of Cultural Affairs to work cross-departmentally, it may be advisable to eventually transition the position into Cultural Affairs proper.

- **Create a permanent position that continues to facilitate cross-departmental and City-community relations that are relevant to the creation and retention of robust cultural spaces in Oakland**
 - Refine a position description, comparable to the current PDAS', that aligns more closely with the new cultural vision
 - Develop and share the dashboard of cultural space creation/retention outcomes internally and externally
 - Advocate for and secure funding of the position

Public Art Program: As recommended above (see the *Culture & the Civic Commons* section), the capacity of the Public Art Program needs to be strengthened for it to responsibly manage ongoing and new public art projects and initiatives, and steward the City's collection. A first step should be to reinstate a full-time position that was recently lost and to hire an intern to assist in collection inventory and assessment. Though the new administrative position could take some burden off the Public Art Coordinator with regard to PAAC management, the Public Art Program is significantly under-staffed. Once the cultural plan is adopted, Public Art Program staffing up should be considered in light of holistic rethinking of Cultural Affairs' work.

- **Strengthen the Public Art Program's capacity to responsibly manage ongoing and new public art projects and initiatives, and steward the City's collection of public art**
 - Reinstate qualified, adequate staffing to manage ongoing and anticipated new public art projects and initiatives
 - Allocate resources necessary to responsibly steward the City's public art collection, including the implementation of policies and procedures for the inventorying and assessing the collection, and the restoration, conservation, and deaccession of pieces, as needed

Cultural Funding Program: As recommended above (see *Neighborhood Places* and *Oakland's Cultural Ecology* section), a reorientation of grantmaking, technical assistance, and other forms of field support will require a lot of revising and creative thought as general field practice in these areas tends to be deficit oriented. Current staffing is minimally adequate for maintenance of current work. As a small first step, bringing the Cultural Funding Program Assistant from part-time to full-time is advised given

growing program demand and the initiation of program revisions. With the eventual new program design and partnership building, the Cultural Funding Program could use another FTE. But as with staffing up for the Public Art Program, capacity building in the Cultural Funding Program should be considered holistically with other possible reorganizing.

- **Strengthen Cultural Affairs capacity to reorient to asset-based approaches**
 - Increase capacity of Cultural Funding Program staff (through internal or external support) to review existing programs through an asset and cultural equity lens
 - Coordinate with the PDAS and other staff on new neighborhood-oriented approaches
- **Strengthen the Cultural Funding Program's capacity to reorient grantmaking and technical assistance support toward cultural equity and asset-based approaches**

CITIZEN ADVISORY BODIES

Cultural Affairs Commission: During the 2017-19 budget cycle, there was a call from the community to strengthen City support for the cultural sector and to reactivate the Cultural Affairs Commission as a demonstration of commitment to community requests. As noted above, the Commission has been on hiatus for a number of years due to its inability to achieve a quorum on a regular basis and conduct business in a timely fashion. There appear to have been a number of reasons for the Commission's struggle to establish a well-functioning process. These include:

- there not being a clear focus to its purpose and scope of work
- there not being adequate staff capacity to support the effective functioning of the Commission
- the size of the Commission not being suitable for conducting its work efficiently (currently the Commission membership is set at 15 with eight members constituting a quorum—Berkeley, Richmond, and Sacramento have commissions with fewer than 12 members)

The Commission has a broad charge with respect to cultural life in the city. Included in the Commission's duties (as stated in the 1991 Ordinance No. 11323) are to "advise the Mayor, City Council and City Manager on all matters affecting cultural development in the community" and to "render advice and assistance to other City boards and commissions, to City departments and to private agencies on matters related to cultural affairs in the community." In a 1995 update to the ordinance (see Ordinance No. 11778), a number of tasks were added regarding reporting requirements to the City Council and "to better integrate the activities of the Commission with the City's overall goals and objectives."

Commission members are appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. It is critical that the Cultural Affairs manager have a key role in advising Mayor and Council on the membership of the Commission to best advance the goals and work plan of the division and ensure its effectiveness. It is advisable to curate a slate of nominees holistically and not by district since the needs for broad cultural and sectoral expertise as well as knowledge of the cultural infrastructure disparities of the city cross its various geographies. The optimal size of the Commission should be determined once its charge and scope of work has been clarified. The Commission should not be reanimated until the new administrative support position has been filled.

