

Art as Innovation

Embedding artists and creativity across local governments in Los Angeles County

Nahal Jalali
November 2020



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|----|-----------------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| 03 | About the Laura Zucker Fellowship | 27 | Case Studies |
| 04 | Introduction | 35 | Barriers |
| 06 | Study Design | 39 | How to Operationalize |
| 09 | Terminology | 42 | Recommendations |
| 10 | A Moment in Time | 51 | Conclusion |
| 11 | Key Findings | 53 | Acknowledgements |
| 17 | Creative & Artistic Skills | 54 | Interview List |
| 21 | Benefits | 55 | Resources |





About the Laura Zucker Fellowship

Incorporated in 2006, Arts for LA is a non-profit arts advocacy organization that activates artists and organizations, and leads communities to advocate for an equitable, healthy, and creative Los Angeles region.

Arts for LA reaches deeply into communities to forge relationships, create partnerships, and bring people together to explore the ways arts and culture increase our quality of life by building a healthy and prosperous region. The organization and its leadership serve as advisors to elected officials and their staffs, create opportunities for arts leaders to collaborate, and participate in coalitions around larger issues in which arts and culture play a strategic role.

In June 2017, Arts for LA announced the Laura Zucker Fellowship for Policy and Research, the first ever fellowship for individuals to effect change at the regional level focused on arts and cultural policy development, reform, and implementation in Los Angeles County and the accompanying research necessary to inform such policies. The Fellowship is open to recent graduate students in Public Affairs, Public Policy, Arts Administration/Management or related fields of study, as well as local community leaders and arts professionals with a minimum of five years' experience (regardless of educational background) who have a demonstrated interest in conducting research and/or crafting public policy pertaining to the arts and cultural landscape of the Los Angeles region.

The Introduction

BACKGROUND

The arts—and artists in particular—are increasingly brought into non-arts organizations to offer fresh perspectives and incubate creative solutions to cross-sector challenges. This trend largely builds off a growing body of thought that artists possess a range of creative skills, beyond the production of tangible artwork, that help organizations understand their challenges differently, generate innovative solutions, engage deeply and meaningfully with community, and advance social policies and outcomes.¹ While these roles exist across different types of organizations, this study focuses specifically on municipalities. After all, in the landscape of government, it is local institutions that are often the first point of connection for most people, charged with delivering core essential services and functions, and most directly connected to daily lived experience.

At the municipal level, integrating artists into local government in a strategic capacity can manifest in many forms, including artist-in-residence (AIR) programs.² These are typically part-time, or contract-based roles that position artists as strategists in various non-art departments or agencies to help infuse creative problem solving around a specific set of challenges. In addition to benefitting municipalities, these roles also support artists by creating a new and diversified set of employment opportunities and career pathways.

PURPOSE

This research considers the case for integrating the arts into municipal functions, beyond arts and culture departments, to spur innovation. To this end, it explores the potential to employ artists as innovators or creative strategists across the Los Angeles County region. It also seeks to equip artists and arts organizations to position themselves and effectively advocate for these roles.

To support this core inquiry, the report provides a baseline understanding of:

- 1 The extent to which the arts, or artists, are currently present and valued by non-arts departments across the County and a handful of cities in the region.**
- 2 The appetite of non-arts department leaders to hire artists or integrate the arts in a strategic capacity on their teams.**

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The report also highlights benefits to strategically embedding the arts, artists, and creative skills across non-arts departments, and perceived challenges and obstacles to said integration. The report concludes by exploring potential models to operationalize embedding artists as innovators and providing tactical recommendations to artists and municipal leaders championing an expanded role for the arts.



Lula Washington Dance Company, Photo Courtesy of Arts for LA

AUDIENCE

This report is written for two broad audiences:

- 3 Municipal and governmental agency leaders asking, “How might a strategic approach to the arts, and specifically embedding artists as creative strategists, support the functions of non-arts departments?”**
This includes elected and appointed local government (city, county, government agency) leaders, non-arts department leaders, arts department leaders, hiring managers, and more.
- 4 Arts community leaders asking, “How might we best position ourselves for, and advocate for, embedded opportunities across local government?”**
This includes artists, art department leaders, art organizations, the social practice art community, and more.

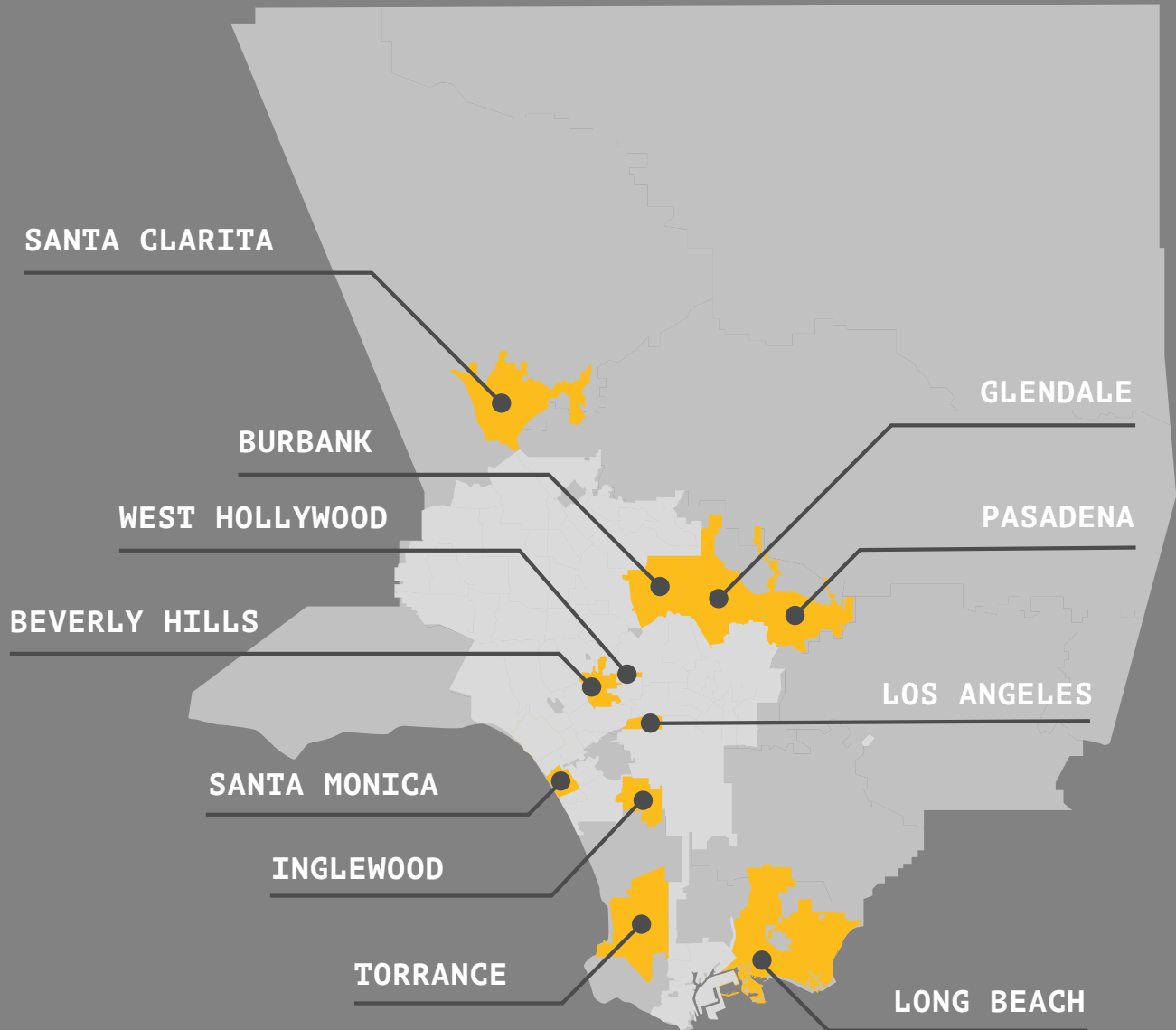
Study Design

This research is supported by both qualitative and quantitative methods. Most of the findings in this report are drawn from **30+ interviews** with experts from across the region, including leaders of arts, as well as non-arts, departments from the County of Los Angeles and **eleven cities**: Beverly Hills, Burbank, Inglewood, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Glendale, Pasadena, Santa Clarita, Santa Monica, Torrance, and West Hollywood. Los Angeles County has a diverse population of more than 10 million people living in 88 cities and approximately 140 unincorporated areas.³ While the cities selected for this study are diverse in many ways, they do not represent the totality of perspectives across the County.

To facilitate the study non-arts department leaders were identified via referral from an arts department leader, and thus all cities engaged in this study already have a local arts agency presence of some shape or form. It is possible that representatives of these cities are more likely to be familiar with and open to integration of the arts in local government. However, acknowledging this potential limitation of the findings, the case studies and recommendations have been crafted to provide inspiration for municipalities regardless of size, resources, or familiarity with the arts.



Los Angeles County Cities Surveyed



In addition to key interviews, the research also includes a quantitative analysis of **2,260 job class specifications**⁴ from the County of Los Angeles (a governmental entity distinct from any of the 88 cities or other formal jurisdictions, such as school districts, transit agencies, or water districts). Job classifications are the official definitions of all non-exempt roles approved by the County. They include a general job description, key requirements (technical skills, education, etc.), and example duties. For the purposes of this study, the database of job class specifications has been used to contribute to the baseline understanding of the extent to which the arts and creative skills are deployed across County departments. By analyzing the class specifications for arts or creative skill terminology, we can better understand the extent to which these skills are sought after currently by departments through hiring and promotion.

Each local government or municipality has its own class specifications, and therefore the class specifications analyzed are unique to the County of Los Angeles (as opposed to the cities included in the qualitative analysis). We chose to analyze the County class specifications due to their central accessibility, and in order to model what an analysis of creative skills in hiring might look like generally speaking. While the findings are specific to the County's departments and hiring process, the hope is that the analysis may serve as a roadmap for any entities or municipalities who wish to evaluate the prominence of creative skills within their recruitment processes.

