



Lessons for the Future

Community Services

10.27.2022



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Executive Summary

In September 1565 Spanish explorers established St. Augustine, Florida as the first City in what would eventually become the United States of America. The purpose of this colonization was nothing more than utilitarian - a means to establish trade corridors. Now, more than 450 years later, our cities have evolved to serve a much larger purpose; they have seen the heyday of industrial boom, the abandonment of white flight and the resurgence of the urban lifestyle - through it all, government has assumed an increasingly significant role - however silent - role in the lives of residents. Once providers of physical infrastructure and purveyors of law and order, governments now find themselves charged with delivering a vast array of services, solving wicked problems and preparing for the challenges of the future.

As the delegation of representatives selected to provide leadership in implementing solutions in the space of Community Services, we believe the Grand Challenge of **Developing New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement** is the foundation upon which organizations can collaborate to protect and advance democracy, strengthen social and economic development, ensure environmental sustainability and manage technological changes. We view government as a platform, a facilitator and a convener and that the problems our communities face in the coming years will only be exacerbated by failure to collaborate across agencies, jurisdictions, sectors, communities and levels of government.

Our value proposition is that stronger collaboration between people, their governments and private/non-profit organizations will lead to better served, more resilient and engaged communities - and cultural institutions are the untapped resource to eliminate barriers, build trust and solve problems. In order to deliver this, there must be intentional infrastructure around sustainable funding, collaboration and governance.

Table 1: Focus Areas

SOCIAL

Reimagine the role of cultural institutions in addressing the most pressing issues facing our communities; leverage existing high-trust relationships to align resources toward a common goal.

ECONOMIC

Embrace creative placemaking as a cornerstone of economic development; invite the arts and culture sectors into planning discussions and invest in arts as a vital component of community development.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Establish an emergency preparedness and response plan that proactively designates cultural institutions as a critical resource to residents and first-responders during natural disasters.

Array of Programs

The approaches to Community Services as a public good varies vastly nationwide and a microcosm of that diversity can be seen in the organizations selected to participate in this convening. For the purposes of this exercise, Community Services refers to public departments/programs/initiatives within the functional areas of: Libraries, Arts & Culture, Parks & Recreation. Note, when making a general observation about shared roles, these unique areas will be referenced collectively as Cultural Institutions.

Cursory research into Community Services often leads to social services sector work or unpaid work that benefits the community, which provides an opportunity to explore the increasingly significant role Cultural Institutions play in supporting the basic needs of residents in their communities as well as beg the question: whether these organizations should be the provider, or the platform for provision?

Programs and Services

Community Services is a wide umbrella of programs and initiatives organized in many ways across local governments, with similar and overlapping missions. This umbrella encompasses Libraries, Arts & Culture, and Parks & Recreation. The following table provides an overview of core services and is not meant to be all-inclusive; surprising services that Cultural Institutions often provide are: free snacks/food boxes, cultural asset mapping, artist-in-residence programming, social service navigation, and even human services focused support such as Peer Support/Navigator programs. The table provides highlights with more extensive information following on Arts & Culture, Libraries and Parks and Recreation.

Table 2: Programs and Services

DEPARTMENT	PROGRAM AREA	DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES
Arts & Culture	Special Events	Community services host special events like community festivals, farmers markets, and other celebrations to enhance local connections.
	Performing Arts	Performing arts can include musical events, interactive art exhibits, community showcases and much more.
	Art Exhibitions	Publicly accessible art, through purposeful public art placement as well as artistic development spaces, provide opportunities for community members to enrich themselves and others.
	Community Arts	Community arts can be as simple as a sidewalk chalk children's art space or as complex as a regionally funded community arts commission to fund and place public art pieces.
	Cultural Centers	Cultural centers offer spaces for all members of a specific community-by region, ethnic groups, or age ranges-to connect with their peers in a place of easy access and programmatic offerings.

