

Cultural Plans

Developed Under Supervision of
Rana Amirtahmasebi
Research: Saritha Ramakrishnan
Design: Sera Tolgay

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Cultural planning at the local level has become a means for cities to identify the needs of their cultural sectors, set goals to meet these needs, define strategies and tactics, and meaningfully engage the public on issues related to arts and culture. Though there is no one definition or set of parameters for the drafting of a cultural plan, plans produced for and by individual municipalities can serve a number of goals, including economic development, developing civic capacity and social inclusion, and meaningfully defining local identity.



Image Credit: Hester Street

Components



Generally cultural plans include a **baseline evaluation** component, where the municipality gathers data about its existing cultural ecosystem and gaps. Data gathering can take many forms, through focus groups, demographic characterizations, asset mapping and more. Once baseline needs are established, municipalities set **goals** they would like to accomplish related to arts and culture. Strategies, tactics, recommendations and initiatives follow as a result. Municipalities may also outline means of **implementation**, through designated financing mechanisms or governance structures from advisory committees, individual city agencies, or collaborations between stakeholder groups. Many of the plans reviewed attempted to set designated **timelines** for completion for individual components of the plan. Through a review of ten different cultural plans, we characterize the ways in which local governments use these processes. Major findings of interest are below:



TENOR & GOAL OF CULTURAL PLANS

The tenor by which the arts are approached within individual plans shapes the approaches outlined. For example, the **City of Phoenix's cultural plan (2012)** seeks to attract visitors, generate jobs, stimulate the creative economy, and revitalize underutilized area. In addition, the plan itself was shaped by the business community, meaning that its recommendations are geared towards greater economic development. Its characterization of the meaning of art and culture is broad, and considers businesses of interest for downtown economic development, including creative-class, tertiary industries such as programming and architecture. In contrast, the **City of Oakland's**

cultural plan (2018) seeks to address issues of equity and access within the municipality, especially given issues of housing insecurity, displacement, and the fragmentation of minority communities as a result of these housing market dynamics. **The City of London's (2018) cultural plan** seeks to define the city's cultural output for its global, cosmopolitan characteristics and artistic contributions by immigrants. The text of the plan seeks to contrast the city's image to the recent Brexit decision. The political atmosphere and development dynamics of individual municipalities will inevitably shape the cultural planning process, and the goals cities aspire towards.



PROGRAMS AND CONTENT OF PLANS

Individual content areas that were common to most of the plans reviewed can be found below. Though this list is not exhaustive to every initiative in each reviewed plan, many initiatives, recommendations and goals fall within these thematic areas.

- 1. Education and Youth Engagement:** Plans were concerned with youth access to arts and culture. Many plans, including **Chicago (2012)**, **New York City (2017)**, **Boston (2016)**, **Phoenix (2012)**, and **Los Angeles (2017)** involve the integration of arts and cultural education into school district planning processes, as well as the provision of resources to districts to better offer arts education. Education for older adults as well as working creative professionals are also included.
- 2. Spatial Planning:** Most plans were concerned with the availability of space for artists to work within, and support the review of zoning and permitting practices to better prioritize and accommodate artists. (See Page 5 for details).
- 3. Global Image, Tourism and Economic Development:** As many of the cities reviewed were large, cosmopolitan cities, cultural development and planning also very much related to tourism, economic development and the notion of global and national image. For example, **Denver's (2015) cultural plan** describes the importance of tourism, marketing, and exchange programs to develop the city's national and international brand. **Chicago's (2012) cultural plan** suggests that the city work to establish well-known international and national-level festivals that will attract tourists to the city while developing its image as a global destination.
- 4. Arts Equity:** As several of these cities also face challenges related to affordability, structural inequality, and issues of quality of life, many