2,260

Job Class Specifications
Analyzed

30+

Experts
Interviewed

11

Cities
Surveyed

Terminology

A broad range of terminology is used, often interchangeably, in this field. For the purposes of the paper, key terms used are described below:

Artist. Artists as used in this report refer to individuals who fall across a broad range of creative occupations. As defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, these occupations included - but are not limited to - actors, announcers, architects, fine artists, art directors, and animators, dancers and choreographers, designers, other entertainers, musicians, singers, and related workers, photographers, producers and directors, writers and authors, and more.

Arts Department Leader. Leaders of arts and cultural departments, divisions, or offices working for a governmental entity.

Creative Skills vs Artistic Skill. In the context of this report, “artistic skills” refer to direct functions or capabilities unique to artist occupations. These include, but are not limited to music, drawing, performance, illustration, graphic design, photography, etc. “Creative skills,” on the other hand, refer to a host of capabilities and skills that are not necessarily exclusive to the arts sector but are often uniquely developed through an arts education or creative practice. These include, but are not limited to creativity, problem-solving, brainstorming, persona design, visual storytelling, etc. A full list of skills identified in the development of this report is included in the Creative and Artistic Skills analysis.

Creative Strategist. While there is no singular term used to describe this role, “creative strategist” is used generally throughout this report to describe an artist who collaborates or is embedded within non-arts municipal departments to help solve strategic challenges.

Innovation. As described by OECD, innovation is “Public-sector innovation involves significant improvements in the services that government has a responsibility to provide [and] covers both the content of these services and the instruments used to deliver them.”⁵

Local Arts Agency. Organizations designed to promote, support, and develop the arts at the local level ensuring a vital presence for the arts.

Non-Arts Department Leader. Leaders, managers and decision makers of non-arts and culture department, offices or similar working for a governmental entity.

Social Practice Art. As defined by the Tate, “Socially engaged practice describes art that is collaborative, often participatory and involves people as the medium or material of the work.”⁶

The Region. “The region” refers to the geographic region within the County of Los Angeles, including 88 cities and approximately 140 unincorporated areas.

A Moment in Time

The proposal for this study was developed prior to the widespread impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The pandemic has had far-reaching and disruptive impacts on society. Municipalities are no exception. Many are facing significant budget constraints, furloughs, and hiring freezes. These are realities which are placing undue stress and burden on existing staff and making conversations regarding new or additional roles challenging in the current moment.

Despite these challenges, one unexpected result of this crisis is that it has upended traditional conventions about government and has created an opportunity to rebuild with intention. Additionally, the scale of the crises communities now face only amplify the purpose of this study: to make art and creativity commonplace in the response to complex challenges facing municipalities. As such, this is meant to be a forward-looking study that lays the groundwork, and perhaps offers a roadmap, to rebuild in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Key Findings

In order to better understand how to create opportunities for artists as innovators in local government, this report first explores the current state of value, appetite, and collaboration across the municipalities selected for this study.

VALUE OF THE ARTS

As described in the study design, this report involved interviews with more than 30 leaders from arts, as well as non-arts, municipal departments. By nature of their roles, the art department leaders interviewed spend a significant amount of their time and effort cultivating interest and support for the arts across their municipality. Based on these experiences, there was interest in understanding (1) the level of support and value they experience from their local government counterparts, as well as (2) the extent to which this perceived value translates to strategic applications of the arts as a tool for problem solving across the municipality.

Among the eleven cities surveyed, all eleven art department leaders felt that their equivalents in other departments value the arts generally. Interviewees in six of these cities expressed this sentiment across the board and as a cultural quality of the city, while five identified specific departments that were strong proponents of the arts.

Arts department leaders who **identified strong support for and value of the arts** among their counterparts expressed some common themes:

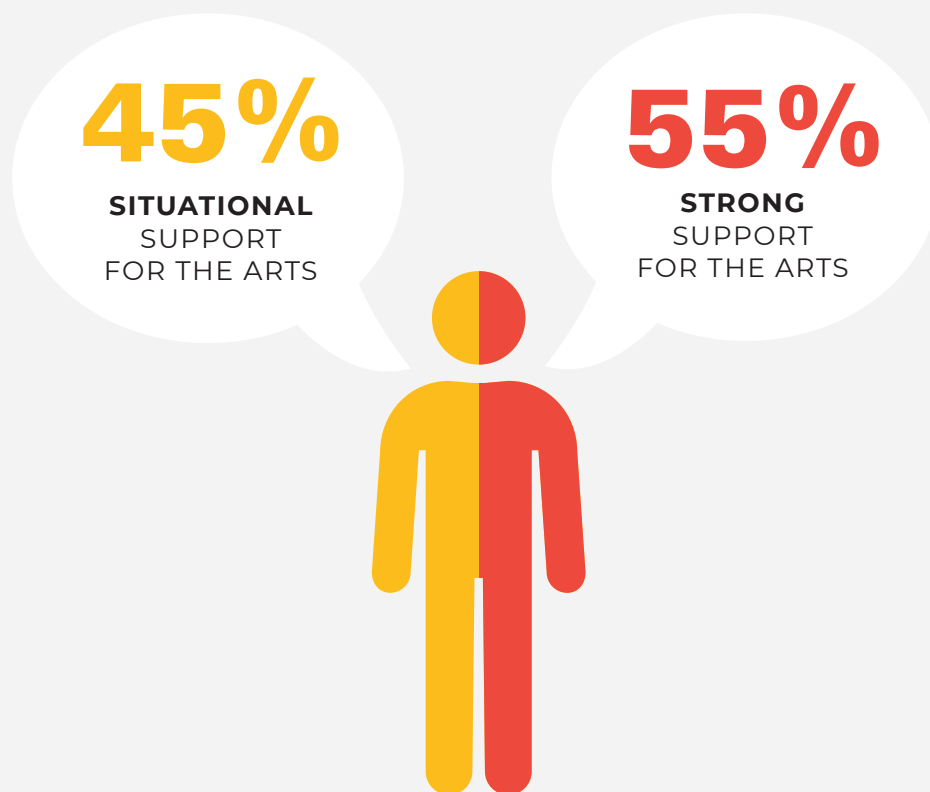
- Leaders who are creative themselves, or have a strong personal connection to the arts, which has ultimately led to their desire to establish a more pronounced role for the arts
- A city culture that inherently values creativity, with a large number of professional or personal creatives on the staff
- City-wide view of the arts as a core part of its brand (an “art city”)
- Arts are incorporated in city plans and policy
- Arts are not viewed as an afterthought; they are automatically included in policies and/or planning efforts

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In the cases of **municipalities whose representatives identified more situational or sporadic support for the arts**, there are also a set of common themes:

- Support for the arts is growing and developing
- While some leaders see value in the arts, core department functions or challenges remain higher priority, and the arts are not necessary seen as a means to achieving those objectives
- Leaders who are supportive of the arts are emerging, but still limited in their capacity to influence change by more traditional leaders who are less open to the arts
- Organizational challenges in terms of where the arts department/division is housed, or the number of staff/resources allocated to the arts, limit collaboration with the arts

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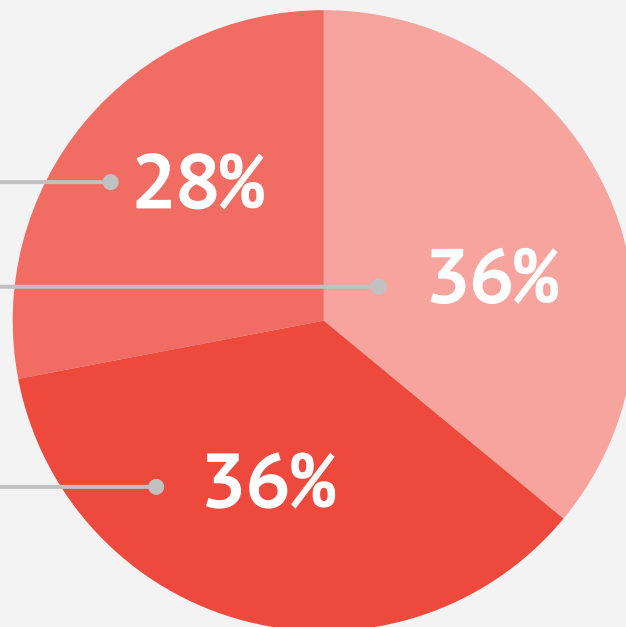


**ARTS DEPARTMENT LEADERS
ON SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS
ACROSS THEIR MUNICIPALITY**

Qualifying “general” value in the arts is a purposefully vague exercise, intended to solicit a range of responses specific to the contexts and realities of each city. However, those same arts leaders were also asked the extent to which the arts are used strategically across their city, as it relates to helping departments solve their key challenges.

To this more specific question, cities fell fairly evenly into three general categories:

- 1 The arts are not immediately thought of as a strategic tool and it is rare that the arts are brought into a strategic conversation naturally without being prompted.** *One arts leader identified that other department heads need to see examples, and while the examples did not need to be “apples-to-apples” they should be solving a similar type of challenge.*
- 2 Mostly direct programming as opposed to strategic problem solving, but there is openness, as well as key problem areas that are being identified by departments as an area of strategic collaboration with the arts.** *As an example, one arts leader identified that there has been growing discussion about using art to relay information related to racism and discrimination in an effort to build bridges across the community.*
- 3 Artists are not viewed as thought partners across the board, but there are strategic relationships within certain departments or in certain issue areas.** *For example, one municipality has been placing public art strategically along a main commercial corridor to draw foot traffic to quieter parts of the street in order to support small businesses.*



COLLABORATIONS AND PROGRAMMING

Though each municipality is different, and relationships across departments vary, certain departments tend to be more likely and frequent collaborators with the arts. Interviews with arts and non-arts leaders from across the municipalities confirmed that this list typically includes: Community Development, Economic Development, and Public Works. Several interviewees also highlighted collaborations with other entities like the City Manager's Office, or other government or nongovernmental agencies. Finally, in some cities the local arts agency is actually housed within Community Services, Parks and Recreation, or Library Services. In cities where those are distinct agencies, those entities were also identified as frequent collaborators.

