



Recommendation: Promote cultural development and preservation, public art and public realm design

Strategy 1

Provide direct relief to artists, cultural workers, and cultural organizations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and lay the groundwork to cultivate a more equitable, resilient, and cohesive sector.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the vulnerabilities and challenges facing the arts and culture sector – a major part of the Massachusetts economy and critically important to our quality of life. Long-term closures and restrictions on in-person gatherings have decimated the revenues and all but eliminated the contract work that supports artists and cultural producers across the Commonwealth. According to data released by the Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) in March 2021, arts and cultural nonprofits reported more than \$588 million in lost revenue due to COVID-19 related cancellations, closures, and other impacts since March 2020. In surveys conducted by MCC, artists, art teachers, and other individuals in the arts and culture sector who live and work in every region of the state reported more than \$30.4 million in lost personal income and 67,986 cancelled gigs/jobs since March 2020. At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated fragility and inequity in the cultural sector. Low pay, the prevalence of gig and contract work, lack of access to traditional job benefits, an over-reliance on formal education (including graduate degrees such as a master’s in fine arts), and other inequitable hiring practices have restricted access to the field and favored artists and cultural workers with greater access to financial, social, and political capital. The result is a sector that is unable to support diverse talent, including people of color and people with disabilities, who are particularly vulnerable to disruption.

Creative expression and cultural representation and participation are fundamental to the human experience, health and well-being. As such, creating the policy conditions for arts and culture to thrive requires adoption of a cultural equity framework that affirms the value of all cultures and recognizes that systemic and institutional forms of oppression have erected barriers to cultural participation and self-determination, particularly for people of color. In addition to dismantling these barriers, achieving cultural equity requires expanding opportunity, reallocating resources, and developing capacity for ongoing advocacy and policy

change efforts. The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the cultural sector has only deepened these issues, demonstrating the need both to provide robust support for the sector as part of larger investments in the state's economic recovery and to provide direct support to artists and cultural workers so that they may fulfill their human and creative potential.

- ▶ **Action 1.1: Establish a new Massachusetts Cultural Council Program on Arts, Culture, and Heritage Policy tasked with promoting conditions that allow creative and cultural expression to flourish for all throughout the Commonwealth.** The MCC is currently working to provide an overarching vision and coordination of state efforts to promote recovery and resilience that will inform the development of a cultural policy and advocacy agenda. COVID-19 presents both a challenge and an opportunity to rethink how the state of Massachusetts can support this vital sector, now and for the future. A coordinated recovery effort can help establish new lines of communication and collaboration within the sector, align the sector with public health, housing, environment, and economic development priorities and lay the groundwork for permanent programs that outlive the pandemic.

The state should establish a new program area within MCC to facilitate coordination and collaboration across state, regional, and local entities that work in and provide resources to the arts and culture sector, including the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT), the Mass Downtown Initiative and Commission on Indian Affairs, MassDevelopment, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. In managing this program, MCC will have the opportunity to connect with regional and local agencies that are active in the arts and culture space.

This program will help direct individuals, organizations, and agencies to appropriate resources, coordinate the development and distribution of relief funding for the arts and culture sector, integrate creative and cultural workers into recovery efforts throughout the Commonwealth, and advocate for recovery programs and investments across the state to address the needs of individuals and organizations within the sector. Additionally, this program should provide clear guidance and communications, grounded in public health data, around reopening arts and cultural activity and integrating arts and culture into public life.

- ▶ **Action 1.2 Establish a Cultural Equity Task Force to ensure that the new MCC Program on Arts, Culture, and Heritage Policy focuses on issues of cultural equity as a key part of its mission.** This Task Force should include representatives from tribal historic preservation offices and/or entities that promote and preserve Native American culture in Massachusetts and New England; cultural organizations and individuals focused on promoting and preserving African American, Latinx, and Asian American history and culture in Massachusetts and New England; representatives

of community development corporations and community development financial institutions; and representatives working to promote access to and representation in arts and culture for people of color, individuals with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, incarcerated people, and other populations that face barriers to cultural access and participation. The Task Force should cultivate and strengthen networks of cultural producers and residents who face barriers to cultural expression or participation and cultural organizations led by, with, and/or in service of these communities; establish metrics and data collection efforts to measure indicators of equity in the cultural sector and workforce; and establish benchmarks for equitable public and private sector support, access to capital, and equitable funding of arts producing organizations, small creative businesses, community cultural centers, and collectives. By communicating and collaborating with community-based, regional, and municipal entities, the new Program on Arts, Culture, and Heritage Policy, along with the Cultural Equity Task Force, offer the promise of addressing critical issues affecting equity in the arts and culture sector.