➤ **Reanimate the Cultural Affairs Commission, ensuring a clear charge and scope of work aligned with the new vision**

- Align the Commission charge and work plan with the new vision and Cultural Affairs' priorities—having an equity orientation with well-defined areas of focus (e.g., culture in the civic commons, private development and placekeeping, cultural district policy, equity audits)
- Ensure Commissioners have the skill sets to address the role of cultural equity in the areas of, e.g., diverse cultural practices, real estate development, urban planning, small business development, and human services/education
- Build the capacity of the Commission to work in integrative ways—e.g., by having ex officio participation in and from other departments or advisory bodies to facilitate communication, coordination, and collaboration with colleague/partners
- Make explicit the relationship between the Commission and the Cultural Affairs Manager in order to ensure alignment of purpose and effectiveness in achieving goals.

Other Advisory Bodies: Cultural Affairs interfaces with two other volunteer advisory bodies that inform its work: the Funding Advisory Committee (FAC) and the Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC). Both of these bodies are made up of professionals in fields relevant to their purview, including artists, for-profit and non-profit arts professionals, and funders. Both bodies are currently active and functioning.

The FAC advises Cultural Affairs staff and City Council in matters relating to Cultural Funding Program policies, procedures, and the award of grants to Oakland-based artists, cultural organizations, and schools to support arts and cultural activities that reflect the diversity of the city for citizens of and visitors to Oakland.

The PAAC works with the Public Art Program to develop program policies and procedures, and approves sites, budgets, selection methods, and proposals for public art in Oakland. The Committee advises the City Administrator, Mayor, and City Council on all matters pertaining to public art in Oakland. It is a subcommittee of the Cultural Affairs Commission. The Committee works closely with staff to develop public art projects and to keep them running smoothly.

➤ **Align Funding and Public Art Advisory Committees' membership and work plans with the new vision, implementation strategies, and Cultural Affairs Commission's charge and scope of work**

- Align Committee membership updates and work plans with the reorientation of Cultural Affairs to cultural equity and related implementation strategies
- Re-establish connections to the Cultural Affairs Commission when it is reanimated—e.g., having a representative from each committee on the Commission—in order to facilitate communications

A Note About the Grants Approvals Process

The reactivation of the Cultural Affairs Commission raises a critical issue for Cultural Affairs' grantmaking. The grant allocations and approvals process is burdensome and overly layered for efficient and timely grantmaking. These are the layers of review currently in place:

1. Cultural Affairs staff do an eligibility and due diligence review of applications.
2. A panel of community peers adjudicates eligible applications in a public meeting where applicants may present their case in person in addition to submitted application materials.
3. The FAC reviews panel recommendations with funding scenarios prepared by staff and is charged with recommending a slate to the Life Enrichment Committee (LEF) of the City Council.
4. The LEF reviews the FAC recommendations and is charged with moving a slate forward to the City Council.
5. The full City Council reviews the Life Enrichment Committee's recommendations and is charged with approving a slate of grantees.

When the Cultural Arts Commission was active, it added another layer to the grant approvals process—making a total of six approval layers.

The grants in question range in size from about \$4,000 to \$40,000. Each level of approval requires a different memorandum with revised information to be prepared by staff. At each stage, the body in question has the power to send decisions back for reconsideration. There are no shared decision-makers from one approvals body to the next, except in the case of Life Enrichment and the full Council, so no direct experience of deliberations is carried forward from the previous decision-making body. The only levels of review with full knowledge of the details of the proposed projects are at the staff and peer panel levels. Peers review panelists donate days of their time reading applications and reviewing work samples of applicants. The power to overturn previous judgments undermines the integrity of the process, at the peer review level in particular.

The rationale for this structure bears examination and streamlining. Cultural Affairs might try eliminating a non-statutory review level above peer review, incorporating personnel from a higher body into a lower review level (e.g., have a commissioner serve on the peer review panel), and/or having higher consent levels only open to declinations as a final failsafe in order to facilitate moving decision-making forward in a more efficient way.

OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE

IT Capacity: Cultural Affairs' technology infrastructure is weak and not adequate for its current level of operations. Without sufficient capacity to collect robust data on the cultural and racial diversity of grantees and projects, scale and type of investments across different areas of the city, etc., Cultural Affairs will not be able to do the reporting and casemaking necessary to fulfill its vision of promoting equity across the city.

Its grantmaking platform functionality is very limited. The current use does not allow for efficient data-gathering and analysis on the front-end of the application process, automation of the back-end reporting process, and it doesn't support efficient and consistent data analysis and reporting by the

grantmaking staff. Cultural Affairs could make better use of staff time with a platform with stronger database functionality.

Cultural Affairs doesn't currently subscribe to the DataArts' standardized financial and operations data platform. Arts and culture funders across California and the country employ DataArts in order to allow their constituents to submit data that have been categorically aligned and are therefore made comparable. However, DataArts is calibrated for organizations with a level of organizational capacity that cannot be met by a number of Oakland's cultural organizations. Oakland data could be acquired from DataArts directly or gleaned from colleague funders who share some of Cultural Affairs' applicants/grantees. Having a database that could be used to capture data of small budget organizations without imposing an undue burden on them would be preferable. At this time, DataArts' platform doesn't accommodate the collection of race/ethnicity data for grantee operations or program participation—which is required for equity analyses.