A few cities actually had cross-department artist-in-residency programs, though several were in the process of establishing such programs before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an example, the City of Los Angeles Creative Catalyst program is a collaboration between the Department of Transportation and Department of Cultural Affairs that places an artist within the Department of Transportation. *See Case Studies for more information.*

In particular, cities that have percent-for-art ordinances (programs that allocate a small percentage of private development capital projects to funding public artworks) typically see significant collaboration related to planning and development. Cities that have public or civic art policies, in which their own capital projects have a required art component, have partnerships that develop between multiple departments and the arts department administering the policy. Though these collaborations are not always strategic in nature, they do lay the groundwork for the critical relationships required for any collaborative or strategic application of the arts.



Left: *The Unconscious*, Franz West, City of Beverly Hills, 2010
Right: *Erratic*, Roxy Paine, City of Beverly Hills, 2007
Photos Courtesy of City of Beverly Hills

Integrating Artists Across Municipal Governments

Municipal leaders across arts and non-arts departments were asked to weigh in on the concept of integrating artists as creative strategists within non-arts departments or functions. Arts department leaders offered their perspectives on the likelihood of such roles, including whether the concept had been successfully explored within the municipality in the past. Non-arts department leaders shared their level of appetite for integrating artists in this strategic capacity within their departments, as well as whether there were any specific types of insights a creative strategist could bring to their organization.

PERSPECTIVES FROM ARTS LEADERS

Arts department interviewees in three cities felt that if resources were not a constraint, their non-arts counterparts would be eager to have someone on their team who could infuse a different perspective and contribute to the type of diversity of thought that executive leaders tend to value. In fact, one of the cities passed an arts master plan which included language about creating opportunities to hire artists to work with different city departments.

Interviewees in a majority of cities anticipated a mixed appetite largely due to current financial constraints. While some said that there may have been more openness prior to the pandemic for that reason, interviewees from at least two cities actually felt that the pandemic had disrupted orthodoxies and helped to create more appetite for this notion. They identified that in some circumstances municipal leaders have been jarred out of their traditional way of thinking and are looking to pull out all of the tools in their toolbox to facilitate recovery. Furthermore, the reckoning around issues of racial injustice has also created a pressing need for municipalities to ramp up their focus on equity and connect meaningfully with their diverse communities.

Finally, interviewees in at least two cities indicated that their counterparts likely have the appetite but would need to see examples of how integrating artists could tangibly help advance policies and social outcomes. They also would likely need a roadmap for how most effectively to integrate artists.

PERSPECTIVES & APPETITE FROM NON-ARTS LEADERS

While non-arts leaders confirmed many of the potential barriers anticipated by arts leaders in terms of integrating artists in a strategic capacity (e.g., resource constraints), importantly, the non-arts leaders expressed strong appetite for the concept across the board. Even those who admitted they would not have normally thought or considered this specific concept, understood the value, and identified critical challenges that they felt an artists or creative strategist could help attempt to solve. Their appetite fell into two general categories:



Value in tackling specific challenges through the arts. For example, both public works, as well as economic development directors, highlighted the value of the arts in defining and distinguishing the built environment. A fire department chief articulated the importance of connecting their teams with the community they serve, identifying the arts as a potentially powerful tool for storytelling and a catalyst for building empathy and reimagining public safety. The director of a library system expressed a desire to explore how the arts can help engage and humanize populations experiencing homelessness within their city through public programming. The head of a city innovation department saw potential opportunity for the arts to help engage community members, particularly on a large scale. In fact, they had subcontracted artists in the past to help the city with marketing and public engagement.



Value in having people on the team with creative or artistic skills who can offer a different perspective. For example, the director of a library system highlighted the immense value of having a team that could look at issues from a variety of perspectives (analytically, historically, and creatively). Similarly, an economic development director expressed that having a person with an artistic mindset who could look at issues from a variety of perspectives would be an asset to *any* team. They identified that creativity (paired with analytical thinking) is important in any department – even those that are more technical in nature. A public works director highlighted that they had benefitted greatly from having an individual with artistic skills on their team. Finally, the head of a city innovation department mentioned that they actively seek artistic design skills during the hiring process, requesting that applicants possess basic technical knowledge of Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, and InDesign, and that they submit a digital portfolio of prior work.

Creative and Artistic Skills in the Hiring Process

All of the leaders from non-arts departments emphasized the creative and artistic skills of their existing staff, and the fact that those skills were highly valued - enabling them to enhance the core functions of their department as well as improve the public experience navigating the city. However, department leaders will not be able to target these specific skills, unless they are named and prioritized in the hiring process. Even if an individual possesses these skills – through formal or informal arts training, for example, that may not be uncovered during recruitment without further intentionality.

Municipal leaders who wish to incorporate creative and artistic skills in the hiring process may consider conducting an evaluation of their job descriptions—or class specifications—to understand the extent which the recruitment process is (1) tailored to applicants who have arts or creative backgrounds, and (2) provides license for applicants to highlight creative or artistic backgrounds which may be of significance to department leaders and hiring managers.

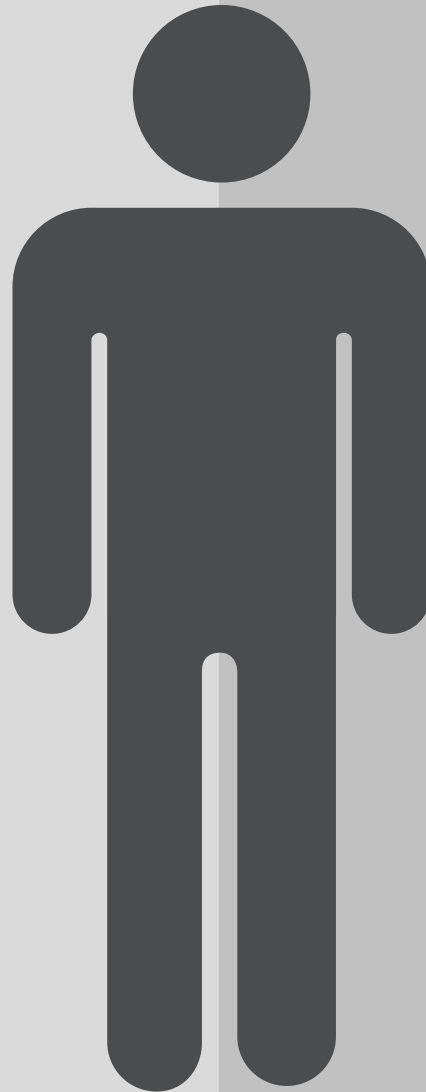
The analysis of job classifications from the County of Los Angeles provided in this section can serve as inspiration for other municipalities interested in elevating artistic and creative skills in recruitment and promotion process. Leaders may also refer to the County of Los Angeles guide to promote gender equity in recruitment and hiring, developed by the Women and Girls Initiative and Department of Human Resources. Though the focus of the report is different, it can provide an example for leaders looking to examine language within hiring and recruitment as a means to prioritize certain skills, backgrounds, or attributes.⁷

CLASS SPECIFICATIONS

Class specifications are the documented record of all potential roles available across an organization. They typically include a description of the role, the general and specific requirements, and the typical tasks and duties of the role. In the specific context of Los Angeles County, specifications are often unique to a specific department. However, there are also many more general specifications, or roles, that apply to multiple departments. This is critical to note, because the process for updating or amending class specifications involves multiple layers of approval. This includes, but is not limited to, sign-off from all departments who utilize a particular specification, as well as any unions who may represent those roles/departments. This is true at the LA County level, as well as many cities and municipalities within the County.

CREATIVE SKILLS

ABSTRACT†
ACTIVE LEARNING[^]
ACTIVE LISTENING[^]
BRAINSTORMING†
COLLABORATION†
COMMUNICATION†
CREATIVE SOLUTIONS†
CREATIVE THINKING†
CREATIVE*†
CRITICAL THINKING†
INTERPERSONAL†
INVENTING†
NETWORKING†
NEW IDEAS†
NEW METHODS†
ORIGINALITY[^]
PATTERNS*[^]
PERSONA DESIGN†
PROBLEM SOLVING*†
STORYTELLING†
TAKING RISKS†
VISUAL COMMUNICATION†
VISUAL STORYTELLING†
VISUALIZATION**



ARTISTIC SKILLS

ADOBE†
AESTHETIC†
ART DIRECTOR†
ARTISTIC*†
ARTWORK†
AUTODESK**†
CHARCOAL†
COLOR†
CRAFTSMANSHIP†
DESIGN†
DRAWING†
EXHIBITION†
FINE ART†
GRAPHIC DESIGN†
ILLUSTRATOR*†
INK†
MUSIC†
ORAL HISTORIES**†
PAINTING**†
PHOTOGRAPHY*†
SKETCHUP**†
SPACE†
UNDERSTANDING FORM†
WATERCOLOR†
WRITER†

Terms derived from sources outlined in the References

* Includes multiple word variations

ANALYSIS

As mentioned earlier, there are two distinct, but connected, categories of the skills defined in this report. The first are direct artistic skills which are largely unique to artist occupations. The second are creative skills, which are skills that are not specifically unique to artist occupations but are often the result of arts education and/or arts practice. Creative skills are particularly useful to local governments as they seek to synthesize their challenges differently and ideate innovative solutions. A database of creative and artistic skills has been developed for the purposes of this study, and is laid out in the previous page.

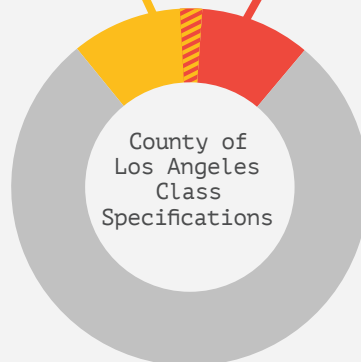
2,260 County class specifications were analyzed, mining for the number of times artistic or creative skills (and terminology) were referenced. Overall, fewer than 20% of class specifications referenced a creative or artistic skill (441 specifications contained either or both types of skill). Creative skills were mentioned 319 times in 270 specifications (12% of the total). Artistic skills were mentioned 335 times in 237 specifications (10% of the total).