DEPARTMENT	PROGRAM AREA	DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES
Libraries	Collections	Library collections vary but should be broad and deep enough to meet the needs of all community members including children, teens and adults in a variety of formats including print materials, digital materials and audio.
	Programming	Library programs span multiple age and interest ranges typically breaking down into programming for youth such as storytimes, for children and teens like STEAM programs, and for adults like book clubs or English Language Learning groups.
	Reference	Reference services allow specialized library staff to assist members of the community with their information inquiries.
	Archives	Some libraries provide archival services, housing important local and state documents for accessibility into future generations.
	Services to Priority Populations	Priority populations also vary by location but could include add-on services to vulnerable populations such as old adults, communities that don't natively speak English, the homebound, veterans, etc.
	Digital Inclusion	Digital inclusion remains a needed programmatic area in libraries, particularly in rural communities where the public library may be the only site with reliable internet connectivity. Additional services could include circulating MiFi units and laptops, parking lot/interior WiFi services and digital literacy training.
Parks & Recreation	Senior Services	For some Parks and Recreation departments, Senior Centers are a space that is dedicated to the recreational, emotional, and physical well being of older adults. These spaces can host senior fitness programs, gaming events, socialization times, and meal delivery services.
	Youth Camps/Classes	After school and during off-school seasons, youth classes and camps remain a popular option for families to provide engaging and invigorating spaces and services for children.
	Rentals	Community rentals, of either park spaces like picnic areas or of community rooms at recreation centers, provide a shared resource to the community for use at life's big events and moments.
	Parks/ Public Space Maintenance	Parks and open green spaces are a critical piece of infrastructure. Having a walkable, accessible and usable green space allows residents to participate in nature regardless of housing status.
	Recreation Centers	Recreation centers can offer classes on parks and gardening, fitness equipment and classes, as well as other nature themed programming.

LIBRARIES

Public libraries provide access to books, materials, digital collections, media and other information sources to the public - almost universally free of charge. They provide internet access and technology, as well as the assistance necessary to utilize these resources. Though the internet is ubiquitous and a prerequisite for participation in modern society, there still are significant sections of the public who wouldn't have access to it without their local public library or their staff to teach and support its use.

Libraries are bastions of intellectual freedom that provide access to a wide variety of viewpoints, allowing individuals to explore ideas and form their own opinions. However, there is a tension in our increasingly polarized society over whether libraries should be “*neutral*” or embody equity, diversity, inclusion and justice. Increasingly, librarians push back against the assumption that providing access to “*all sides*” of an issue means providing a platform for hateful, intimidating, dangerous or dehumanizing speech that targets a specific community, which erodes its ability to serve as a safe space for all.

Library buildings provide space for studying, reading, learning, leisure and gathering and in many cities and towns are the only such space that is fully accessible to anyone during open hours, acting as the de facto community center. With access to enriching materials and experiences for children of all ages, opportunities for teens to develop leadership skills, adult programming and older-adult services, the library is a place of lifelong learning.

With the continual erosion of many shared common spaces and social services, libraries have become essential social infrastructure helping people from all walks of life, particularly those who are marginalized or disadvantaged. Whether it is assisting a struggling individual to find much needed employment, providing a space for teens to socialize and explore their own thoughts and ideas without interference or giving a platform to a member of a long-oppressed group to give voice to their community, the library endeavors to create welcoming spaces for all.

PARKS

Parks protect and preserve the biodiversity and the natural, archaeological and cultural resources at park sites and open spaces; additionally, depending on the community, may also maintain beaches, creeks and urban forests.

In addition to maintaining a city or town's public, outdoor spaces, Parks & Recreation departments provide multi-use facilities and organize activities for all ages, often also offering programs targeted to youth and seniors. Activities are low cost and bring people together to socialize. Parks departments create space for the community to engage with their surroundings and each other in a welcoming environment.

ARTS & CULTURE

Arts & Culture are often integrated into a community's libraries or parks departments, but in some cases are a unique division of a government entity. Arts & Culture services create unique, culturally-responsive opportunities for neighborhoods to co-create their built environment whether it be through cultural centers, public art or community programming. Arts & Culture divisions invest in spaces specifically

designed for use by artists and culture workers and often provide professional development resources and may offer monetary support for creative placemaking projects. In addition, Arts & Culture departments may also support film and music production, cultural celebrations, festivals and special exhibitions.

