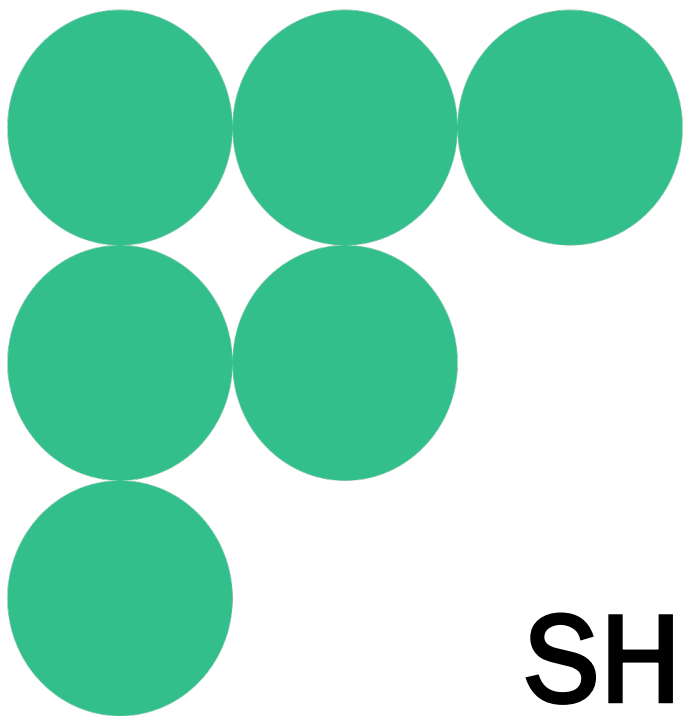




SHOWCASING LOCAL VENUES

Mitigating Impacts of the Encore Casino on
Local Independent Venues in Metro Boston

August 2026





Acknowledgements

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) would like to recognize the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC) for funding this work through the Community Mitigation Fund Planning Grant program for Regional Planning Agencies. The impacts of casinos on local independent venues are well documented, and we hope that this project can strengthen the resources available to increase venue's visibility and mitigate the impact of the Encore Casino. We also recognize the partnership of the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) and its CreativeGround program as well as ArtsBoston. These organizations provided critical data and insights into the field and how their organizations' resources support venues in the Greater Boston region. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the municipal staff, venue staff, and organizations that participated in the project and informed our understanding of the venue ecosystem and its needs.

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Executive Summary

In an industry dominated by multimillion-dollar entertainment companies, ensuring the long-term viability of local independent venues is critical for Metro Boston's cultural vitality. These venues, and the creative ecosystems they generate, are crucial for hiring and retaining regional talent, and are much needed cultural anchors for communities.¹ Since 2020, small and mid-sized independent venues have been struggling to overcome the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in an already high-risk and competitive market. One hundred venues in Metro Boston received Shuttered Venues Operators Grants (SVOG) in 2021 and 2022 – highlighting the widespread impact of the pandemic on venue operations. Despite these grants, many long-standing anchor venues have permanently closed since 2020. The opening of the Encore Boston Harbor casino in 2019 added additional pressure to local independent venues and made recovery more challenging.

In 2024, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's (MAPC) Arts and Culture Department, funded by a \$75,000.00 grant from the Mass Gaming Commissions Community Mitigation Grant for Regional Planning Agencies, initiated the first regional effort to support marketing and tourism for local independent venues in the communities impacted by the Encore Casino.

Showcasing Local Venues explains how local production is being done and its dialogue with the larger industry. MAPC, in partnership with NEFA and ArtsBoston, has developed a complete inventory of performance spaces, venues, and other cultural facilities that host live entertainment and performance arts in Everett, Somerville, Cambridge, Medford, Malden, Revere, Chelsea, Lynn, and Melrose. The project goals were to identify key marketing and promotion strategies to increase visibility of local venues and provide stakeholders with information about local and regional resources.

Throughout an extensive community engagement process with venue stakeholders and municipal staff, the project also gauged awareness, application, and use of regional resources like NEFA's CreativeGround and the ArtsBoston Calendar supporting independent local venues marketing efforts. The project team has also identified opportunities for coalition-building for the Metro Boston local independent ecosystem.