12%

of class specifications include reference to a **creative skill**

10%

of class specifications include reference to an **artistic skill**

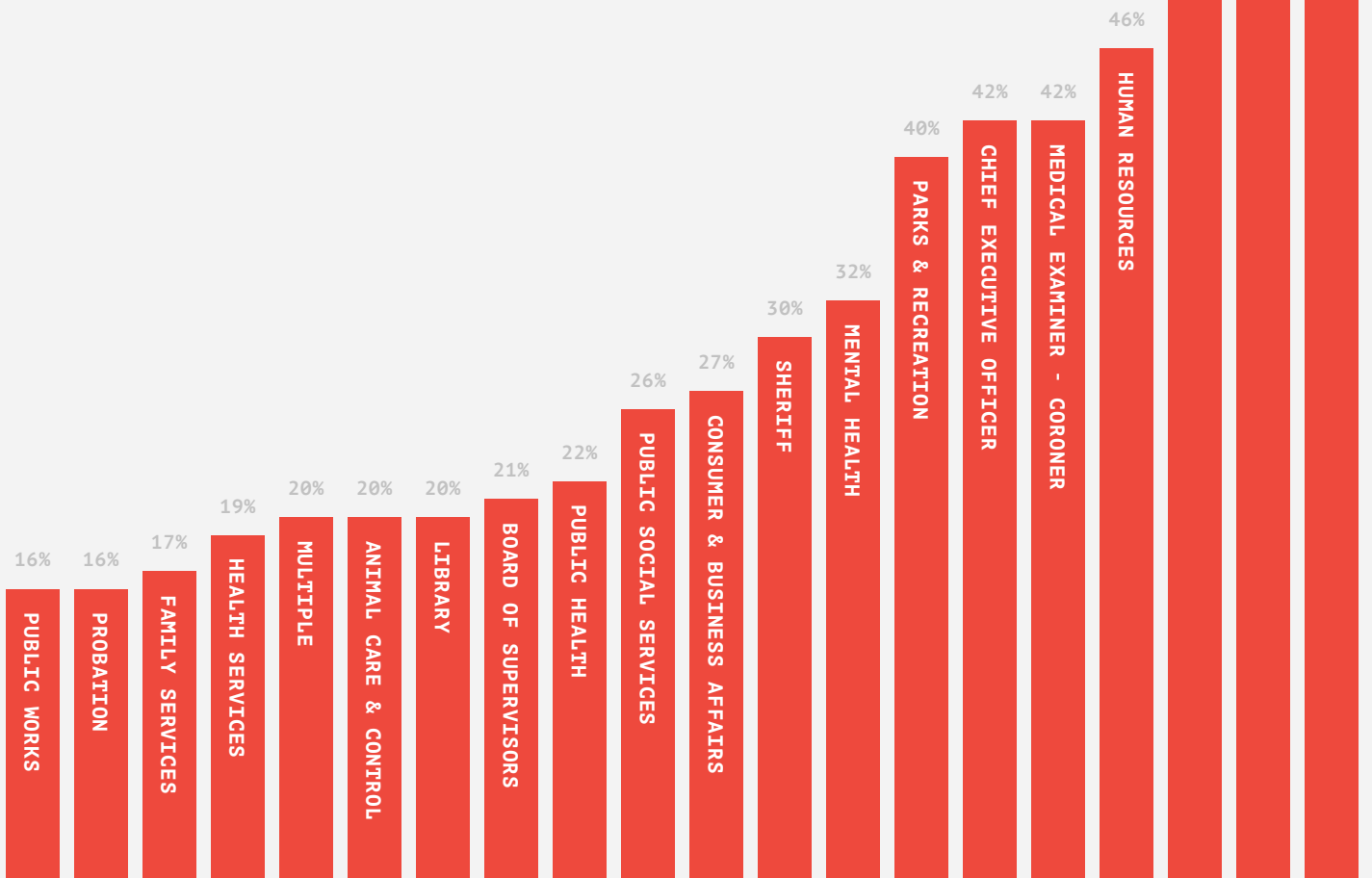


DEPARTMENT-BASED ANALYSIS

The data visualization below illustrates the twenty departments (including the Museum of Art and Museum of Natural History) across the County of Los Angeles with the highest percentage of specifications unique to their department that include either creative or artistic skills or terminology.

The most frequent terms identified through this analysis across both artistic and creative skills include: *photography, graphic, culture, painting, art/artistic, visual, pattern, collaboration, interpersonal.*

Ultimately, this analysis can serve as a starting point and example for government leaders who wish to conduct their own assessment of creative/artistic representation in the hiring process. Leaders may choose to focus on a subset of departments/roles within their analysis, or tailor the terminology used to best meet a municipality's needs or goals.





Benefits of Integrating Arts and Artists Into Municipal Departments

In addition to offering baseline understanding of current levels of collaboration, perceived value, and appetite for further integration of the arts and artists across city departments, all interviewees provided a perspective on potential benefits of arts integration and the hiring of artists as innovators. An aggregated list of themes and concepts are included in this section.



Quetzal Flores, Photo Courtesy of Arts for LA

BENEFITS OF DEEPENING ARTS INTEGRATION

- ✦ **Communicating and distinguishing a municipality's brand, vision, and ethos.** As many interviewees noted, this is particularly important in the context of Los Angeles county where cities struggle to distinguish themselves among the hundreds of cities and unincorporated areas. Incorporating the arts and creativity in the design of public spaces can help foster a distinct identity, aiding cities as they seek to attract new tourists, businesses, and residents.

The City of Beverly Hills launched two weekly public art projects – “We Create Community” and “Art is Life” – to engage residents and foster community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ✦ **Allowing municipalities to actualize their commitment to diversity.** The protests and reckoning around racial injustice of the last several months have placed onus on cities to actualize verbal commitments to diversity and equity. The arts are one tool for creating the space for authentic public discourse, and helping governments work to remedy inequity.

The County of Los Angeles Department of Arts and Culture has collaborated with the Probation Department and other County Agencies to use art to support youth who are at-risk or involved in the criminal justice system.

- ✦ **Drawing attention to public assets.** Utilizing art and more deliberate design can help draw more focus to the existing public assets in a community, and ultimately may encourage preservation and care of those assets.

The City of Santa Clarita incorporates the arts in its public works projects (e.g., bridges, sidewalks, etc.) to help draw attention to the natural assets of the city.



*Cherry Blossom Cultural Festival, City of Torrance
Photo Courtesy of Eve Rappoport*

- + Generating support for local businesses.** Especially in the context of COVID-19 and with the rising prevalence of e-commerce, physical art and culture can be vital in pulling people out of their homes and into the community in a safe manner.

The City of Burbank hosted social media mural walks, incentivizing participants with rewards, to generate foot traffic for struggling businesses in the downtown area.
- + Engaging elected officials and municipal leadership.** Because the arts tend to be highly visual and highly produced, they are ideal mechanisms for generating excitement. Public art, in particular, can help create synergy, excitement, and buy-in because leaders can physically see, touch, and interact with it.

The City of West Hollywood's highly visualized public engagement efforts around the cultural plan created significant interest among department leaders and other city leadership.
- + Humanizing community members and building bridges.** In addition to its large size, the region is also incredibly diverse. The arts, when truly fostered from within the community, can be an excellent tool to help cities engage and honor the diverse populations within their jurisdiction.

The City of Torrance uses the arts to pay homage to its large Japanese community, and foster awareness about Japanese internment camps of the 1940s.

BENEFITS OF HIRING ARTISTS AS CREATIVE STRATEGISTS ---

- + Enabling departments to communicate effectively.** Having someone who brings strong interpersonal skills to the table is a unique and helpful attribute for teams. In the context of cities specifically, a communication-forward approach often departs from what is traditionally seen as community development and can help foster a different and more effective form of engagement. As one art leader explained, artists are a group of people who can help a city tell its story in a manner that is more engaging, open, and approachable for residents.
- + Helping municipalities pivot and respond to change.** Artists are taught to be agile and responsive in their creative practices, and as a result, are often well-positioned to help organizations pivot and respond to emerging needs. During the COVID-19 quarantine, as an example, art departments within cities were among the first to do programming and outreach digitally. The work of an artist is to take an idea, a concept, and translate it to reality. In this way the arts are a responsive practice.



+ Encouraging municipalities/departments to look internally and connect dots. So often city departments operate in siloes due to the sources and structure of funding they draw on. However, there is value in departments communicating and collaborating more closely and identifying areas of mutual benefit. Social practice artists, in particular, excel at auditing an organization’s needs or goals, and developing interventions that meet multiple objective simultaneously.

+ Understanding and responding to the needs of the community. Because artists are often deeply connected to the community, they are primed to do the work of authentically engaging with the public and surveying whether a community needs, or wants, something (e.g., development project, social program, etc.).

+ Value to building teams with diverse skills and backgrounds. There is a wealth of research showing that teams with diverse skillsets and perspectives help organizations be more productive and innovative.⁸ All non-arts leaders pointed to the creative skills of their current staff as a strong asset that enabled them to think outside the box. Similarly, several departments including economic development, planning, and public works, mentioned having several projects where artistic ability (in terms of direct programming) as well as creative skills (such as community engagement and placemaking) would be valuable.



BENEFIT IN ACTION

During the George Floyd protests, the City of Santa Monica wanted an authentic approach to engaging the community on the topic. The Santa Monica Pier Corporation, leveraging their contacts as an artist-led organization, reached out to Black Girls Surf who organized a paddle-out event in commemoration of Floyd and the other victims police shootings. The event brought out hundreds of community members – including city leaders and council members – and was replicated across 50 cities. Drone footage of the event provided the city with content they could use to articulate their support for the community.

*Paddle Out Protest, City of Santa Monica
Photo by Nicole Gormley, 2020*

The Arts in Times of Crisis

Arts leaders and non-arts leaders agreed the arts are particularly important in moments of crisis. Below are key tangible areas where the arts are essential:

- 1 Mental health.** The arts are critical to mental health, allowing individuals and communities a healthy outlet for stress and anxiety, a means to express themselves and their emotions, and a vehicle to tap into the critical feeling of joy.
- 2 Connectedness.** The arts offer a primary method through which we convene and bring people together. This is particularly true with marginalized and more difficult-to-reach populations, like the elderly and persons with moderate to severe developmental disabilities.
- 3 Empathy-building.** Through the arts, cities foster understanding and help generate empathy for those who are either like or unlike their constituents. One leader mentioned they thought the arts could help break down barriers, allowing cities to provide an opportunity for dialogue and self-expression without being too heavy-handed.
- 4 Meaningful Entertainment and Illumination.** The arts keep us preoccupied, fueling a desire for more engaging and compelling content during challenging times. For example, the City of Santa Clarita started producing virtual performance art programming at the beginning of COVID-19, and almost 1,000 viewers attended the first digital event, leading to plans for increased digital programming.
- 5 Social and economic recovery.** Tactically, art departments are working with artists to create projects that help communities deal with issues of connectedness, justice, public health, safety, and economic recovery. According to two economic development leaders, the arts will be key to revitalization efforts, and should be embedded in strategies to help small businesses and cities sustain during this challenging time.