► **Action 1.3: Establish an Equitable Culture Program to advance social and cultural equity across all levels of the cultural sector.** The program should be guided by the Cultural Equity Task Force and implemented through the MCC Program on Arts, Culture, and Heritage Policy. Such a program could engage in the following activities to advance equity in the arts:

- Research and share benchmarks and best and emerging practices for diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizational structures, governance, staffing, programming, hiring and procurement practices, and wages for arts and cultural organizations and other entities that hire or contract with cultural workers and artists;
- Identify, convene, and cultivate a learning network of community and cultural leaders focused on implementing anti-racist practices across all facets of organizational structure and culture;
- Establish a program among the Massachusetts Cultural Council Program on Arts, Culture, and Heritage Policy and other appropriate entities to provide training and resources for artists and cultural workers on topics including healthcare, tax assistance, business development, and labor rights - including organizing, advocacy, and unionization;
- Fund and bolster support for programs that expand access to cultural opportunities and participation and create new opportunities for populations that face barriers to preserving and practicing cultural traditions.

► **Action 1.4 Expand and streamline access to employment opportunities, financial relief, and other resources for workers and organizations in the arts and culture sector, including non-profits, independent businesses, and sole proprietors.** Artists and cultural workers have a unique and vital role to play in recovery and rebuilding efforts. As creative thinkers and community connectors, they often see solutions others don't, bring creativity to problem-solving, and are the linchpins of partnerships that build vital community connections. All levels of government (federal, state, and local) should engage in the following best practices:

- Contract with artists, cultural workers, and cultural organizations across a wide variety of public activities, including crisis response and recovery, economic development and workforce, housing development and rehabilitation, transportation infrastructure, climate mitigation and resilience, and public health;
- Encourage and assist the private sector to hire and contract with artists, cultural workers, and cultural organizations, with an emphasis on building creative and economic output for all parties to these transactions, and for the communities where they occur;
- Expand direct financial assistance to artists, teaching artists (including art teachers)¹, and cultural practitioners and provide explicit permission for artists (including performing artists), cultural workers (including independent contractors), and arts and cultural organizations to apply for relief funding, loans, tax credits, and other financial supports for entrepreneurs and small businesses; streamline application processes and reporting requirements; and increase investment in organizations led by and serving communities of color;
- Expand eligibility requirements for rent and mortgage relief, food assistance, and healthcare to include independent workers and workers with a combination of employment and other income sources; and
- Invest in capacity-building programs that can equip artists and cultural organizations with skills for a post-pandemic reality, including virtual program delivery, digital audience development and marketing, and online sales.

¹ A Teaching Artist is a professional visual, performing, or literary artist who works in schools and in the community. <https://www.creativeground.org/faq/what-teaching-artist#:~:text=The%20Association%20of%20Teaching%20Artists%20has%20compiled%20a,who%20works%20in%20schools%20and%20in%20the%20community.>

Best/emerging practice: Guaranteed income and creative workforce programs for artists. To support artists living and working in the City of San Francisco during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of San Francisco partnered with local organizations to launch two innovative programs. [San Francisco Creative Corps](#) – a partnership among the San Francisco mayor’s office, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA), the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, and the San Francisco Parks Alliance – has employed artists as community health ambassadors to promote healthy behavior during the pandemic. Subsequently, the Office of Racial Equity at the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, YBCA, Grants for the Arts, and the San Francisco Arts Commission joined forces to launch the [Guaranteed Income Pilot for the City of San Francisco](#). Administered by YBCA, this program provides 130 San Francisco-based artists a \$1,000 monthly stipend for six months. California Governor Gavin Newsom has since signaled support for an expanded creative workforce program; in January 2020, he announced a proposal to dedicate \$15 million for a similar pilot program at the state level. In May 2021, Bill SB 628, the [Creative Workforce Development Act](#), which would require the California Workforce Development Board and the state Arts Council to work collaboratively to design the program, was passed by the Senate and now awaits passage by the Assembly. A similar program run by Arts Wisconsin with support from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), [“We’re All In” Creative Workforce Program](#) is already operating in nine communities across the state.