Trends

SOCIAL

- **Political Polarization:** Even the most basic functions of government, that could previously be agreed upon by individuals of all political stripes, have become emotionally fraught battlegrounds. In many unfortunate circumstances the gears of government have ground to a halt, with individuals/groups waging a culture war at the site of vital government services. Local governments, the heart of the country's democracy, need to foster relationships of trust and openness within their communities.
- **Collective Trauma:** Local government employees have been under a tremendous amount of daily stress for years. The [2022 Urban Library Trauma Study](#) found that staff across all levels of these Cultural Institutions report feeling stressed, experiencing violent or aggressive interactions, and only feeling moderately safe physically. This is simply not sustainable for a protracted period of time and will require creative solutions in the space of wellness, compensation and employee engagement.
- **Demand for Welcoming Spaces:** With the tragedy of the commons only barely in the rearview mirror, there has been an increased demand for libraries, arts centers and recreation facilities to serve as welcoming, open spaces for all members of society. While this is undoubtedly a necessary endeavor, there is also the inevitable culture clash that results when individuals from wildly disparate walks of life encounter each other in the public space. And beyond that, these welcoming, open-door policies have revealed a segment of the population that desperately needs the support of basic social services. Local governments are forced to navigate a delicate balancing act of serving individuals seeking social services and those who wish to utilize Cultural Institutions for their more traditional purposes.
- **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:** Perhaps more so than anything else, the last few years have shown that not all voices are heard in equal volume, and some are not heard at all. At the local level government organizations are not only responsible for creating space at the table, but also ensuring that - when shown to their seats - individuals can be confident that their voices are not just heard, but actively listened to. This must be accomplished through a mixture of open dialog, equitable funding distribution determined through rigor to address gaps in public service.
- **Privacy:** While not explicitly stated anywhere in the constitution, the Bill of Rights and several constitutional amendments heavily imply a right to privacy for the populace. But how that manifests in various governmental departments is not standardized in any way. Departments like the County Assessor's Office and the Public Health Department must maintain personally-identifiable information to successfully perform their duties - juxtapose this with departments like libraries, which actively work to retain as little information as possible in order to maintain user privacy. As cybercrime and even more low-tech phishing schemes continue to grow in number and complexity - and with mistrust in government surveillance extraordinarily

high among some segments of the population, local governments must strike a careful balance between collecting the information they need to best serve their communities and protecting the privacy of their co-creators against malicious actors and accidental misuse.

ECONOMIC

- **Do More with Less:** Government organizations are increasingly pressured to expand service despite little-to-no growth in available revenue; organizations are making significant cuts to budgets while attempting to increase service levels. This has bore innovations like priority-based budgeting, social-impact bonds and other process improvement - designed to help organizations meet expectations in the absence of traditional resources. The struggle is often where to draw the line between efficiency and the reality that high-quality service requires adequate resources.
- **Privatization:** The call to run government like a business is hardly new, but in recent years the push in that direction has become more transactional. With tight budgets, many local government agencies turn to private contractors for assistance and, while this can often have the positive effect of reducing the face-value cost, it can result in unintended consequences like poor service quality, inefficiency or pass-through costs to residents. Amenities like contract-managed recreation leagues and arts classes may be easier to manage, but are often inaccessible to lower-income residents without subsidization.
- **Technological Reliance:** Through a mixture of social and commercial forces, technology in the United States continues to whip forward at a breakneck pace. And while technology in many ways can be used as a kind of equalizing force - streamlining communication, giving individuals access to more information, and creating dynamic and diverse new realms of entertainment - it can also unfortunately become cost prohibitive for lower-income groups within the community, thereby limiting contributions to the collective dialog.

ENVIRONMENTAL

- **COVID-19:** While not necessarily a trend as such, COVID-19 has unmistakably made its mark on local government. Local government services had to be completely reimaged on an extremely tight timetable in order to maintain basic functions. Public libraries, recreation and arts departments in particular were upended, as so many of their services relied on in-person interactions or gatherings. While vaccines and growing immunity have helped to turn the corner, the reality is that there will be future disasters - natural and human - that require local government employees to be extremely flexible and radically creative. Local governments must understand that libraries, parks, and public arts are not a luxury during a disaster, but a vital lifeline to an anxious population when much else seems uncertain.
- **Disaster Preparedness & Response:** All public services are called upon during disasters to respond, relieve and rebuild. Public facilities such as libraries and recreation centers are heating/cooling centers during record temperature days, and any public facility can be called upon to temporarily care for those who become unhoused due to a disaster like fire, flood, earthquake or hurricane. Cultural Institutions are often overlooked and therefore inadequately prepared to perform their roles in times of emergency. As the climate crisis is poised to continually worsen, it is imperative that all governmental services are incorporated into community disaster relief plans.