Key findings show deep disparities in the access of cultural programming in this area, reflecting a concentration of small and mid-sized independent venues in Cambridge. Municipally owned venues in Lynn and Medford have emerged as very competitive venues in Metro Boston, and occasional venues, specifically bars and restaurants, represent the vast majority of alternative performance spaces.

This project lays the foundation to inform future resource development to support local venues regionally and locally.

¹ Americans for the Arts' *Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 (AEP6): The Economic and Social Impact Study on Nonprofit Arts & Culture Organizations and Their Audiences*, 2023, found that venues are a source of neighborhood pride and that communities that invest in arts and culture stimulate job growth. Last accessed February 2, 2026 at [1696872054-AEP6 National Findings Full Report-Proof final-web.pdf](https://www.artsandeconomicprosperity.org/AEP6-National-Findings-Full-Report-Proof-final-web.pdf)



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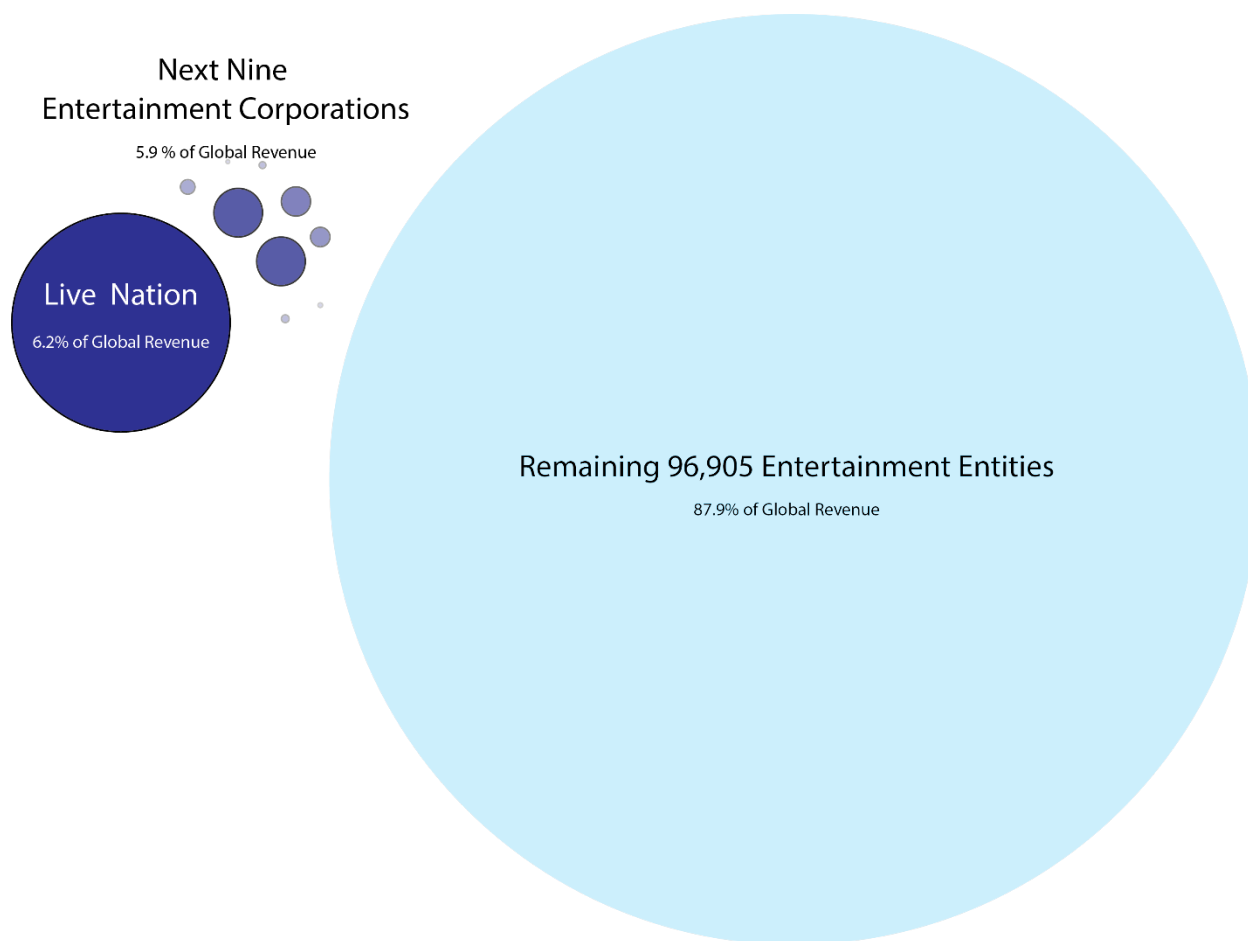
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Introduction