of the plans addressed equity of access and participation. Those that conducted analyses of equity-related metrics found that minority and low income neighborhoods lacked the same level of access to cultural infrastructure and services as other neighborhoods. Many included strategies to increase arts access and diversity in the arts. For example, **Oakland's (2018) cultural plan** calls for an analysis of current programs and policies within the realm of racial equity. **New York City's (2017) cultural plan** describes mechanisms for funding allocation towards neighborhoods identified as low-income and underserved. **Washington DC's (2019) cultural plan** follows an ethos where every individual within the city is "a performer" within the city's urban fabric and emphasizes the importance of individual, small-scale venues, businesses and public spaces as opposed to a focus on large, well-established cultural institutions. Ashley et al (2021) note that "critics point out that cultural planning often automatically intertwines arts and culture with economic development rationales and equates inclusion with economic participation. This orientation leaves little room to discuss the ways in which an economic development rationale shuts some people out in terms of both the process and what arts and cultural planning can do to advance social justice." Because arts planning is deeply intertwined with economic development and city agencies that promote the economic value or monetization of art relative to larger goals, equity may be something that planners consider, but is otherwise "inconsistently applied." However, because the arts are not considered to be a traditional component of planning and municipal activity, some cities have been able to use cultural planning processes to identify inequitable conditions and remedy them.

SPATIAL PLANNING

1. Art Spaces

Plans also include individual strategies within the purview of spatial planning, including cultural community land trusts, the revitalization of underutilized areas or individual buildings, tax incentives and financing mechanisms to encourage private sector investment in art spaces, and the development of cultural districts or arts opportunity zones to serve individual neighborhoods of particular cultural interest.

2. The Public Realm

Plans also describe the integration of art into the public realm via public art displays, pop-up spaces, and the activation of public space for performances and exhibitions. Some plans briefly mention transit and accessibility issues. A plan by the **City of Liverpool (2016)** focuses on heritage preservation, and discusses the importance of building standards for individual areas, as well as architectural preservation.

3. Neighborhood Level Planning

Finally, plans also consider the importance of neighborhood-level cultural planning, and the identification of areas that may be spatially bereft of cultural institutions.



PROCESSES OF MEASUREMENT AND ENGAGEMENT



Image Credit: Hester Street

Most of the plans included a data collection phase where practitioners reviewed demographic and city-collected data, administered surveys, conducted focus groups, and held town halls and public meetings to collect feedback. Data gathering processes served to characterize the types of disparities, challenges, and needs faced by the individual municipalities while identifying cultural assets, strengths, and overall contribution to the urban economy.



DATA COLLECTION

Gathering data served an important purpose in many of the plans, specifically to characterize public interest and asks of municipal governments in the cultural planning process. Most planning processes included intensive data gathering phases, where the characterization of cultural sectors and cultural output by municipalities was matched with public engagement on how municipal governments might improve and better offer services to communities. For example, **Boston (2016)** developed an interactive, online asset mapping application, where members of the community could mark cultural venues they utilize. Data was gathered and reviewed according

to the individual goals of the plans. Similarly, the **Liverpool (2016)** cultural heritage plan reviewed tourism data, in order to understand the programs available for tourists, and the economic impact of tourism on the city. In some cases, individual focus groups and targeted data gathering efforts helped provide clearer recommendations. For example, **New York City's (2017)** data and feedback gathering effort was intensive, and involved not only the engagement of the general public, but the convening of individual artists and arts administrators into larger focus groups.



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The plans varied significantly when it came to strategies and directives towards implementation. Most specified agencies or public sector groups that would be responsible for implementation. **Chicago (2012)** and **Denver (2016)** both describe how art and culture agencies would administer the plan, but both plans also seek to integrate art and cultural planning into the activities of other agencies. Others described governance structures unique to cultural planning that would assist in implementation efforts. For example, **New York City's (2017)** Citizen

Advisory Committee that was convened during the data gathering efforts will continue to serve the city in identifying opportunities for implementation. London's Mayor's Leadership Board will serve in a similar capacity. Governance via resolutions and ordinances can be found in **LA County (2017)** and **Oakland's (2018)** cultural planning documents. Specifically, in the case of a LA County, a resolution directed the creation of an inclusive public process, while in Oakland, an equity ordinance directs city activities towards ends of social justice.