Though limited to just the non-profit arts and culture sector, the periodic Arts & Economic Prosperity studies conducted by Americans for the Arts is a worthwhile investment if Oakland wants to be able to do local, regional, or national comparisons of its non-profit market using this data analysis.

➤ **Strengthen technology infrastructure to build efficiencies, establish baselines, and track progress of cultural equity goals**

- Research and utilize a grantmaking platform that facilitates front-end application and back-end grant reporting data
- Create templates for an ongoing dashboard to track racial and cultural equity data
- Subscribe to data-collection/analysis services that benefit constituents' capacity building or resource access

Communications Capacity: Cultural Affairs' communications capacity is weak. There is no dedicated communications staff. Each program does their own outreach and communications. This is challenging for under-staffed programs and not an efficient use of their time.

The perennial issue of marketing Oakland's cultural assets arose at a number of the community engagement meetings held as part of the planning process. Cultural Affairs could investigate building a stronger relationship with Visit Oakland to create new ways to support marketing the cultural community and to avoid possible duplication of efforts. The work of the Film Office, which promotes Oakland to the film industry and provides logistical support to film crews, might also be a point of collaboration between Cultural Affairs' and Visit Oakland's work.

➤ **Strengthen communications capacity to support both internal and external relations**

- Consolidate communications resources and duties through the new administrative position
- Explore collaboration with Visit Oakland to strengthen marketing of the cultural community

Placement in the City Structure: The placement of Cultural Affairs inside of the Department of Economic & Workforce Development is a double-edged sword. On one side, being placed to leverage the assets of the department to strengthen the non-profit and for-profit arms of cultural sector in the city is a strength. On the other side, it limits Cultural Affairs' ability to promote cultural equity across City government.

With the goal of working cross-sectorially and cross-departmentally, Cultural Affairs would be more advantageously placed at an administrative level that would enable easier dialogue and collaboration with other department heads. Cultural Affairs' goals to advocate for cultural equity across government and to be an effective liaison between the cultural community and the City could be accelerated by being able to work more directly with colleagues. This suggestion was heard both from City colleagues and from the community.

- **Raise Cultural Affairs to a level that facilitates communications and collaboration across City departments and between the City and the community in order to advance cultural equity more effectively**

GRANTMAKING & PROGRAM RESOURCES

In 2001, Oakland's grantmaking budget was \$1.3M, or \$3.25 per capita. Seventeen years later, it is \$1M, and with the city's population growth, that makes per capita spending only \$2.38. (The City of Berkeley spends \$4.12 per capita on arts grantmaking.) The City's investment in artists and non-profit cultural organizations has not only fallen in real terms, but also in terms of the spending power of today's dollars: that \$1.3M in 2001 would be worth \$1.8 M now, or \$4.29 per capita.

Grant amounts have been stagnant over a number of years—which means they are actually going down in value. Application numbers are rising. From FY 2012-13 to FY 2016-17⁴¹, the application load grew 74% overall from a total of 100 applications to 174, with Individual Artists applications more than doubling and Organization Projects almost tripling. FY 2016-17 saw an award rate of 52%, with 89 grants made from 171 eligible applications, but with funding levels only meeting 42% of total requests.

Cultural Affairs' current allotment from the TOT does not match its responsibility to support cultural vibrancy throughout the city. The Chabot Space & Science Center, the Oakland Museum of California, and the Oakland Zoo receive allocations from the TOT equal to that of Cultural Affairs, and Visit Oakland receives quadruple of each of those. The funding principle for Cultural Affairs' work should be reconsidered by the City. It is the only entity that has the mandate to equitably serve all of the city's communities in addition to supporting the cultural sector's ability to make Oakland a destination.

- **Advocate for additional resources to address cultural and racial equity and community capacity building**
 - Research funding sources within the city to increase grantmaking and program budgets

⁴¹ FY2016-17 was that last year in which the full complement of funding programs was offered, as Organizational Assistance is awarded on a two-year cycle.

- Research programmatic partnerships with other city departments that leverage additional funding for cultural organizations, artists, culture bearers, etc.
- Research external funding sources for new practices (e.g., program audits, grantmaking and capacity building pilot programs) related to establishing and measuring cultural equity indicators
- Advocate for feasible increases and collaborative funding partnerships

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Oakland is rich with innovative programs and place-based initiatives that are focused on equity and the well-being of the city. With a goal of working cross-sectorially, Cultural Affairs has many opportunities to build common cause and learning communities with local colleagues and contribute cultural perspectives on equity issues. It will also be well placed to help enrich the knowledge base on the role of cultural equity and belonging as contributors to community well-being for cities across the nation and the globe.