Independent live entertainment venues, as defined for this project, are venues unassociated with another business through common ownership or affiliation and where booking or promotion are not contracted to corporate partners. Independent venues are a critical platform for developing local talent and preserving the region's cultural heritage. They include a variety of different venue types, from small jazz clubs to non-profit performing arts centers, to large capacity theaters, as well as promoters, festivals, and more. In Massachusetts and metro Boston, mid-sized venues operate in a highly competitive market.

Live Nation is the dominant corporation within the global live entertainment market. Its annual revenue makes up about six percent (6%) of the total global market revenue. Altogether, the top ten live entertainment corporations globally (or 0.01% of the market) receive 12% of the total global market revenue. Within this context of market dominance, the local independent venues that sustain arts and culture ecosystems operate at a disadvantage.



Producing events presents a high risk of financial loss due to competition with entertainment conglomerates and increasing artist fees, according to the National Independent Venue Association's *State of Live: The First Economic Research Study of the Independent Live Sector 2025*.²

² National Independent Venue Association, The State of Live, 2025, [2025-NIVA-State-of-Live-Report.pdf](#)



Recovery from the pandemic has exacerbated the impacts of this competition felt by small and mid-sized venues in competition with venues controlled by corporations and conglomerates such as Live Nation/Ticketmaster and Bowery Presents, a subsidiary of Bowery, Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG).

