



Recommendations for an Equitable Arts and Culture Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects on Greater Boston's creative economy: with performance, gallery, and retail spaces shut down, many artists lost their sources of income, while arts organizations lost revenue. At the same time, the arts served as a source of entertainment, hope, and inspiration for many during the most frightening days of the pandemic.

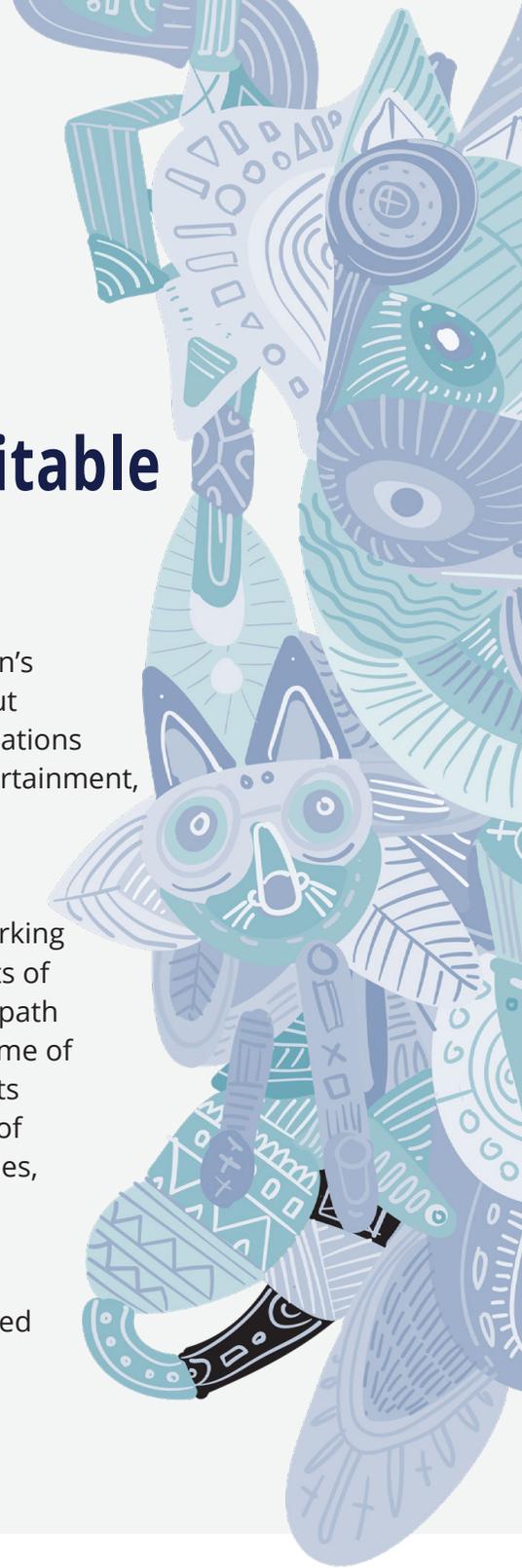
In 2021, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) began working with Arlington, Beverly, Boston, and Franklin to analyze the impacts of COVID-19 on local arts and culture organizations and help chart a path for response and recovery. The recommendations below detail some of the steps these cities and towns can take to support artists and arts organizations. These recommendations are informed by a survey of artists and creatives with over 600 responses, as well as case studies, interviews, and engagement with municipal staff.

Across Arlington, Beverly, Boston, and Franklin, we heard similar concerns around keeping the arts sector active and artists employed while also addressing cultural equity. Our recommendations are grouped into categories and address both immediate needs and long-term recovery.

JANUARY 2022

Produced by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council for the cities of Beverly and Boston and towns of Arlington and Franklin.

www.mapc.org/arts-indicators



Recommendation 1: Provide Culturally-Inclusive Access

Are art spaces and opportunities shared equitably among demographic and cultural groups within your community? Identify barriers that may prevent different groups from creating and enjoying art, and work to overcome them.

1.1 Promote culturally inclusive programming

The programs and performances that take place in your community set a tone create shared experiences for residents. Ensuring that program objectives are culturally inclusive shows residents and visitors what you believe has value.

1.2 Develop access to private cultural activities

Cultural institutions often have rehearsals throughout the year. Opening rehearsal space to the public can create a deeper understanding of cultural anchors in the community and expose others to artistry in the community.

1.3 Allow for free and ticketed public events in open space

It is important for cultural organizations and artists to have opportunities to display artwork, perform, and showcase creative endeavors. Create opportunities for both free and ticketed artist markets, performances, and other events in public space. Free events are a crucial part of creating access for the public to engage and experience art. Artists and creatives should also be allowed to provide ticketed experiences in public spaces to build their work, portfolio and wealth.

1.4 Identify opportunities for short-term and long-term creative engagements

Short-term engagements include temporary art installations, pop up showcases, or window displays. These typically have a smaller budget and can be implemented in a short amount of time. Long-term creative engagements, including installations and permanent public art, are key to making your community stand out and can permanently bring cultural representation to your public spaces. Long-term creative engagements typically involve an in-depth community engagement process, design, budget, and timeline.

1.5 Lead a series of surveys or interviews on cultural inclusion

Learn about the people in your community and how they feel about the culture of the space they occupy. Do they feel included in the community? Are they reflected in how the community is conveyed? Conduct a series of interviews and/or surveys that can assess this need.