The Challenges

Communities are facing increasingly complex social, environmental and economic challenges of which no one entity is unilaterally responsible for or capable of addressing. Design theorists Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber coined the term *Wicked Problem* in 1973 - assigning a descriptive language to the problems that society struggles to identify a lasting, universal or simple solution for. Issues such as climate change, poverty and homelessness are multifaceted and continue to push organizational comfort with collaborative governance; however - without co-creation, solutions identified will fail to address the full scope of the problem at hand. A pre-requisite for co-creation and collaborative governance - beyond the obvious elements such as shared values - is trust.

A [2021 Gallup poll](#) gauging Americans' Trust in Government shows that, while local governments are viewed as more capable of handling problems than State and Federal counterparts, trust remains low. Chapman University conducts an annual survey of Americans' greatest fears - holding the #1 spot for six consecutive years: Government Corruption. Conversely, a trademark of cultural institutions is their status as high-trust, high-value community assets that - to the average resident - don't feel like part of the traditional government apparatus. Cultural institutions deal in experiences, enrichment, access to resources and wonder - they are powerful tools for placemaking, community-building and civic engagement. A poignant example can be found in the critical role libraries played in the 2020 Census - ensuring that even digitally isolated communities had access to the information and technology necessary to be counted. In this same example, the trust between public libraries and their communities helped to dispel misinformation surrounding the purpose/use of census information; 78% of Americans view their libraries as a trustworthy source of accurate and reliable information.

Cultural institutions are often called upon in the eleventh hour to referee, assuage fears and mend bridges when the stakes are high - but, **what if we proactively and intentionally invited cultural institutions to be a partner in problem-solving?** The relationship these organizations have with people from all walks of life are unparalleled - the social capital they wield might bring to the proverbial table groups that would never engage otherwise.

SOCIAL

Third places can be identified as those unique spots in people's lives that follow after home (first place) and work/school (second place). A Third Place can be a community gathering spot, a space for people to relax or recreate before or after the rigors of the day. The [Brookings Institute](#) also identifies this elusive Third Space as a place where people of different social groups and standings can feel "*leveled out*" and treated as equals or peers. Third Spaces are even more essential when reviewed in the context of technological growth, where some populations communicate more frequently through a screen than they do face-to-face. Having an in-person place that is open to all at no cost beyond what is already paid through taxes, creates space for common ground and community-building away from the constant stream of social media and other online interfaces. The [National Park Services](#) may have said it best with their Healthy Parks, Healthy People initiative: "*parks (and other cultural institutions) are the great social*

equalizers. They benefit the health and wellbeing of all who engage with their spaces, services, and staff.” When developing stronger plans for shared governance and problem-solving, utilizing spaces that people already flock to and trust allows conversations to start on stable ground.

OPPORTUNITIES

COLOCATION OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Relying on Cultural Institution staff to fill social service gaps is not a sustainable solution for the future - the question at hand is: can we identify processes and partnerships that allow community service providers to be a synapse rather than a source?

Co-locating social service hubs with other community service spaces is not new - but it is still novel; one of the most notable examples in the United States comes from Chicago, in which Mayor Rahm Emanuel exercised executive leadership to establish a [collaborative partnership](#) between the City’s housing authority and public library system to build mini-branches into new affordable housing projects. Another [example from Encinitas, CA](#) shows how community centers can become a refuge for unhoused residents and these organizations have sought collaborative partnerships to facilitate resource connection and social service navigation.

There is a strong argument for capitalizing on the geographically-diverse locations and high-trust relationships Cultural Institutions have to improve access to social safety-net resources. But with this comes an ideological shift not only for executive level thinkers, but also for front-line staff. **How might we remove the bureaucratic obstacles to intergovernmental agreements, grants and public-private partnerships to ensure community needs are met with expediency?**

FOCUS ON CO-CREATION

Rather than assume the aspirations of the community, public service organizations can leverage Cultural Institutions to bring creatives, thinkers, innovators, problem-solvers and other engaged residents into the discussion about the largest issues at hand. By inviting these minds to help envision the community they want to live in, organizations can identify unique solutions to persistent problems. This approach takes additional time, resources and an appetite for risk that might not be necessary when applying incremental, conservative solutions to ever-evolving problems - but as demonstrated through urbanist research such as Peter Kageyama’s, tools like co-creation and deliberative democracy often yield more creative solutions while also giving agency to community members. **How might we reach outside the halls of government or pool of traditional stakeholders to tap into the love residents have for their community?**