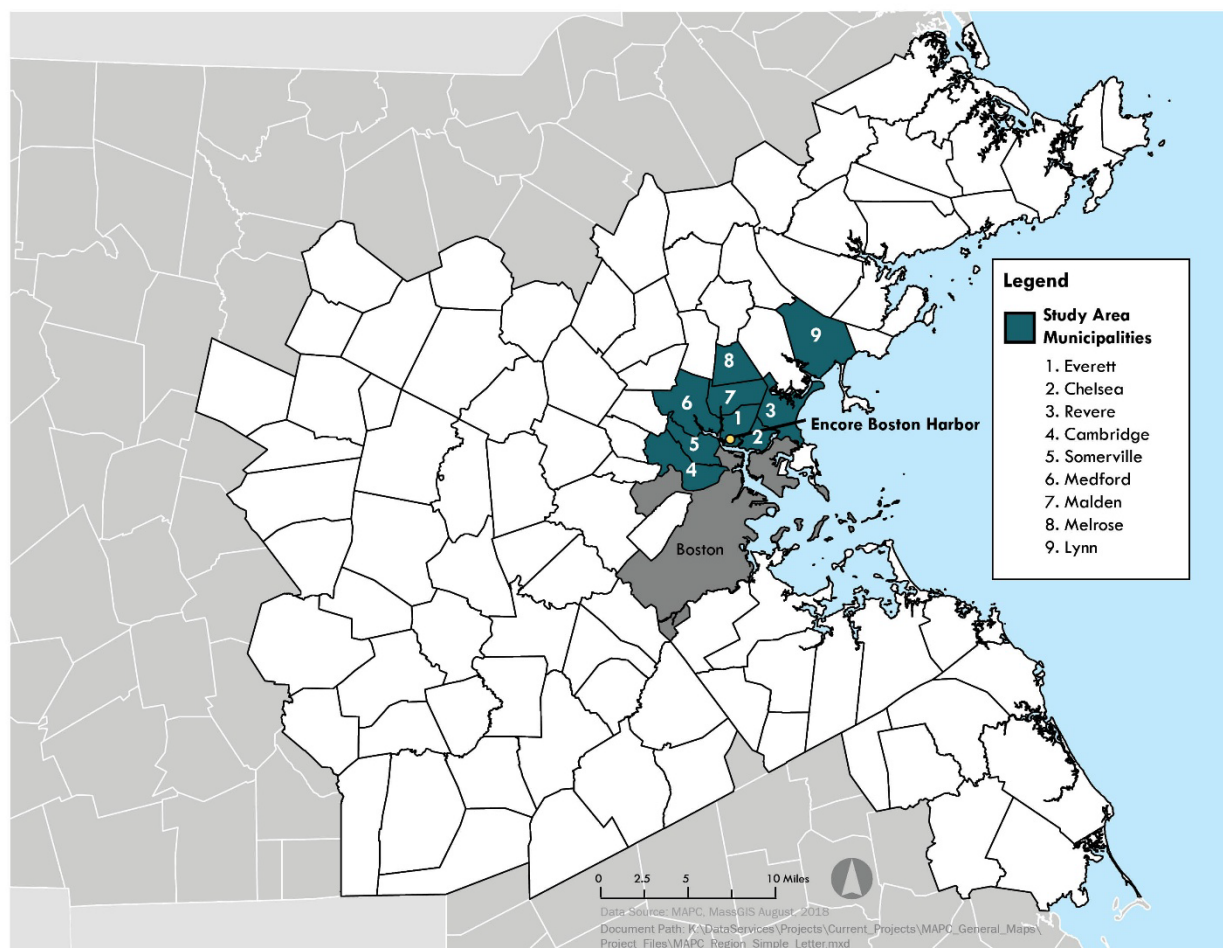


Figure 1. Encore Boston Harbor and Study Area Communities in Regional Context.

The Encore property includes the casino and the Encore Boston Harbor Convention and Event Center. For the purposes of this study, the property including the casino will be referenced as Encore Casino or Encore. Since its opening in 2019, Encore's ability to attract and promote entertainment and events has increased competitive pressure on independent venues in Metro Boston.³ Located in Everett, Massachusetts, Encore Casino is situated along the Mystic River across from Assembly Row in Somerville to the west, and the Charlestown neighborhood of Boston to the south. It is adjacent to industrial parcels that provide opportunities for further development and expansion of the Encore campus, including an approved expansion along East Broadway. Encore is partnered with [Big Night Entertainment Group](#) – an affiliate of Live Nation – to bring live music, DJs, entertainment, and events to the casino's 37,000 square foot ballroom and other spaces. Its Massachusetts-issued gaming license seeks to address its impact on mid-sized venues with the provision that it "shall only be permitted to build a live entertainment venue that has less than

³ City of Lynn 2021 Gaming Commission Community Planning Grant Application, Appendix F.



1,000 seats or more than 3,500 seats,”⁴ and in 2023, Encore received approval for a new 999-seat theater and 200-seat comedy club as part of the East Broadway Encore expansion. This means that the competition for booking, marketing and visibility will likely increase for local venues.

To mitigate this disadvantage and the impacts of Encore Casino on the live entertainment ecosystem of Metro Boston, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) partnered with the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) and Arts Boston to support local independent venues located in the communities the Mass Gaming Commission identified as impacted by the casino. The project study area includes Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Lynn, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Revere, and Somerville.

The City of Boston was excluded due to the challenges of determining which geographies and venues in the City fall within the casino’s area of impact. The study included both dedicated venues purpose-built to offer live entertainment and occasional venues like parks, bars, and restaurants. It included for-profit venues, non-profits venues, municipally owned venues and venues owned by universities. The study also included some presenting organizations in the process of securing venue space. The goal of the study was to determine whether existing regional resources including the CreativeGround Directory managed by NEFA and the ArtsBoston Calendar could better increase visibility and marketing opportunities for these independent venues.

Regional Marketing Resources and Networks

For this project, MAPC partnered with ArtsBoston and the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) as providers of regional resources that could support the needs of venues. Founded in 1976, the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) supports the arts in the six states of New England and beyond through grants, convenings, and partnerships. It also maintains the database directory CreativeGround. With over 24,000 profiles, it is one of the only region-wide databases of arts and cultural entities in the U.S. NEFA has a CreativeGround API that allows municipalities and other arts organizations to integrate creative profiles into their own webpages upon request. NEFA also helps foster a regional identity for arts and culture across New England.