Recommendation 2: Foster Partnerships to Increase Capacity

Partnerships take time, and fostering them is long-term process that often requires a cultural shift from pre-established roles. Municipalities and partners need to make the extra effort to reach out, attend events, actively listen, and engage with others.

2.1 Consider applying for cultural district designation

Massachusetts communities can apply for cultural district designation from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Designated cultural districts drive economic growth, strengthen local character, and attract tourists, entrepreneurs, and creatives. Designated cultural districts are eligible for investment grants to help meet the district's goals. Although cultural districts are a good starting point and can have political and social influence, additional funding sources are recommended to provide needed funds for compensation for creatives to engage the public.

2.2 Consider establishing a Business Improvement Districts (BID)

"Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are special assessment districts in which property owners vote to initiate, manage and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond the baseline of services already provided by their local city." — [Commonwealth of Massachusetts website](#).

BIDs can provide a revenue-generating source for cultural institutions and creatives.

2.3 Leverage existing programming and events

Some communities may not have BIDs or cultural districts. Explore partnering with existing events and organizations outside of cultural districts and BIDs. Use creative engagement to promote planning processes and community development and highlight artists. Consider working with schools, faith-based groups, and others that may have annual events and could feature creative workers.

2.4 Create clear communication channels and partnership opportunities with other municipalities

Consider municipalities with similar demographics as potential partners in your cultural work. Promote and share resources with creatives in your community and allow for flexibility in outreach to other communities. Remember that creatives thrive when there's a level of flexibility in the work. Forming cross-municipal partnerships can increase your reach, engagement, and programming.

Recommendation 3: Transparent & Efficient Permitting

Municipalities have an opportunity to facilitate cultural events by simplifying permitting for outdoor events and activities.

3.1 Make permitting process transparent and easy

Online permitting and processing is an easier and more efficient way to track permits. Making the permitting process as easy as possible is key to getting artists and organizations to take advantage of public space.

3.2 Develop space requirements that are tailored and specific to the size of your open space

Be specific about the number of artists and the type of artists that you hope to occupy a given public space. This will help manage the amount of people in the space and identify what public health precautions need to be taken.

3.3 Track permitting to allocate programming and resources

Track what spaces permits are for, what groups they're going to, and what dates they're for. This information can tell you if the distribution of permits is equitable and fair. It may also be a useful tool to audit the reach of programming.

3.4 Work with other municipalities to procure shared software and equipment

To save funding, municipalities can work together to procure permitting software or use Combuys to purchase equipment like generators and signage.

Recommendation 4: Build Municipal Support Capacity

The needs of the arts and culture sector are urgent and very particular. Municipal staff need the skills and resources to provide support to arts organizations and artists in a timely manner.

4.1 Improve funding and implement policies that provide affordable housing and workspaces

Local recovery programs that might not otherwise be known to the arts community can help artists.

4.2 Work in partnership with arts organizations to establish relationships with the local arts community

Seventy percent of artists of color that responded to our survey identified the need for more communication from municipal staff. Establishing relationships between municipal staff and community organizations can help communicate information about resources and opportunities to the local arts community.

4.3 Provide workforce development opportunities targeted to artists and creatives

Municipalities that already offer workforce development training opportunities can make these programs more accessible and efficient. In addition, municipalities can expand their offerings to include art-specific programs such as building digital portfolios, applying to calls for art, etc.

Recommendation 5: Improve Access to Public Outdoor Venues

Cultural programming and events were severely disrupted by the stay-at-home advisory. Overwhelming scientific evidence shows that outdoor activities are safe. Simplify existing processes granting public access to outdoor venues to support artists.

5.1 Provide a directory of available public outdoor venues, such as parks, plazas, or community centers

During the summer and fall of 2021, the City of Medford provided an inventory of publicly-available outdoor venues with an online reservation form. Municipalities that have recently adopted an Open Space and Recreation plan have easy access to inventories like this. An online form for reservations makes the permitting process easier and more accessible. Ask about expected attendance, equipment needs, and power access so artists and organizations can plan for a safe performances.

5.2 Provide a clear and concise process to reserve public venues

In addition to having an inventory of public venues, municipalities should provide a clear and concise process to schedule performances or festivals. A clear process will help artists and arts organizations, many of them with scant resources, plan their programming. Similarly, the reservation process should have minimum requirements as most of these uses are temporary and equipment is mostly provided by the artists or arts organizations. If additional costs or requirements are needed, municipalities should offer discounts for the arts sector given the uneven impact it has suffered due to lockdown restrictions.

5.3 Allow for experimentation in the use of the public realm

Municipalities in the region have already implemented innovative strategies on the use of public space, a few of them supported by the [Shared Streets Initiative](#). To further support the recovery of the sector, towns and cities can provide resources and funding to reimagine the use of streets and integrate the arts in this vision.

Recommendation 6: Clear & Consistent Public Health Protocols

As the COVID-19 pandemic quickly evolves, local public health guidelines need to adapt. Uneven guidance and enforcement across municipalities can increase the disparities among the arts community.

6.1 Provide clear and science-based guidelines

While information on COVID-19 safety is quickly evolving, municipalities need to be ready to swiftly respond to changes in cases and infections. As circumstances change, communities should provide clear guidelines on cultural programming and events.

6.2 Appoint an advisory committee on safe cultural programming and artist support

State public health guidelines are often hard for independent artists to interpret. Municipalities can appoint an advisory committee to advise arts organizations on safe programming and create safe job opportunities for arts organizations and artists. These committees should have at least one member of the public health board, one member of the local business council, one member of the arts council, and members of the arts community.