6 Contribute to municipal systems and challenges. As one arts leader articulated, scaled back budgets and staff will likely limit the physical production of artwork. As such, now may be an ideal opportunity for local arts agencies to contribute to systems and challenges internal to the city and work closely with other departments to help them achieve their strategic goals.

7 Designing safe spaces. The arts, experiential, and event communities represent an entire economy of individuals whose work it is to manage lines, provide services to hundreds of thousands of people at a time, and manage crowd behavior. One leader specifically expressed the view that this community can help government manage and design public space for safe interactions, enhancing public safety, as well as fostering feelings of joy and connectedness.

A common theme that emerged from both arts as well as non-arts leaders is the truly unprecedented nature of the current moment. Rules and processes that normally take years to amend have shifted almost overnight. Community members are turning to their local governments more than ever before to access resources as well as feelings of safety, joy, and connectedness. There is a clear opportunity to envision what rebuilding will look like, and to do so with inclusivity and creativity at the forefront.

AREAS OF FOCUS



Mental Health



Community Connection



Building Empathy



Meaningful Entertainment



Economic Recovery



Municipal Systems



Safe Spaces

Case Studies

The following are examples of cases where the arts have been used strategically to address key challenges faced by municipalities across Los Angeles County.

365 Days of Voters

County of Los Angeles Department of the Registrar-Recorder, County of Los Angeles Department of Arts & Culture, Arts & Culture Commissions of the Cities of Glendale and Pasadena

365 Days of Voters is a recently concluded project led by artist Deborah Aschheim, born out of her time as a creative strategist with the County of Los Angeles Department of the Registrar-Recorder. Most recently funded by the Arts & Culture Commissions of Glendale and Pasadena, Aschheim created a portrait of a Los Angeles County resident each day, with a description of what motivates them to vote. The project, conducted in collaboration with the City Clerk's office, was a socially distanced strategy aimed at influencing residents to vote.

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*365 Days of Voters, Deborah Aschheim, 2020
Images by the artist, Deborah Aschheim*

Art Happens Anywhere

City of Glendale

In response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and its devastating effects on the arts and culture community, the City of Glendale's Library, Arts & Culture department and the Glendale Arts and Culture Commission re-launched the Art Happens Anywhere ("AHA") Program, with the purpose of encouraging the expansion of arts and culture activities to benefit the citizens of our community during these unique times. One of the funded projects is *Reflections* by artist Ashton Phillips which is an experimental sound installation with audio recordings from Glendale residents in quarantine. *Reflections* creates a safe and interactive experience for the public, and is located at Central Park in Glendale.

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Reflections, 2020
Photo by the artist, Ashton Phillips

The Plan

City of West Hollywood

In 2016 and 2017, the City of West Hollywood's Arts & Cultural Affairs Commission (ACAC) developed a community-based cultural plan for the city to guide arts/culture programs and services through 2022. The cultural plan was a product of an 18-month iterative process that engaged more than 1,700 individuals. As part of the development of the plan, ACAC received money from the city's Innovation Fund to commission three artist/team(s) to visualize the plan's core principles and the data collected during the planning process. Each project was designed to be displayed on multiple of the City's multi-media platforms. In addition to using the artwork to engage community members around the cultural plan, the plan itself solicited intrigue from other departments and served as a model for how art and creativity could be used to make data more compelling.

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WeHo Arts: The Plan, 2017
Photo by Jon Viscott, Courtesy of the City of West Hollywood

Art of Recovery

City of Santa Monica

Shortly after the COVID-19 outbreak, the City of Santa Monica developed a working group around economic recovery. Cultural Affairs immediately positioned themselves around recovery and developed a proposal to use \$500,000 in funds generated through the Private Percent for Art Ordinance to fund art projects of up to \$20,000 that are focused on three areas of recovery (economic recovery, community connectedness & restorative justice, and/or public health & safety). Two pilot projects have already been completed and new projects are being announced on a rolling basis. The pilot projects are highly visualized K-rails by artist Molly Ellis, and the second are place-specific physical distancing markers at the Annenberg Community Beach House designed by Urban Rock Design.

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Social Distancing Marker, Urban Rock Design, City of Santa Monica, 2020
Photos by Shannon Daut



K-Rail Murals, Molly Ellis, City of Santa Monica 2020
Photo by Shannon Daut

Sidewalk Poetry

City of Santa Clarita

Sidewalk Poetry is a collaboration between the City of Santa Clarita's Arts and Events Division and the City's Department of Public Works. The City hosts a public contest and selects short poems to be stamped in the City's sidewalks. In addition to engaging the community in the design of public space, the sidewalk poetry project has also cultivated some interest in City infrastructure among the public, helping to foster buy-in to keep the public right of way clean and unobstructed.

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Grandmother (2019) by Abby Kirby
Location: 19424 Soledad Canyon Road, Canyon Country
Courtesy of City of Santa Clarita

Storytelling with Traffic Engineers

City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation and Department of Cultural Affairs

In 2017 the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation and Department of Cultural Affairs established the Creative Catalyst program, a collaboration focused on placing an artist within DOT to develop creative ideas to help the department meet their goal of reducing traffic fatalities by 2025. Artist Alan Nakagawa, the first Creative Catalyst, began his tenure by compiling a vast oral history of the department. He conducted interviews with present and retired department staff, collecting stories, and ultimately producing a historical narrative of DOT. The process also helped Nakagawa build familiarity and credibility within the department. The oral histories were well-received by the engineers personally, the feelings of importance, longevity, and pride they elicited were of critical value. Ultimately, the oral histories also helped illustrate the concrete value of storytelling and of the Creative Catalyst role. Nakagawa followed the oral histories project with a storytelling workshop with Department traffic engineers, facilitated by the award-winning Moth Radio Hour. The workshop focused on providing the engineers with compelling tactics for communicating the importance of traffic safety and fatalities with the broader community – a skill that several senior engineers in the department continue to utilize.

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*Storytelling Workshop with Moth Radio Hour, 2017
Photo by Alan Nakagawa*

Rotating Art Program

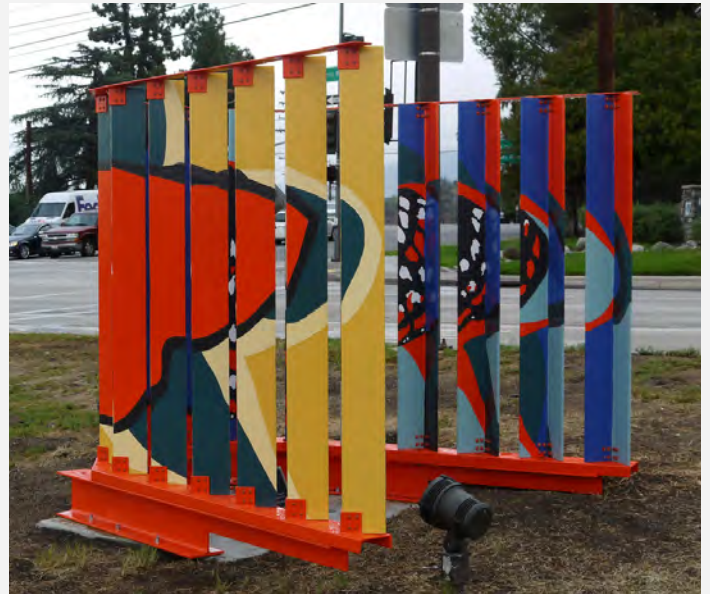
City of Pasadena

Launched in 2011, the Rotating Public Art Exhibition Program was developed to expand art and culture, which had primarily been contained to Pasadena's commercial districts, into the city's neighborhoods. The program makes art accessible to residents and tourists alike by placing temporary public art works throughout the city. As described in the Cultural Nexus Plan, the city was looking to create "cultural zones" in neighborhoods with historically fewer arts and cultural resources. According to the plan, such expansions could "help strengthen cultural programming and stimulate economic and social development within these specific areas and throughout the entire city."

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*Basics #25, Matthias Neumann
City of Pasadena, 2018
Courtesy of Matthias Neumann*