ArtsBoston is Metro Boston’s largest nonprofit arts service organization. Its membership spans theater and dance companies, music organizations, museums, multidisciplinary presenters, and more, and it has served its members, the broader cultural sector, and the public since its founding in 1975. The ArtsBoston Calendar, launched in 2009, is a unified online events listing platform available to all Metro Boston arts organizations at no cost. It is the most comprehensive online compilation of performances, exhibitions, festivals, and free events in Metro Boston, profiling 3,000+ cultural organizations and thousands of events each year. In 2022-23, more than twenty-five hundred events were uploaded to the calendar by more than one thousand organizations. ArtsBoston Calendar promotions shared via email and social media reach more than one hundred and eighty thousand arts-attending households. ArtsBoston has invested in transforming its ArtsBoston Calendar platform into a venue accessibility directory by improving how it collects and shares accessibility information about venues to support users with disabilities.

Both CreativeGround and ArtsBoston are free platforms for members and users, and participation is voluntary. Understanding the extent to which existing digital tools like CreativeGround and the ArtsBoston Calendar can improve visibility and enhance marketing for venues was the key

⁴ Sparks, Veronica. “MGC ‘Parsing Words’ Regarding Live Entertainment Gaming Statute,” *PlayMA*, March 27, 2022.



question for this effort. Both platforms have the potential to provide equitable access to cultural resources to all venues, cultural facilities, stakeholders, and audiences and to amplify the visibility of cultural resources. Venue engagement explored how their information hubs have the potential to expand local independent venue visibility.

Study Area Communities and Venue Ecosystems in Context

In addition to falling within the impact area of the casino, the collection of cities in the study area is one of the most racially diverse geographies of Greater Boston. According to the 2020 US Census, these nine (9) municipalities had a combined population of over 600,000 residents accounting for eighteen percent of the region. Across the study area, the population has a higher share of people of color (50%) compared with the MAPC region (36%). There is also a higher share of individuals living in poverty (12% compared with 9%) and a higher share of individuals who do not speak English well or cannot speak English at all (9% compared with 5%). Most of these municipalities are immigrant gateway communities that have historically suffered from deep socio-economic inequalities. Everett, Chelsea, Malden, and Revere are also considered environmental justice communities that have been historically overburdened by industrial activities. Each community also plays a unique role within Metro Boston's entertainment ecosystem.