- ▶ **Action 1.5: Establish a variety of stable, robust funding sources including but not limited to a “Percent for Art” program to engage artists and cultural workers in community development and public infrastructure projects and advance an equitable and innovative recovery for the Commonwealth.** The extended closure of arts and culture organizations and venues, shifts to online learning, and the cessation of in-person events and activities that generate contracts and revenue streams for artists and arts workers has put the arts and culture sector in crisis. Prior to the pandemic, public funding for arts and culture was limited and distributed across many grant programs, municipalities, and government entities. Establishing a \$200 million stabilization fund for the state’s cultural sector through S.2246, “An Act to Rebuild the Commonwealth’s Cultural Future, filed by Senator Edward Kennedy responds to this direct and urgent need. To ensure creative, culturally responsive solutions to ongoing challenges facing the Commonwealth, the state should establish a statewide Percent for Art policy to unleash creative imagination in the development, design, and improvement of public works. This program would enable arts and creativity to permeate the physical spaces of our communities. In addition, the Commonwealth should establish new funding to be administered by the MCC to support creative community development that enables all forms of

creative and cultural expression to support, rebuild, and sustain our civic life and communities. Funding through both Percent for Art and creative community development will ensure that artistry, creativity, and cultural expression will play an even stronger role as we rebuild a post-COVID economy and society.

Best/emerging practice: King County, Washington supports a robust creative economy through [two complementary funding strategies](#). The county's 1 Percent for Art Ordinance mandates that construction projects done by county government direct one percent of eligible parts of the budget towards public art portions of the project. Additionally, the county's lodging tax authorizes cities and counties to impose an excise tax of two percent on the sale of or charge made for the furnishing of lodging for periods of fewer than 30 consecutive days. At least 37.5 percent of this tax revenue must fund art, cultural and heritage facilities, as well as the performing arts.

Best/emerging practice: Minnesota's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund receives 19.75 percent of the sales tax revenue resulting from the state's Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment to support arts, arts education and arts access, and to preserve Minnesota's history and cultural heritage. A portion of the dollars appropriated from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund is distributed through grant programs administered by the Minnesota Department of Administration, the Minnesota Historical Society, the Minnesota Humanities Center, the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, and the Minnesota State Arts Board.

Strategy 2

Launch a creative community development program that affirms creative and cultural expression as a basic human need, expands opportunities for creative and cultural expression and participation for people of all ages and backgrounds, and advances equitable community investment and preservation.

Arts, culture, and heritage make the places where we live, work, and play healthier, more connected, and more appealing. Additionally, access to arts education, cultural connections, and lifelong opportunities for creative and cultural expression is vital to the mental health and well-being of individuals and communities. Moving beyond recovery from COVID-19 to a resilient and just Commonwealth requires investment in creative community development as a foundation for healthy, adaptable, and equitable communities.

- ▶ **Action 2.1 Enact policies for residential properties, neighborhoods and development to ensure that homes equitably provide space for private cultural practices and creative expression.** Limit the ability of municipalities to restrict the use of homes for creative and cultural pursuits (e.g., through noise and home-occupation or accessory-use regulations). Promote residential building codes and programs to offset costs to ensure that new multi-family or small-lot residential development integrates sound proofing and sustainable waste management to mitigate potential nuisance impacts of creative expression in dense neighborhoods.
- ▶ **Action 2.2: Invest in lifelong access to arts and culture across the Commonwealth.** To ensure a flexible, skilled, and resilient workforce, the Commonwealth should strengthen programs that provide culturally resonant arts education and creative workforce training and support. For example, the Cultural Equity Task Force should advise MCC on conducting an equity assessment of access to culturally responsive curricular and extra-curricular arts education and programs and work to address equity gaps. The MCC Program on Arts, Culture, and Heritage Policy should work with other state entities to expand investment in arts and culture for public health, community building and youth development initiatives; coordinate skill-building and job opportunities for the creative workforce; facilitate access to culturally resonant programming and creative expression for older adults; and create opportunities for representation from arts and culture organizations on MassHire Workforce boards.