ECONOMIC

With a potential recession looming, Cultural Institutions would be remiss to not begin bracing for reductions in available funding, while gearing up for increased service demand. The [National Park and Recreation Association](#) found that in the Great Recession, local government leaders deemed funding for public parks as “discretionary” and “a luxury” - at the same time, the general public began to lean more

on *seemingly* free services as a way to offset the impact of recreation and leisure on their own shrinking budgets. During this same time, libraries saw increased interest in library cards, higher volume of material checkouts and unprecedented demand for access to public-use technology. Beyond community need, the presence of Cultural Institutions has a demonstrated economic impact:

- [The American Library Association](#) has for years touted that libraries are forces of economic development, including simply increasing home assessment values in dwellings relatively near to a branch library location.
- The [National Assembly of State Arts Agencies](#) found in 2017 that the percentage of Federal dollars flowing to arts organizations comprised 0.004% of the national budget. However, data from that same year showed that the National Endowment for the Arts showed that more than 40% of the funding flowed to rural communities, which were much less likely to be able to locally support arts initiatives and spaces.
- Access to parks and green spaces are a key consideration in rating the livability of a community. The [American Planning Association](#) points back to a turn-of-the-century study that demonstrated a correlation between investment in parks and the desirability of a community - a hypothesis that has been proven again and again.

Arts and cultural spaces, libraries and parks must continue to highlight their work in support of a healthy financial ecosystem, and need to be at the decision-making table as the nation's economic status pivots.

OPPORTUNITIES

ARTS & CULTURE MICROGRANTS

Municipalities can pool resources with nonprofit partners to provide seed funding to support and sustain key arts initiatives that might otherwise remain unfunded. As little as \$1,000 can be the boost necessary to kickstart a project that can have ample future returns. The [City of Long Beach, CA](#) offers microgrants for community art projects which are free and open to the public, supporting both the individual financial needs of the selected artists and providing a more robust public arts scene. **How might we design shared governance processes that bolster investment (financial and social) in the nonprofits and actively engaged citizens that participate in government?**

INVEST IN COMMON-GOOD RESOURCES

Public goods like parks, library materials and public art can be seen as recreational assets in times of economic boom; however, when the economy is pitching downward these resources become beacons for individuals looking for a safe place to spend time, resources to upskill for a new job, access to technology or free content for those who can't afford to purchase private materials anymore. Even in times of economic prosperity, many of a community's most vulnerable residents are not financially positioned to use their limited resources on what can be seen as leisure; access to these resources serves a social purpose in our communities and has a measurable return that far outweighs the investment. **How might we protect investment in common-good resources in moments where organizational budgets are faced with declining revenue and increasing reliance on other core services?**

ENVIRONMENTAL

Cultural Institutions feel the immediate and residual impacts of environmental concerns facing the community. The [EveryLibrary Institute](#) outlines the role Cultural Institutions like libraries play in the wake of disaster: *“The library is an information hub for all types of disasters. In many cases, they’ve been known to provide shelter and resources to victims of earthquakes, hurricanes, or shootings.”* Similarly, recreation centers become refuge for families fleeing the path of hurricanes, or the community-meeting spot in times of crisis. In the aftermath of environmental catastrophe, public art becomes a mechanism for healing.

OPPORTUNITIES

EQUIP CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Cultural institutions like parks, recreation centers, and libraries are utilized as emergency services spaces during environmental situations such as fires, floods, and hurricanes. But they are also used for the more mundane or regularly occurring situations that arise due to climate change-specifically. When local health districts call for people to find locations to regulate their temperatures, they might suggest that people go to a [shopping center or a movie theater](#). That is not always economically viable, so known community resources without an impact on a consumer’s wallet can become a much more viable option. **How might we more intentionally design collaborative relationships between public health and public safety organizations and community service providers to ensure that Cultural Institutions are equipped to support an influx of residents seeking emergency support?**