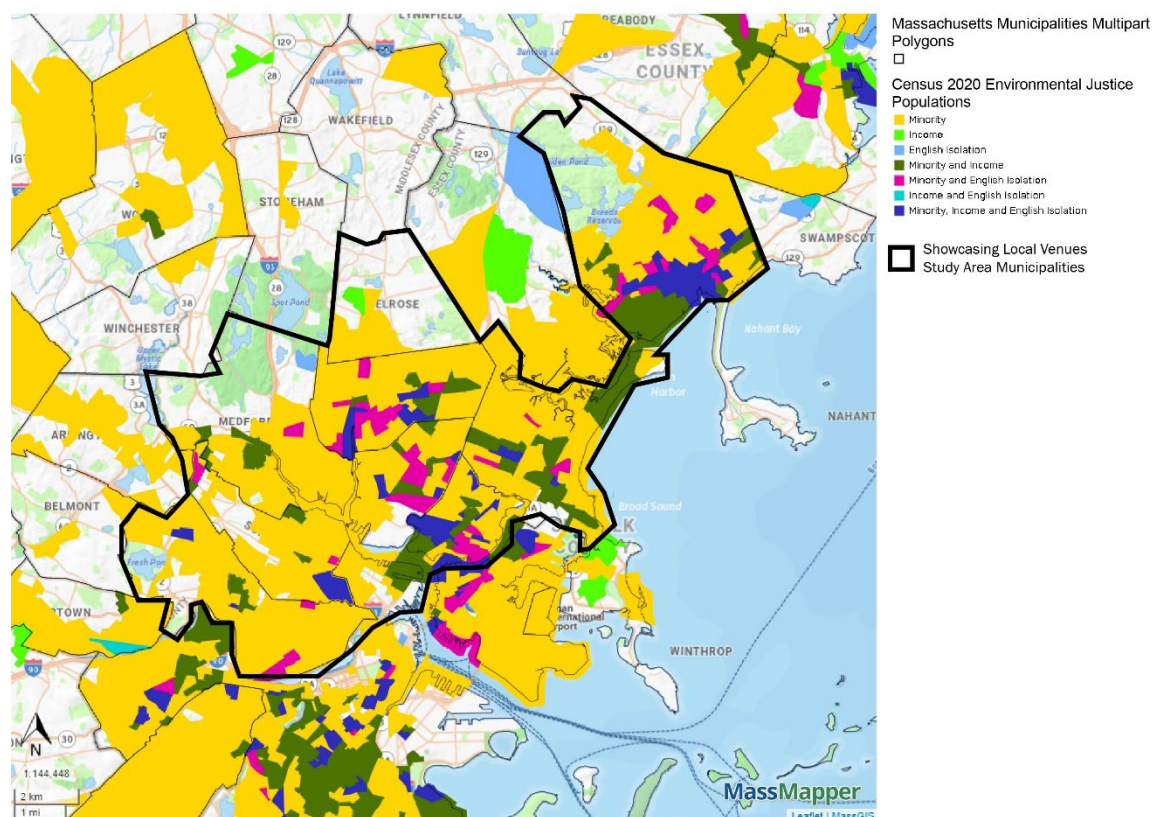


Figure 2. Environmental Justice populations in the Showcasing Local Venues Study Area, 2020.

Five of the nine cities in the study area have been designated as Gateway Cities by Massachusetts: Chelsea, Everett, Lynn, Malden, and Revere. Mass Inc. defines Gateway Cities as “midsize urban centers that anchor regional economies around the state.” Historically, these cities were home to industry that offered good jobs and a “gateway” to the American Dream often to foreign born residents and their families. Today, Massachusetts’ twenty-six Gateway Cities are home to forty percent of the state’s foreign-born population. For these cities in our study area,



access to cultural offerings is tied to the language in which those programs are presented. Independent performance venues in the Gateway communities around Encore add value by offering programming in Spanish and other languages spoken throughout the region. This expands cultural access, reflects the linguistic diversity of the region, and brings meaningful arts and culture programming to historically under-served communities.