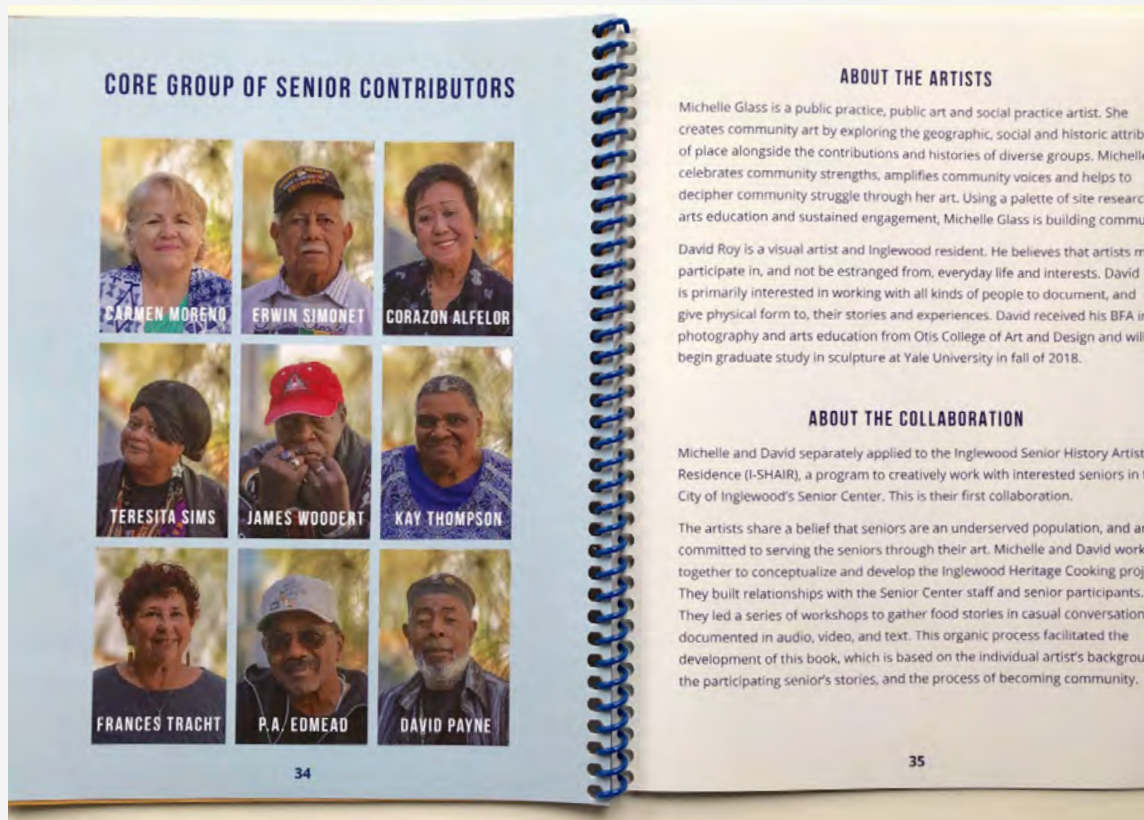
*Calm a Little Soul, Karen Reitzel
City of Pasadena, 2018
Courtesy of Karen Reitzel*

The Inglewood Heritage Cooking Project

City of Inglewood

In 2018, the City of Inglewood was awarded a grant to place artists in residence at the Inglewood Senior Center to engage a typically underserved population. Two artists, Michelle Glass and David Roy, were contracted. They conceptualized a cookbook project, utilizing social practice and photography to capture the stories and recipes of community members at the Senior Center. Through a process of extensive collaboration and engagement with the Senior Center community and staff, the project produced a cookbook. The book documents individual stories, highlighting the diversity of Inglewood's elderly community, and makes them accessible to the broader community through recipes and food. The cookbook is available in the Inglewood Public Library Special Collections.

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The Inglewood Heritage Cooking Project, 2018
 Courtesy of City of Inglewood



Barriers and Challenges to Further Integrating the Arts

While there are benefits to a more strategic integration of the arts and artists across cities, key barriers persist. Understanding these barriers will help champions for the arts better navigate local government systems to make way for a future where the arts are more fully embedded. The barriers outlined below have been categorized into three sections for simplicity, however, in many cases they are cross-cutting.



Lula Washington Dance Company, Photo Courtesy of Arts for LA

BARRIERS TO INCREASING INTEGRATION OF THE ARTS

- ✘ **No master plan for arts or culture.** Some arts leaders surveyed felt that the lack of a cultural policy or master plan was one of the biggest barriers for integration of the arts. As they explained, without a plan or policy in place projects and collaborations between art/non-art departments become highly relational and depend on individual affinity or value of the arts. Even those leaders who did not immediately raise this as a barrier agreed that having something documented in writing would generate greater understanding and a “license to operate.” Similarly, a number of cities that did have a cultural plan and policy in place referred back to that document to drive more awareness and foster buy-in among their counterparts.
- ✘ **Limitations of environments that are personality driven.** Local governments are often very relationship-oriented in nature, so it is unsurprising that this is also the case when it comes to the arts. Challenges arise when program success is dependent on specific individuals who eventually leave or retire. At least two interviewees spoke about situations where they had established promising relationships, or collaborations related to the arts, but had to rebuild when key individuals moved on. Furthermore, without a cultural policy or master plan in place (see barrier above), support for the arts will almost always be affinity-based.
- ✘ **Complex, process-heavy organizational cultures.** While some leaders identified their municipal culture as being highly agile, innovative, and fast-moving, several other leaders said that the bureaucratic culture within their city prevented more meaningful experimentation with the arts. In addition, several leaders also raised the concept of “the old guard.” Though they cited emerging leaders who understand the value and are willing to champion the arts, they are often limited by existing leaders who have more traditional views on the role of city departments.
- ✘ **Insufficient staffing resources for arts departments.** In some cases, arts departments are well resourced standalone departments, while in other cases they are a small team embedded within another department. Further, it can be that the entities hired by the city to work on public art operate outside the formal structure of the city altogether (e.g., the Long Beach Arts Council is a nonprofit organization funded by the city). While the models vary wildly, common barriers were limitations in bandwidth for awareness and relationship-building across departments due to the small number of staff focused on arts and culture.

- ✘ **Lack of unrestricted resources.** Unsurprisingly, resources emerged consistently as the biggest barrier to greater integration of the arts. This is especially salient in the context of COVID-19, and the uncertainty/reductions in city budgets. Even in cities where leadership (e.g., city council, mayors, and department leaders) champion an expanded role for the arts, there are many other urgent priorities vying for resources, and the arts are not naturally at the forefront for most leaders. Leaders spoke not only about a lack of resources, but also restrictions on how resources can be spent that may prohibit departments from allocating resources to items or initiatives outside their core functions. Ultimately, however, a number of leaders identified that the presence of sufficient resources is not necessarily the challenge, rather non-arts departments identifying the arts as a strategic priority.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYING ARTS STRATEGICALLY

- ✘ **Limited understanding of the arts.** Several arts leaders felt that many of their non-arts counterparts have a limited understanding of the arts – viewing the arts as non-critical to a project, rather than expanding its breadth and application. Non-arts leaders also supported this perspective, explaining that despite openness to the arts, they feel lost in terms of where to start and how to best utilize the arts within their context.
- ✘ **Lack of openness to the arts.** This barrier was raised most commonly in relation to more technical departments. Arts leaders questioned whether some individuals within more technical departments view their roles as inherently creative in nature and the extent to which this perspective could limit the perceived value or applicability of the arts. On the other hand, some non-arts departments within more agile cities do view themselves as quite creative and may resist the idea of bringing in an outsider for this purpose.
- ✘ **Reluctance to complicate existing processes.** Both non-arts as well as arts leaders stated that incorporating the arts can sometimes complicate the implementation process, adding several discussions and layers of review. Many department staff are wary of the potential to extend project timelines and add expense by complicating the review process.
- ✘ **Reluctance to integrate the arts early.** Several arts and non-arts leaders felt that most departments in their city approached the arts as an after-thought, and often in response to constituent concerns – for example, using public art to cover unseemly fixtures in the public right of way. However, as one public works leader explained, this type of responsive approach is more expensive, more challenging, and ultimately leads to a less intentionally designed end-result than if the arts are incorporated in the planning process from the very beginning.

BARRIERS TO HIRING ARTISTS AS CREATIVE STRATEGISTS

- ✘ **Implicit (or explicit) bias about artistic personalities and skillsets.** Arts and non-arts leaders admitted that artists are often stereotyped as “flaky,” “unreliable,” or “not-administrative.” Some perceive artists as lacking analytical thinking skills, business interest, or acumen, despite the fact that many successful artists are required to be savvy entrepreneurs. Furthermore, some arts leaders perceived that technical departments that prefer hard sciences may feel that the arts hold less value than skills derived from science, technology, or math-based fields.
- ✘ **Challenges navigating non-arts department cultures.** Many municipal departments are tightly knit environments, difficult for outsiders to navigate. Additionally, non-arts leaders from multiple departments expressed concern that the particular characteristics or working styles of their staff (e.g., sense of bravado, focus on detail and process) could result in confusion or reluctance to work with an artist.
- ✘ **Failure to speak the right language.** Several leaders felt the words used to describe a creative strategist role are critical to cultivating buy-in. In particular, they thought it necessary to focus on the creative strategist as a resource and collaborator, rather than someone hired to fill talent gaps.
- ✘ **Staff already stretched thin.** Already overworked, most non-arts department staff are taking on more responsibility to compensate for departmental shifts and hiring freezes, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some interviewees felt the addition of a creative strategist could add undue burden by complicating review processes. Arts and non-arts leaders emphasized that most funding sources that could have been utilized to support a creative strategist (e.g., training budgets) are mostly unavailable in the current climate.
- ✘ **The need to find the right artist.** Several non-arts leaders voiced concerns about who the creative strategist would be, stressing the need to identify the right candidate. This person would need to possess the right creative and artistic skills as well as a practical understanding of the department’s core functions. Other leaders who had implemented artist residency programs in the past voiced challenges in casting a wide-enough net to attract a diverse and equitable range of artists from across the community. Finally, some also questioned the appetite of artists to take on roles within local government.

How to Operationalize: Integrating Artists in Municipal Government

Every municipality, let alone department, differs in context and needs. To successfully embed artists in a municipal context, the placement of the creative strategist depends on the goal of a given project - whether it be examining internal department culture or facilitating engagement with the community. The model for where and how to embed artists more fully in systems of government should focus on unlocking the necessary tools, resources, political capital, and access required for the creative strategist to be successful in their position and enable the success of the project overall. Some structural and recruitment options are identified below.



Dedicated funds to hire creative strategists for **specific projects**



Single creative strategist in a specific department



Single creative strategist available to all departments



Single creative strategist central in the city structure



Unit of Central Creative Strategists

STRUCTURES

- **Provide dedicated funds to arts department to hire creative strategists for specific projects or contracts with key departments.** Creating a dedicated fund allows the arts department to hire strategists very strategically to ensure they align with the needs and culture of key departments.