Best/emerging practice: Here in Massachusetts, the Essex County Community Foundation has partnered with organizations across the Commonwealth to provide [capacity building trainings](#) for artists and non-profit cultural organizations in the wake of COVID-19. In Seattle, [The Creative Advantage](#) program emerged from a racial equity assessment of arts education in Seattle public schools and works to expand equitable access to arts education through a partnership among the Seattle public school district, the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Seattle Foundation, and more than 100 community arts partners.

- ▶ **Action 2.3 Incentivize opportunities to integrate artists, cultural workers, cultural organizations, community-based organizations, and creative businesses into community and economic development initiatives, development review, public realm improvements, and infrastructure projects.** The MCC Program on Arts, Culture, and Heritage Policy should work with MassDevelopment to expand aspects of the Transformative Development Initiative statewide - for example by linking creative placemaking investments with economic development programs (e.g., the Under-Utilized Property Program) to spur creative placemaking and economic revitalization initiatives, particularly in communities hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, MCC may advocate for state departments and agencies to assign additional points to grant applications that meet objectives such as facilitating cross-sector partnerships among artists, arts

and cultural organizations, community-based organizations, and local businesses, and allow grant funds to support compensation for creative and community partners. Grant-making agencies should establish mechanisms that allow communities to articulate and advocate for their visions for community investment and prioritize applications that demonstrate the potential to support minority-and-women-owned business enterprises and to expand access to resources and decision-making for residents who have been targeted for racial, cultural, and linguistic exclusion, as well as community-based organizations that serve those resident populations. Potential opportunities include the Local Rapid Recovery Plan Program, MassDOT Complete Streets and Shared Streets and Spaces programs, the Massachusetts Department of Health's Community Health and Healthy Aging Funds, and the Urban Agenda Grant Program. The Cultural Equity Task force should advise the MCC Program on Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy on the development of requirements, incentives, benchmarks, and evaluation processes to ensure that principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion shape the purpose and structure of all funding opportunities.

- ▶ **Action 2.4: Expand access to private spaces of cultural production and participation. Incentivize opportunities to expand cultural space development and management and expand access to capital for developing, upgrading, and preserving cultural space with an emphasis on racial equity and equitable access for all ages and abilities.** This effort should be informed by an equity assessment of existing funding programs and incentives for development and preservation of cultural facilities. New incentive programs and grant programs should align with historic preservation tax credits as well as energy efficiency and ADA accessibility incentive programs to allow for environmentally friendly accessible retrofits designed to accommodate cultural uses. Bring together historic preservation stakeholders with local cultural councils and regional entities that serve immigrant communities to identify opportunities and barriers to adaptive reuse of historic structures for arts and culture. Explore new models to support cultural space development and funding to foster equitable recovery, identifying the specific needs of space operators with focus on those that serve and are run by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) artists. Establish programs to provide technical assistance for cultural space operators to ensure that spaces can remain viable.

Best/emerging practice: Seattle's [Cultural Space Agency](#) works to preserve, create and activate cultural space in the City of Seattle. The agency works with artists and arts organizations to strengthen their role in charting the future of their creative spaces, and with developers and builders to incorporate arts and culture into new projects. It offers a variety of capacity-building programs, including a fund that supports cultural facilities projects for communities that have been excluded from owning, managing and leasing property, and the Build Art Space Equitably (BASE) certification program, a cohort training model for people of color that brings together individuals with varied expertise for shared learning around cultural community organizing and commercial property development.