- **Join learning communities and build common cause related to the value of cultural equity to achieving community well-being**
 - Research Oakland-based and external leading-edge equity initiatives and practices to build learning on incorporating cultural equity indicators into cross-sectoral practices related to, e.g., wellness, poverty reduction, education reform, and well-being

FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several things that could be done with additional resources that would deepen the research and analysis offered in this plan in order to further ground implementation. Some of these include:

Rethinking Grantmaking Design: A big part of reorienting the tools of Cultural Affairs will involve doing an analysis of current grantmaking programs—i.e., who is being supported and who is not, how that is happening through the mechanisms that exist, and what creative ways can be developed to address those who have been historically left out of the support picture. This will also involve finding better data gathering tools to hone equity strategies.

Cultural Districts: There is a great deal of activity related to naturally-occurring cultural districts currently in progress. Timely research of policy alternatives for placekeeping and development of these areas would be extremely useful, such as community benefit districts, as would research on the role of culturally-specific retail in neighborhood development.

Ground-Truthing the Cultural Asset Map: The cultural asset map was populated through research based on Internet searches, public records, funder databases, etc., but not street-level research or community participation. Ground-truthing the map would greatly enrich its value.

Venue Research: An inventory of performance and exhibition venues (descriptions of location, size, capacity, equipment, permitted uses, special features, etc.) along with a survey of community needs for

venues would be helpful before the designs of the Calvin Simmons/Kaiser Center are locked in and also to inform other potential venue investments (Malonga Center, CCA, etc.)

Festival Culture: Research of community festivals—who initiates them and sustains them, what function they have for communities, what economic impact do they have and for whom, etc.—would be useful to inform the City’s subsidy policy for festivals/street fairs/parades/runs.

Economic Impact of the Arts & Culture Sector: The economic activity of a number of different kinds of groups was not able to be included in the study, though it represents an important part of the cultural landscape in Oakland. The groups that it would be beneficial to learn more about include: individual artists and makers; informal groups/collectives that float between being umbrellaed by a fiscal sponsor and working as a business (e.g., CultureStrike, Oakland Carnival, Rock Paper Scissors Collective, etc.); and folk artists and culture bearers. The indirect economic impacts of ACE for-profit businesses (as opposed to non-profits) would be helpful to calculate. A variety of other characteristics of arts and culture entities would be interesting to do further research on, including: demographics by arts discipline; disciplines outside standard definitions; longevity as an asset; and relationship networks as an asset.

The Consulting Team

Vanessa Whang is a thought partner with civic actors, funders, and organizations engaged with culture and social change. Her inquiries increasingly grapple with how to achieve social justice in a diverse nation built on the legacies of codified inequality and how a deeper understanding of culture can be key to finding more sustainable paths to well-being for people and the planet. Previously, she served as Director of Programs for California Humanities, responsible for the strategic design, development, and evaluation of programs. In New York, Vanessa consulted on cultural equity and changing demographics, and program design and evaluation for the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Ford Foundation, Leveraging Investments in Creativity, and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, among others. In Washington, DC, she served as Director of Multidisciplinary Arts and Presenting at the National Endowment for the Arts. Vanessa started in the field as a community cultural activist, performing arts presenter, and recording/touring musician. She proudly serves on the boards of the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, a cross-cultural, arts-driven youth development center, and The Whitman Institute, a trust-based funder for social good, and as an advisor to Active Voice Lab, a story-based strategist for social change. Vanessa is grateful to be living in Oakland, CA.

Communities in Collaboration | Comunidades en Colaboración is a women- and minority-owned community engagement consultancy based in Oakland committed to co-creating equity and access to opportunity for all. Founded by Susana Morales and Heather Imboden, they apply their expertise and experience in equitable community economic development, community engagement, and communications to support diverse communities in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs and policies to achieve meaningful and sustainable impact. CIC|CEC has deep experience facilitating high-stakes and emotional public processes. They pride themselves in their ability to create safe spaces for conversation and collaborative processes. CIC|CEC team works frequently with Oakland Unified School District, Oakland's local business community, and social justice nonprofits throughout the city.

Alex Werth is a geographer, curator, and DJ based in Oakland, CA. He is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Geography at UC Berkeley, where he is writing his dissertation on issues of regulation and racial equity surrounding music, dance, and nightlife in Oakland. Prior to graduate school, he worked in affordable housing and urban planning at the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation and Bay Area Economics. He also works as the resident DJ and co-curator of Good Culture, a recurring performing-arts showcase and dance party. He has served as a member of the curatorial cohort of Oakland's Matatu Festival of Stories and is currently a Public Imagination Fellow at San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.