- **Single creative strategist embedded within a specific department.** The focus of this strategist would be solely on the department in which they are located. This could take the shape of a short-term contract position, similar to the current Creative Strategist program within the County of Los Angeles, or a more permanent staff position within the department. Experts provided arguments for both models. On one hand, residencies tend to be successful because the resident maintains an outsider status that allows them to think outside of the perceived constraints of the department. On the other hand, former residents interviewed felt that one year was far too short of a timespan. They explained that successful residencies include a period of “auditing,” where the strategist is learning about the department, gaining the correct vocabulary, as well as building trust and relationships across the department. That process alone can take several months. A residency period of two years or more is suggested.
- **Single creative strategist “consultant” embedded within a single municipal department, but available to all other department directors.** In this model the creative strategist would be housed within a specific department who would provide program management support and coordinate with other departments. Suggested departments include 1) Arts/ Cultural Affairs who tend to understand how to work with artists, and 2) Economic or Community Development, where mandates necessitate the type of community engagement and cross functional/departmental collaboration that creative strategists often facilitate.
- **Single creative strategist “consultant” embedded centrally in the municipal structure (e.g., city manager’s office).** A creative strategist who could consult on a project-basis on specific challenge areas appealed to arts and non-arts interviewees. Such a role helps departments understand how to work with a creative strategist, understand the benefits the relationship yields, and ultimately leads to openness to more long-term, dedicated roles. Positioning the individual centrally under the city manager gives the strategist more credibility and minimizes the length of time required for successful collaboration. Finally, positioning a creative strategist under the city manager could also support city-wide branding and community engagement efforts.
- **Unit of permanent creative strategists housed centrally within the municipal government (e.g., city manager’s office), within the arts department, or on a cross-disciplinary innovation team.** In this model, a group of “generalists” or a more specialized unit of creative strategists with specific skills in community-based design and strategic communication (e.g., Community Engagement Unit) would be housed centrally and available to all departments.

RECRUITMENT

Artists and creative strategists can be found among existing personnel or can be hired from outside. Internal workforce models create creative strategist classifications into which existing employees can transfer full-time temporarily. Personnel can be matched to non-art departments based on skillsets, background, and interest. This model aligns best where the city already knows how it wishes to deploy strategists.

Alternatively, cities and departments can look externally, hiring specifically as the need arises. Master agreements are particularly helpful since they allow artists and creative strategists to pre-qualify based on specific technical skillsets and pre-negotiate compensation and other contractual terms and conditions, and then enable departments to use streamlined requests for qualifications (RFQs) to engage quickly. Proper monitoring of master agreements, along with targeted promotion to underrepresented constituencies, also can help cities keep their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

DRAWING OUT CREATIVE SKILLS

The goal of embedding artists as innovators is to infuse the arts and creativity in local governance and to aid in solving municipal challenges. Creative strategists are one potentially effective means of achieving this, however there are other strategies that municipalities can look to regardless of their size or current capacity to engage artist innovators.

Municipalities can incorporate creative skills more prominently in the external recruitment process. This will help managers target individuals with creative tendencies, a creative background, or an arts practice. Placing greater emphasis on the arts and creativity in the hiring process helps shift the culture within the departments, generating increased value for nontraditional backgrounds (from a civic context), and creative thinking and collaboration. The Creative Skills section of the report provides some perspectives on where municipalities can start.

Municipalities can also look within their existing staff to identify and engage individuals with a creative background or arts practice who may not be deploying those skills to their full potential. Several interviewees mentioned that they knew of dozens of staff members across their city who were artists and were seeking avenues of bringing their creative minds to work but lacked the opportunity within the city or department structure. Fully implementing this approach involves a baseline survey to identify staff members with relevant backgrounds and interests.



The Recommendations

The following pages include two sets of recommendations for the audiences of this report. The first set of recommendations is geared towards municipal champions for the arts, while the second is targeted towards artists and arts advocates.

These actionable recommendations are a culmination of the key research findings, perspectives around benefits, barriers, and strategies to operationalize an essential integration of the arts and artists within municipal government.



*Utility Box Painting by George Shallhoob, 2018
Courtesy of City of Burbank Government*

Recommendations for Municipalities and Departments Seeking to Embed Artists as Innovators

The following recommendations are shared to help internal champions expand the role of the arts and artists as innovators at the municipal level and beyond:

- 1 Be specific about a) the scope of the project and, b) the structure of the role(s).** Prioritizing specificity in the design and articulation of the project will help drive success by ensuring the parties' mutual understanding of the goals of the project. Additionally, being specific about the artist's role will both help the creative strategist understand their scope and expectations and ensure that departments do not misuse the creative resource. A sampling of questions to help define the role include: Is the artist attending meetings? Are they expected to produce deliverables? If so, what format should those deliverables be in (e.g., write-up, physical artwork, facilitated session, etc.)? Will they be hosting artist office hours? Who are their primary champions within the department or agency?
- 2 Select artists with the right skills and cultural fit.** Not all artists excel in the same areas. Focus on what types of skills are most needed for the specific role that is being filled. For example, do you need a generalist with a broad range of creative skills? Is the role more about design thinking and community-based design? Is it more about visual storytelling and facilitation? These criteria will help build the role. Technical departments, in particular, may welcome creative strategists with an understanding of how the department works and the department's operational constraints, thereby streamlining the artist's ramp up time in the role.

- 3 Start with smaller or part-time projects to illustrate value.** Initial smaller projects will help foster relationships and illustrate success, building the case for bigger projects and more embedded roles. Full time positions (if indeed that is the objective) are a big commitment for cities, and departments need to be able to articulate the value. Smaller engagements can help prove this with tangible examples. One city leader noted part-time projects are an effective approach for engaging other departments and creating a low-risk environment to experiment and learn what can be accomplished collaboratively through art and creativity.
- 4 Prioritize departments most open to the concept.** Though the end goal may be to place a creative strategist within every department, it is a better use of resources to start with departments known to be more open to this type of collaboration. Departments that have collaborated with the arts department in the past, leaders who are strong and vocal champions for the arts, or where there are strong personal relationships in place are all positive indicators of the likelihood of success. Working with departments that are open to a creative strategist role can also help ensure that lines of communication are open, enabling agile shifts and troubleshooting to occur over the course of the role or collaboration.
- 5 Bring creative strategists in early.** As one non-art leader noted, the arts, and particularly a strategic approach to the arts, cannot be an after-thought. If artists are brought in during the middle or end of a project, it may already be too late to fully capture the value of their creative skills and process. Similarly, while hiring contract artists is a critical bridge for departments to gain familiarity with working alongside an artist, it is important for leaders to understand that the role of a creative strategist extends beyond the sole purpose of beautifying or visualizing a certain project.
- 6 Position the role within, or with direct access to, the executive team.** Ensuring that the creative strategist role is housed as close to the top of the department (e.g., under the city manager, or in the office of the director of a specific department) will help ensure that the individual has the leadership support to execute their ideas. This will make for a more fruitful and less frustrating engagement for both parties.
- 7 Allow ample time for an audit period.** If creative strategists are expected to embed within departments in a meaningful way, they will need to spend time understanding the context of that department, assessing challenges and fostering trust. This “audit” period can involve a period of shadowing, department-wide interviews, and oral histories and will help ensure that proposed projects or innovations are feasible, impactful, and accepted. This audit period also helps departments understand the full scope of the artist’s capabilities.

- 8 Create space to test boundaries and think creatively.** As long as the creative strategist understands the realities of the department's context, it is a useful exercise for department leadership and staff to suspend disbelief, codes, and rules in early brainstorming sessions, resulting in more innovative concepts and ideas. Once an idea has been selected, the work can begin of how to navigate existing systems and structures to bring the idea to fruition. One non-arts leader noted due to COVID-19, departments once reticent to push boundaries have implemented great and rapid change in some contexts.
- 9 Ensure diverse sources of revenue for arts and culture.** Resource constraints are consistently cited as a key barrier to strategically integrating the arts and artists across municipalities. Champions for the arts within municipalities should pursue a variety of potential revenue sources, to help fund cultural infrastructure and other arts programs – such as embedding arts as strategists in municipal departments. A sample of these funding sources include: Percent for Art ordinances⁹ which allocate a portion of capital projects to the arts, Transient Occupancy Taxes (TOT), or hotel-motel taxes¹⁰, or other alternatives.
- 10 Capitalize on moments of change.** We are in a great moment of change with the COVID-19 pandemic and reckoning around racial injustice in our communities. Though municipalities are facing many challenges, this is also a time when many are testing the status quo and looking for more effective ways to connect with communities and deliver on core functions. This concept extends beyond the pandemic as well. It is important for champions to identify when leadership or cultural shifts create more openness towards the arts and capitalize on those moments.

CHECKLIST FOR MUNICIPAL CHAMPIONS



Be specific about the scope of the project and the structure of the role(s).



Position the role within, or with direct access to, the executive team.



Select artists with the right skills and cultural fit.



Allow ample time for an audit period.



Start with smaller or part-time projects to illustrate value.



Create space to test boundaries and think creatively.



Prioritize departments most open to the concept.



Ensure diverse sources of revenue for arts and culture.



Bring creative strategists in early.



Capitalize on moments of change.

Recommendations for Artists, Arts Leaders, and Advocates

The following recommendations are targeted towards arts advocates seeking to position art and artists as core to how local government functions. These are gathered from the first-hand experiences of art leaders in collaborating with non-arts departments, as well as guidance from non-arts leaders to help address some of their own key reservations.

- 1 Embed the arts through cultural plans and policies.** Arts leaders, artists, and advocates, can help expand the role of art and creativity in municipal government by advocating for the adoption of cultural plan and policy language at the municipal level. As several interviewees noted, cultural plan or policy language helps provide non-arts municipal leaders with the license to engage more strategically with the arts or generate creative career pathways for artists as innovators.
- 2 Advocate for sustainable, diverse funding for cultural plans and policies.** It is critical that advocates push to attach funding to cultural policies and plans to ensure municipalities actually have the capacity to successfully implement them. Identifying diverse revenue sources – such as Percent for Art ordinances, TOT taxes, and alternatives – will help mitigate against disruption in funding, which many municipalities are currently facing as a result of COVID-19. Within the context of Los Angeles County, a key recommendation is to fund the Countywide Cultural Policy to help integrate art and culture in the County’s strategies.
- 3 Emphasize equity through the arts.** Integrating the arts and artists into municipal government is not only an avenue for introducing new and innovative ideas into local government; it must also serve as a vehicle to make municipalities more equitable and accessible. As these programs and roles are implemented, the arts community should encourage municipalities to take advantage of the opportunity, creating pathways and entry points to creative careers in government for underrepresented youth and communities.