Strategy 3

Cultivate a more welcoming, accessible, and inclusive public realm.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the importance of our shared spaces. As schools, community centers, places of worship, libraries, cafes, and concert halls shuttered, the gaps were filled by parks, playgrounds, streets, sidewalks, trails, and beaches. Over the last year, these spaces have provided vital opportunities for people to gather safely and seek respite from the pandemic's physical and psychological tolls. The pandemic also spurred the Commonwealth to expand investments in the public realm and relax permitting requirements for outdoor dining and other activities. This shift gave municipalities and residents the opportunity to reimagine their streets and shared spaces. Yet inequities persist in terms of who has access to the public realm. This is particularly true in working-class communities of color, where lack of trust on the part of local leaders and decision-makers – coupled with funding and language barriers – often impedes the right of residents to access, activate, and enjoy shared spaces. If the pandemic has demonstrated the critical need for a more equitable public realm, then an equitable recovery from COVID-19 requires purposeful investment in our social and cultural infrastructure, guided by knowledge of the barriers and challenges that currently limit people's access to and full enjoyment of these spaces. Shaping a public realm that supports the rights of all residents to be, thrive, express, and connect will be essential as we return to public life and public spaces together.

- ▶ **Action 3.1: Incentivize local partnerships that expand public participation in the making and sharing of history.** The importance of Massachusetts to the founding of the United States and its political traditions remains central to local and regional narratives of identity and heritage. Yet, too often, the stories that preserve this history obscure the experiences of Indigenous peoples, people of color, immigrants and others, and deny centuries of exclusion and persecution. These gaps in our understanding of history hinder our ability to build communities and institutions that are inclusive and welcoming to the richly diverse populations that live, work, and play

in our state. Partnerships that bridge the gap between the arts, heritage, and community development sectors can play a key role in shifting these foundational narratives and cultivating community capacity to envision and realize just futures and thriving communities. MCC and MOTT could work with the MHC to encourage local and regional partnerships that contribute to a more complete story of our shared past through the arts and humanities. Such partnerships could include collaborations among local cultural councils, regional tourism boards, community-based organizations, libraries, archives, museums, historical commissions, and historical societies; artist residencies in libraries and archives, as well as efforts to reinterpret and reimagine commemorative landscapes and historic sites through the arts and humanities.

Best/emerging practice: The New England Foundation for the Art’s [Collective Imagination for Spatial Justice](#) and [Public Art for Spatial Justice](#) grants programs support teams of artists, creatives, culture bearers, cultural organizers, and/or community-based collaborators to do the important work of imagining and creating public art that fosters and contributes to more just futures for our public spaces and public culture. Program guidance encourages projects that dismantle legacies of racism and white supremacy culture – for example, by disrupting harmful historic narratives that perpetuate injustice.

- ▶ **Action 3.2: Fund the development and implementation of a cultural equity approach to guide improvements to statewide, regional, and local cultural and heritage tourism programs.** This approach should prioritize communities that have historically not received the economic benefits of cultural and heritage tourism, particularly working-class communities of color, and expand access to tools and resources to support historic and cultural preservation efforts led by these communities. Specific supports could include funding through MOTT to support communities and neighborhoods in documenting, sharing, and promoting historic and cultural assets; technical and financial assistance to support the creation of cultural and historic districts; incentives for collaboration that advance broader economic and community development goals (for example, among community development corporations, Main Street programs and historic preservation stakeholders); and expanded state historic preservation funding for arts-led adaptive reuse and economic development efforts.
- ▶ **Action 3.3: Convene a statewide working group to develop and issue guidelines for inclusive design, management, and programming of the public realm.** This working group should comprise the Cultural Equity Task Force, the Massachusetts Office on Disability, the Massachusetts Commission on Indian Affairs, and other relevant state agencies (e.g., the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Department of Housing & Community Development, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation). It should evaluate

existing guidance and practices that govern access to and activations of public spaces across the Commonwealth and explore options to eliminate barriers to access and clarify and streamline permitting requirements. Recommendations should be developed with an eye toward universal design, ADA accessibility, and racial justice and address opportunities to:

- Establish a right to nature and the public realm (for example, through an act modeled on Chapter 91 of the Massachusetts General Laws);
- Incentivize and fund municipalities to streamline permitting processes and ease language barriers, administrative burdens, fees, and rules associated with a wide range of cultural activities, including temporary art installations, festivals, parades, busking, vending, and block parties;
- Establish multi-municipality agreements for permitting processes and insurance requirements; and
- Review design and signage guidelines and implement changes to make these spaces more inviting and accessible for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities and incorporate community safety approaches that do not rely on policing and surveillance.