FINANCING STRATEGIES

Most identified potential financing sources for plan implementation to varying degrees of specificity. For example, **LA County's (2017)** report describes how many of the equity initiatives described will be funded via allocated grant funding from the public sector. **Liverpool's (2016)** heritage plan describes funding from a variety of sources, including the European Union, the central United Kingdom government, the municipality, and private sector investment on a local scale. **Washington DC's (2019)** cultural plan describes the importance of impact investment and public private partnerships in fostering the development of the arts. In general, the majority of plans proposed a reliance on several different revenue streams at once, from varying levels of the public

sector, private sector investment, and foundation and philanthropic funding and partnerships. In Seattle, a city-sponsored public development authority was set up to develop and preserve permanently affordable space for arts/culture. The aim is to put the power of real estate development and ownership into the hands of underserved communities. The authority will acquire and redevelop properties to sell them below market rate or to simply gift them to community arts organizations. In general, for the plans to be actionable, individual recommendations or strategies were provided a timeline designation.

Recommendations for Policymakers

1

Collect as much relevant data as you can.

Collecting baseline data is important to understand the current situation and to use for monitoring and measuring success. The data collection should include all cultural institutions, physical heritage, tangible and intangible cultural assets, artists and art spaces, spatial distribution of cultural assets, cultural infrastructure, and so on. The team can use a variety of tools such as census data, online and in person surveys, focus groups, Key Informant Interviews, mapping exercises and other tools. The goal is to have a comprehensive baseline to analyze and interpret.

2

Bring equity to the center of planning.

It is important to address the issue of arts equity in planning for development of culture and arts in the city. It is more and more evident that access to the arts is not equally distributed among different populations in cities. Ensuring that lower income and disadvantaged groups have access to arts education and resources improves the wellbeing of these groups.

3

Define your goal for the cultural planning process.

Cities must be clear on the goal for cultural planning. Our review shows that many cities are concerned with associating the arts and culture sector with economic development. While this is novel, there are other reasons to embark on a cultural planning exercise based on each city's unique needs. For example, arts and culture have a vast impact in healing after disasters and conflicts. They can also help in engaging the groups that are traditionally left out of the planning process.

4

Have a spatial lens.

It is important to keep track of cultural spaces/institutions and the location of historic assets. In many instances, former industrial corridors and historic areas are attractive spaces for arts production. Furthermore, the planning should be cognizant of neighborhood level cultural infrastructure and per-capita arts/cultural spaces in different neighborhood. Landuse practices and zoning regulations can assist or restrict arts and cultural uses in cities.

5

Determine your implementation body.

Depending on the size of the city and its administrative and organizational structure, different implementation mechanisms can be applied. Some cities designate a standalone cultural planning agency while others embed different cultural programming within different agencies.

6

Decide who is going to pay for it and how.

The best option to finance arts and culture is a blend of public, private, and philanthropic funds. In some cases where economic development through creative industries and tourism is envisioned, public-private partnerships can work well. In other cases where an immediate return on investment is not foreseeable, a blend of public and philanthropic funds can be streamed to revitalize the arts and culture sector. Some cities have established semi-public corporations to invest in and fund the arts.

List of Plans Reviewed

Jurisdiction	Name of Plan	Year
City of Chicago	Chicago Cultural Plan	2012
Denver	Imagine Denver 2020	2016
Los Angeles County	Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative	2017
Liverpool	Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site Management Plan - 2017-2024	2016
City of Phoenix	Creative Sector Task Force Vision 2013-2018	2012
New York City	CreateNYC	2017
Washington DC	DC Cultural Plan	2019
Boston	Boston Creates	2016
London	Mayor of London Cultural Strategy	2018
Oakland	Belonging in Oakland	2018