- 4 Propose an evaluation of municipal job descriptions.** In addition to advocating for an expanded role for the arts and artists in a municipality's planning documents, arts leaders can encourage other non-arts department leaders to conduct an evaluation of the extent to which creative and artistic skills are represented in the municipality's current hiring and promotion processes. Emphasizing the value of these skills and recruiting for them actively can help open a range of creative career pathways and opportunities across local government, while potentially enhancing municipal functions through creative innovation.
- 5 Show what has worked before.** When asked what would help build greater appetite for such roles, non-arts leaders expressed interest in learning about where a strategic approach to the arts has helped solve key challenges in other similar communities. This was raised as particularly critical in under resourced communities where tangible case studies could help strengthen the case for allocating limited resources to the arts. While this report includes a handful of case studies, there are many more examples of successful arts-driven innovations and collaborations across the country. It would be effective to compile a comprehensive catalog of case studies categorized by location and sector to be used in advocacy efforts with the leadership of cities and departments across the County.
- 6 Foster community-based champions.** In addition to building champions within departments, several leaders interviewed felt it was critical for organizations and community-members to serve as champions for a more integrated role of the arts in local government. If organized effectively, community champions are critical in encouraging local government officials to harness the arts and artists as innovators. Additionally, once opportunities for artists in local government arise, community-based champions ensure the pool of candidates considered are diverse, inclusive, and representative of the community.

CREATIVE STRATEGIST PROGRAM

The County of Los Angeles Department of Arts & Culture is publishing an evaluation of their Creative Strategist program which, launched in 2018, has placed artists within a range of County Departments. Their report will serve as an additional source of case studies and insights.

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- 7 Enlighten and share what creative strategists can accomplish.** A director of innovation found it challenging for other departments to really understand what their team did, and how it fit into their work. Over time, they learned to describe the department in simpler terms and position it as a resource to help other departments. For creative strategists, this definition might be *helping departments think about challenges in different and creative ways and coming up with new solutions*. Another concept raised during interviews was the idea of a cultural innovation training to help municipal leaders understand the role and value of the arts, and how they could collaborate with artists within their own departments.
- 8 Reframe pre-existing perspectives of artists.** There is a perspective, voiced throughout this research by both arts as well as non-arts leaders, that artists lack analytical or business development skills, have egos, are unrealistic, and can be challenging to work with. It is important to advance the notion that artists are required to be resourceful, organized, and entrepreneurial, and thus may possess more analytical skills than typically perceived. Another perception is that artists may push boundaries in “unrealistic” or “challenging” ways. As one interviewee noted, it is this precise dynamic that can unearth innovative concepts and solutions.
- 9 Establish credibility and trust.** Because working familiarity with the creative strategist role is limited, in most cases, the onus falls on the artist and their liaison to define their value prior to collaborating with a department on a project. How the artist establishes this credibility or trust largely depends on the scope of the project and the culture of the department in question. For example, in public works departments, liability is a large issue. The artist knowing this in advance and having an understanding of common liability issues and how to read plans would be a key asset.
- 10 Prioritize humility and listening as the artist embarks on the role.** Across the board, leaders emphasized humility, flexibility, and a willingness to listen as critical attributes. For example, one non-arts leader noted having to periodically fix or maintain artworks in the public right of way, and highlighted the importance of artists reducing complexity in this process, rather than adding to it. Two other leaders, who expressed concern that the culture of their respective departments may drive reluctance to accept an artist, advised artists to emphasize listening in their creative process, and to frame initial projects as opportunities to listen and learn from existing department staff.

CHECKLIST FOR ARTS ADVOCATES



Embed the arts through cultural plans and policies.



Foster community-based champions.



Advocate for sustainable, diverse funding for cultural plans and policies.



Enlighten and share what creative strategists can accomplish.



Emphasize equity through the arts.



Reframe pre-existing perspectives of artists.



Propose an evaluation of municipal job descriptions.



Establish credibility and trust.



Show what has worked before.



Prioritize humility and listening as the artist embarks on the role.

The Conclusion

We are living in unprecedented times. Our communities are in the midst of three interconnected crises – a public health crisis, an economic crisis, and a racial justice crisis. While this is a time of incredible challenge and constraint, it is also a moment of opportunity. Leaders of municipal governments are eagerly looking in their toolbox to find solutions to the grand scale of challenges they face. The arts can serve as a powerful tool to help organizations think about their challenges differently and generate unique and creative solutions.

While increasingly there are examples of artists working with municipal governments in this strategic capacity, the arts continue to be an underutilized tool for problem solving. This holds true across Los Angeles County, despite the fact that many municipal and non-arts department leaders see value in the arts, and even express appetite for integrating artists to help their departments tap into a range of creative ideas and solutions. There is a clear leap that must be made, from identifying value, to making the decision to allocate resources to utilizing the arts more strategically.

It is important for local leaders to consistently consider the role that the arts can play in helping shape solutions and engaging more meaningfully with the constituents and communities they serve. This can only happen if civic leaders, as well as artists and arts organizations, work together to advance this concept within their own spheres of influence and create the conditions for its success. Ultimately, we are at an important inflection point. This exact moment is a critical opportunity to position the arts and creativity, not only as essential to recovery, but also core to an agile, equitable, and accessible local government in the long term.



*The Golden Boy by Bodeck Hernandez
Cambodia Town, Long Beach (2017)
Funded by Arts Council for Long Beach*

Future Research

This research study builds on a growing body of evidence examining the potential for the arts and artists to enhance municipal governments, and help non-arts organizations carry out their core functions more effectively. This study intends to serve as a baseline for this concept across Los Angeles County.

There are many additional and further lines of interesting inquiry that can, and should, be conducted:

- 1 Artist appetite for government roles: Throughout this report we speak to municipal leaders about their appetite for working with artists within their departments, however it is also important to consider the appetite of artists for working within municipal governments.** Where do artists across Los Angeles County currently stand? What are some methods or tactics for cultivating more interest in creative career pathways within civic government?
- 2 Arts/Creative training of existing staff: The extent to which the current workforce of municipal governments across Los Angeles County has an arts background or creative training is another path of inquiry.** How many artists work in non-arts capacities across Los Angeles County? To what extent are they able to utilize their arts training in their roles? To what extent does this equip them with creative skills that make them more effective in their roles?
- 3 Cultivating creative skills: While some literature exists on the value of creative and artistic skills in the broader workforce, this is an additional area of research that can be further explored.** What is the role of an arts career or education in cultivating creative skills? Which creative skills are most relevant and helpful to organizations in terms of problem-solving?

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has made this research possible. I am grateful to Arts for LA for the opportunity to conduct this research. Thank you to Gustavo Herrera and Aubrey Farkas Harris for providing me with this opportunity and for their tireless support and guidance throughout the process. I am also grateful to Gustavo and Cordelia Istel for their support in contextualizing this research within the actionable priorities of Arts for LA.

I am also immensely grateful to my mentor Karen Constine, who has been so generous with her insights, experience, and network. Many thanks as well to Bronwyn Mauldin, Shawn Landres, Deirdre Shipstead, and Laura Zucker for reading and providing their critical inputs into the report. The report is greatly enhanced thanks to their insights. I am also extremely thankful to AJ Hansen for her support in the graphic design of this report.

Finally, this research would not have been possible without the numerous leaders across Los Angeles County, and in particular, the cities of Beverly Hills, Burbank, Inglewood, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Glendale, Pasadena, Santa Clarita, Santa Monica, Torrance, and West Hollywood, who made the time to speak with me and share their perspectives over the course of this research. The full list of interviewees is included in the next page.

List of Interviewees

Abbe Land, Los Angeles County, Women and Girls Initiative

Alex Hinojosa, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, Human Resources Manager

Bronwyn Mauldin, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, Director of Research and Evaluation

Danielle Brazell, City of Los Angeles, Department of Cultural Affairs General Manager

Elizabeth Goldman, City of Burbank, Library Services Director

Eve Rappoport, City of Torrance, Cultural Services Manager

Fran Fulton, City of Torrance, Economic Development Manager

Francisco Contreras, City of West Hollywood, Innovation Manager

Griselda Suarez, Executive Director, Arts Council of Long Beach

Helen Lessick, City of Inglewood Public Art Consultant

Janine Prado, City of Santa Clarita, Director of Recreation and Community Services

Jennifer Fukutomi-Jones, City of Glendale, Arts & Culture Administrator

Jenny Rogers, City of Beverly Hills, Director of Community Services

Kim Glann, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, Cross Sector Manager

Kristen Smith, City of Burbank, Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation

Martin Serna, City of Torrance, Fire Chief

Mary Hamzoian, City of Burbank, Economic Development Manager

Nancy Hunt-Coffey, City of Beverly Hills, Assistant City Manager

Negin Singh, Executive Director, Santa Monica Pier Corporation

Peter James, City of Santa Monica, Chief Operations Officer Department of Public Works

Phil Lantis, City of Santa Clarita, Arts & Events Administrator

Rebecca Ehemann, City of West Hollywood, Acting Arts Manager

Robert Newman, City of Santa Clarita, Director of Public Works

Robin Garcia, Los Angeles County, Cross Sector Analyst Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow

Rochelle Branch, City of Pasadena, Cultural Affairs Manager

Sabrina Barnes, City of Inglewood, Director of Parks, Recreation & Library Services

Sara Daleiden, 18th Street Art Center, Visiting Artist in Residence

Seleta Reynolds, City of Los Angeles, Department of Transportation General Manager

Shannon Daut, City of Santa Monica, Manager of Cultural Affairs

Shawn Landres, Los Angeles County Quality and Productivity Commission and Santa Monica Planning Commission

Shelley Ovrom, City of Beverly Hills, Director of Human Resources

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This report was produced by Arts for LA through the Laura Zucker Fellowship for Policy and Research, and made possible by the generous support of the Arts for LA Board of Directors and contributing members.

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2020 Laura Zucker Fellow for Policy and Research

Nahal Jalali is a visual artist, writer, and strategy consultant focused on advancing social change through the arts. She has supported dozens of public, private, and social sector organizations in the areas of innovation and growth, and has written and researched extensively on the topic of socially engaged art. Nahal earned her MPP from Georgetown University.

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