CAPITALIZE ON THE SHARING ECONOMY

Cultural Institutions provide access to unique, high-value resources that are cost-prohibitive to acquire personally, have a limited use or are simply unavailable for individual consumption; for example, a 3D laser printer, olympic-size swimming pool or a rare piece of artwork are unlikely to be found in the average American household. Yet, these assets represent an opportunity for all - regardless of socioeconomic status - to experience the wonder these items bring. Beyond access, there is an environmental benefit to reducing single-use consumption; for example, at the Denver Public Library a popular book can be checked out 40+ times before being taken out of circulation. **How might we reinvigorate collective consumption behavior to increase the return-on-investment for public goods and reduce the environmental impact of single-use consumption.**

GO GREEN

Cultural Institutions represent a significant amount of a municipality’s real property; as such, there is an opportunity to make small changes that have a large impact on a community’s carbon footprint. By reducing energy consumption with smart lighting, providing access to simple amenities like bottle-filling stations, selecting native plants and other environmentally-conscious measures, Cultural Institutions can minimize adverse impacts of their service provision. However, these facilities are often riddled with deferred maintenance or have other critical repairs that outweigh “nice-to-have” green updates; **how might we prioritize modernization and climate-friendly improvements in our community’s most high-use facilities?**

Case Studies

In the following pages, you will find examples of how cultural institutions have created critical intersections between traditionally siloed sectors of public and private enterprise to address social, economic and environmental challenges facing our communities. These examples serve to inspire public administrators to set organizational expectations that prioritize collaborative governance, resource outcomes rather than agencies and remediate the fragmentation of critical processes for our most vulnerable communities.

SOCIAL

LORTON LIBRARY, COMMUNITY CENTER AND PARK

Located in Fairfax County, a 1.15 million resident county in Northern Virginia, the community of Lorton has typically been underfunded for infrastructure and community supportive services. A prior elected official from this community is often cited as saying that Lorton used to be known as the “*armpit of Fairfax County*” because it was a location where people had to live but not where they wanted to live. Government facilities located in this community in the early 1900’s through the 1980’s included a County landfill, a County jail, a small library and an overtaxed road system-but not much else.

As the County grew and began looking at ways to incorporate equity measures into cultural and recreational facilities, the idea of a larger library and community center for this part of the County took root. Over many years and community engagement sessions, funding for a larger library and a new community center on a current county owned site took root. Community trust in government needed to be expanded slowly and through purposeful measures and actions. The old Lorton jail complex was decommissioned and turned into the nationally acclaimed Lorton Workhouse arts center. The landfill was closed and the County is in beginning talks to use the natural incline on site for a large indoor ski slope. And the humble 10,000 square foot library began to take shape as the future home of a multi-use facility.

The Lorton Library has long been a stable spot for the community along the busy Route 1 corridor; a quick spot to drop off books, participate in a storytime or hop on a computer. But with a newly elected local official in place, prior ideas of a ‘gateway’ to Lorton, a single stop municipal complex took on new energy and dedicated funding. Instead of a simple renovation of this community library, a renovation plus expansion was put into the queue to include a new 30,000 square foot community and senior center complete with gymnasium. The community trust built up through those prior revitalizations bore fruit when the new community center received a positive vote from the whole county with a bond funded for the new space in 2018. The Library and Community Center project commenced construction in 2020 and the facility opened to the public in October 2022.

This new space emphasizes all the good that can come of building a civic commons, an easy to access route for a local community to access government services. The renovated library features a quiet study room for those in need of silent contemplation but also houses a fully enclosed teen space for gaming

and homework time. The children's area is park themed to mimic the several acre park across the street, completed with three new playground sets and a walking trail around the property. The joint lobby invites community members to engage with all aspects of the facility, including the community center's gym, art room, sensory space and fitness rooms. An anchor nonprofit, the Lorton Community Action Center, acts as a food pantry and emergency support network for people in need. And to tie it all back together, art from local exhibitors at the Lorton workhouse are hanging their work in the library branch. The ribbon cutting celebration saw more than 500 people streaming through the doors, eager to engage with *their* trusted community space.

ECONOMIC

CITY OF SAN ANTONIO EQUITY ATLAS

To pursue needed systemic change related to equity, the Department of Arts & Culture within the City of San Antonio actively supports arts and culture organizations, artists, and programs that reflect values to address diversity and inclusion. Also, to inform its work, guide its investments and work to achieve citywide equity goals and strategies, the City's Office of Equity has created a simplified version of an Equity Atlas and Matrix that can be used to rank many of the agency's internal lists that relate to projects, programs, and even procedures. This project was created in collaboration with the City's Planning Department and with help from the Information and Technology Services Department.

The Equity Atlas is an interactive tool that highlights the demographics, disparities, and some infrastructure distribution within the city. Maps relating to basic demographic indicators such as race, income, and language are published in a standard format that includes consistent methodologies as it relates to breaking points, census tract data, and thresholds. It is critical to address all areas of marginalization, and an institutional approach is necessary across the board. As local and regional government deepens its ability to eliminate racial inequity, it will be better equipped to transform systems and institutions impacting other marginalized groups.

Using two demographic variables, race and income, the City has designed a simplified Equity Matrix that focuses on breaking points above and below the citywide averages for those demographic variables. This essentially means that more points are assigned to a census block that has a higher than citywide average concentration of people of color and/or people below the average for median family income.

In summer of 2020, the Department of Arts & Culture used the Equity Atlas to inform emergency COVID Grants to individual artists through our SA CARES 4 Art Grant Program. The information included in Equity Atlas is another tool that provides the factual predicate for continued focus on equity in the arts and culture sector due to past discrimination and continued marginalization of people of color and low-income persons in San Antonio. Now in fiscal year 2023, the Department continues to employ the Equity Atlas in Arts Funding initiatives and in the planning for the 2022-2027 Bond for Public Art.

CITY OF CHICAGO C.A.M.P PROGRAM

In 2020, the Arts & Culture Unit of Chicago Park District launched the Cultural Asset Mapping Project (C.A.M.P.) in partnership with the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events (DCASE) and the League of Chicago Theaters with additional support from Enrich Chicago. C.A.M.P. is a community storytelling and data visualization project, where Chicago artists and residents collaborated to better understand artistic excellence and cultural vibrancy in Chicago communities. C.A.M.P. is a creative response to the call for a deeper engagement with theater and performance spaces on the city's South and West Sides and it tells a rich and inclusive story about creativity in Chicago. It combines current technologies of geo-location mapping with ancient traditions of storytelling to survey creative potential in time and space. This project aligns with an unprecedented commitment to investment in the South and West sides through Mayor Lightfoot's INVEST South/West initiative as well as many other recent public investment initiatives focused on disinvested areas of the city. As such, C.A.M.P. supports, amplifies, and facilitates a collaborative cultural vision for the neighborhoods we are working within, encouraging funders and producers to take more direct action toward supporting cultural agents working within and for their communities. Lastly, a range of upgrades is coming to park Cultural Centers on the South and West sides of the city. Community input to this mapping project has helped inform thinking of programming those upgraded facilities with relevant cultural activity.

C.A.M.P. grows out of the Re:Center Initiative, a long-term visioning process driven by local citizens for all 15 Cultural Centers in Chicago Park District's network (2015-2020). C.A.M.P. started as a proposal in late 2019 and transitioned into a series of public, artist-led workshops held between August and October 2020 for nine different communities. While the COVID-19 pandemic made the original plan of hosting in-person storytelling events impossible, it opened up time and resources for the Arts & Culture Unit to dive deeper into the backend of the website and mapping tools. Simultaneously, the pandemic highlighted systemic inequity and the precarity of creative practices, institutions, and industries. C.A.M.P.'s central aim to act as a public resource highlighting under-appreciated artists and practices, connecting organizations and makers to share resources and skills, and mapping the vibrancies and struggles for creativity and joy in each neighborhood became even more urgent. Since then, additional funding has been secured to grasp the material and social realities of BIPOC/ALAANA artists working in Chicago today.

As arts administrators, there is a civic responsibility to care for and steward Chicago's creative future. As the C.A.M.P. project sunset, a report was created describing reflections and future motions for an equitable artistic ecosystem in Chicago. A primary objective of the CAMP program is to better understand and represent the needs of African, Latinx, Asian, Arab, Native American (ALAANA), and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) artists, cultural producers, and community members. With hopes of engaging this demographic in the process of identifying equity goals, ten focus groups were hosted in which participants shared stories reflective of Chicago's cultural landscape, and brainstormed ideas for the development of mutual aid networks and cultural infrastructure.

ENVIRONMENTAL

SANTA BARBARA PUBLIC LIBRARY DISASTER RESPONSE

From December 2017 to January 2018 the greater Santa Barbara community was impacted by the dual disasters of the Thomas Fire and the Montecito debris flows. Through these months, and the following year, the Santa Barbara Public Library (SBPL) engaged in a variety of disaster response activities to support the community, including serving as Information Officers in the Joint Information Center (JIC), handing out N95 masks and providing educational support for families with children when schools and daycare centers were not operating. While SBPL was expertly positioned to be involved in information provision and community gatherings, this was not always the view of other coordinating organizations. A key outcome of the experiences of the Thomas Fire and resulting debris flow has been leveraging libraries as a nexus point for intergovernmental cooperation and community engagement both in the immediate response to disaster and the recovery period.

All full-time City of Santa Barbara staff are designated as disaster workers. When the call went out for staff to assist in the Joint City-County Emergency Operations Center, SBPL leadership responded and several staff were deployed. Emergency Services staff from Fire and Police were surprised at how efficient and skilled Library staff were at responding to inaccurate information on social media, answering questions and concerns from distressed callers and identifying public interest stories that would engage the community between logistical updates. These duties were congruent with typical library work, as information navigation and assisting the public with and are tuned into the needs and interests of members of the community are core tenets of library service. As the fires spread, it became clear that information about potential evacuations and other information was not spreading as quickly in several neighborhoods, especially those whose residents were predominantly Spanish-speaking. Not only were a higher percentage of SBPL staff bilingual, library staff also had extensive community connections and relationships with leaders in the Spanish-speaking community and were able to collaborate with community partners to disseminate critical, life-saving updates. Though it took significant advocacy and political capital, SBPL locations also became distribution points for N95 masks for the public, as well as sites for the display of large-scale maps and updates on evacuation orders. This ensured that people who might not have otherwise, received personal protective equipment and critical information.

In the months following the devastation of what was at the time the largest fire in California history - resulting in the death of 21 individuals, hundreds of injuries and hospitalizations and the destruction of 1000 buildings and homes - the Library was able to partner with numerous agencies to support the community. From providing facilities, programming and supplies to school children displaced from their classrooms, offering workshops on preserving photographs and other personal effects damaged by fire or mud, to educational classes on fire-safe gardening and processing grief through memoir-writing and the preservation of oral histories of the disaster with StoryCenter, the Library was critical to the recovery process for the community.

Conclusion

The reality is that most people do not love their roads, sewer lines or revenue collection offices - they love their parks, libraries and public art; in his book *For the Love of Cities* Kageyama puts it best “*when we love something, we cherish it; we protect it; we do extraordinary things for it.*”

Local governments must consider the barriers to doing these extraordinary things and commit to reinventing the very fabric of governance to empower collective action. Nothing about this work is easy - it requires public servants to challenge the notion that funding is a zero-sum game, to set aside ego and consider the value of skills not traditionally called on in public policy and to place more weight in the value of collaboration than the risk of failure.

The future of local government is predicated on the ability to establish resilient communities that operate on shared values and view problems as better solved through collaborative governance. Cultural institutions are the synapse. Whether the community is navigating social unrest, economic distress or environmental threats - community service leaders are uniquely poised to:

- Identify thinkers and change-makers, leveraging their hard-earned trust to invite individuals to convene to solve wicked problems and co-create their community’s future;
- Break through the noise of disinformation, connecting people to reliable resources and facilitating healthy community dialogue;
- Equip residents with the tools necessary to navigate economic challenges and ensure access to critical resources and safe spaces;
- Serve as the bedrock in the midst of environmental disasters - providing accurate information, access to shelter and other basic needs;
- Catalyze creativity, dialogue and community preservation through public art - giving a voice to artists and offering opportunity for economic advancement; and
- Provide unrestricted access to quality-of-place amenities that have a demonstrable impact on individual health, public safety and economic vitality.

Though presented with examples of successful collaboration throughout this document, it remains a fact that Cultural Institutions are often under-utilized and overlooked by partners despite their natural ability to serve as forums for public engagement and community building. Local government leaders of today have an opportunity and, perhaps an obligation, to design a future where interjurisdictional and interdisciplinary collaboration is an expectation, rather than an afterthought.