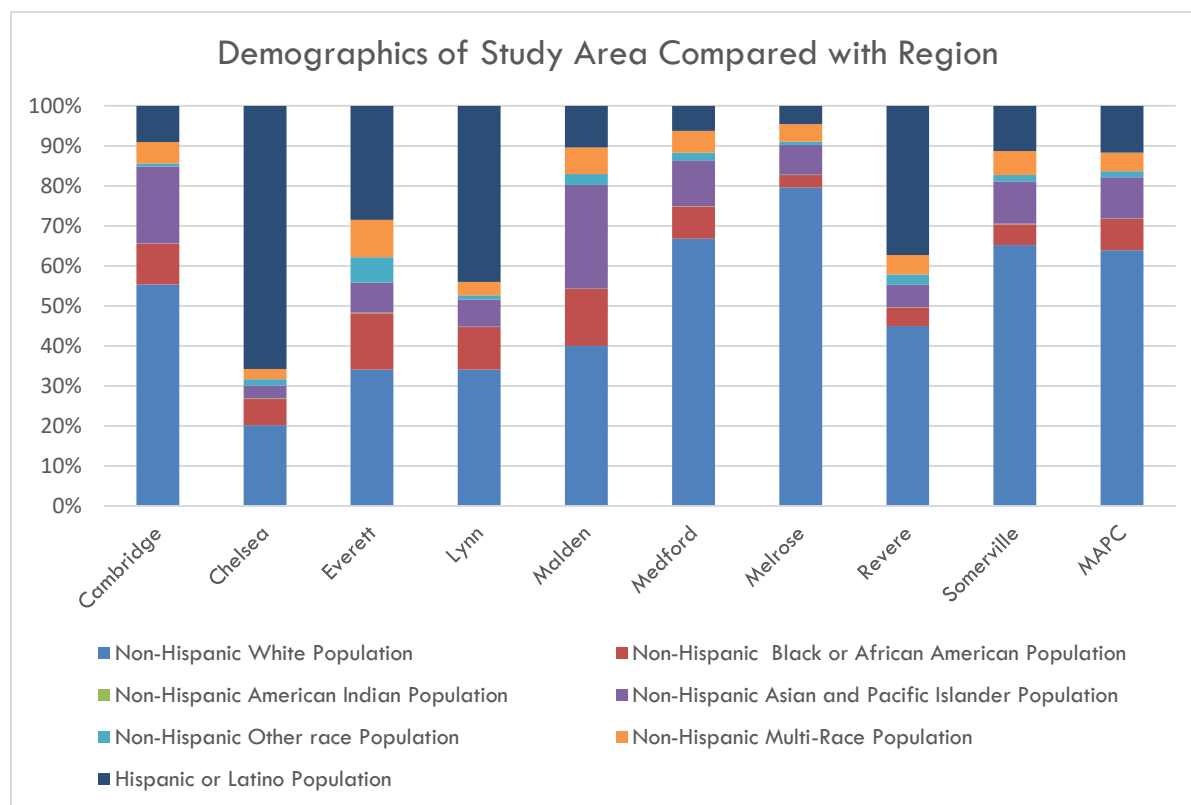


Figure 3. Population diversity across study area municipalities with regional comparison, 2020.

Cambridge is located to the west of Boston and is the largest city in the study area by population. Boasting a direct connection to downtown Boston via the Red Line and Green Line, home to multiple universities, and the center of the region's biotech industry, Cambridge is an important cultural hub in the region. The city is home to the largest number of venues in the study area with thirty-one local independent venues, a quarter of all venues in the study. Its venue ecosystem includes thirteen dedicated venues and eighteen occasional venues. Venues are most concentrated in Central Square, with additional clusters around other Red Line stops in Harvard, Kendall, and Porter Squares. Venues are at risk of displacement due to ongoing development pressures.

Lynn is the second largest city in the study area, the largest Gateway City and largest city with a majority non-white population. Lynn serves as a cultural hub on the North Shore and is home to the fourth largest number of venues in the study area and the third most dedicated venues. Lynn is also known for its strong presence of public art. Downtown Lynn is one of the Commonwealth's earliest established cultural districts, supported by an active network of grassroots organizers and volunteers. Venues are concentrated around Downtown, and Lynn Auditorium emerges as one of the most prominent venues in Greater Boston. The Lynn Auditorium has successfully attracted major



performers, including Marlon Wayans, Pitbull, and Diana Ross. The City of Lynn is now working to expand its audience to reach beyond Lynn's borders.

Somerville is the third largest city in the study area and is home to the second highest number of venues, accounting for 18% of venues across all nine communities. Abutting Cambridge to the north, Somerville is served by the Red Line at the Davis Square and Porter Square T stations. In addition, Somerville expanded its transit access with the opening of the Green Line Extension in 2022. It is also the second community with more dedicated and occasional venues. Venues range from small spaces for performances and DJs to larger and historic venues. Bars and restaurants dominate among occasional venues. The city engages with these venues as small businesses rather than cultural spaces and is exploring ways to support them beyond grant funding. Municipal staff are uncertain about their role in marketing small businesses, particularly regarding endorsement and promotion.

Malden is the fourth largest city in the study area and a Gateway City. It relies predominantly on occasional venues and has a few that are well-recognized, like SUM Studios, with established audiences. Urban Media Arts serves as an additional non-profit occasional venue. The City has acquired the former Malden District Courthouse as a site for a new arts and culture center that can provide additional dedicated venue space. While the city does not currently provide support for local venues, it has expressed interest in strengthening the local entertainment economy. Some venue operators have also indicated a need for facility upgrades to better serve their audiences and attract more programming.

Revere, another Gateway City, is primarily known for the large events at Revere Beach and is home to a venue ecosystem that operates entirely for profit. While it has the third highest number of venues, it has only one dedicated venue in the Wonderland Ballroom. The City of Revere, often in partnership with local businesses, also hosts events at Hall Square. Bars and restaurants dominate the local ecosystem, but most of these occasional venues have limited capacity. The Yard at Beachmont Square is an emerging venue, offering regular live music nights. Venues face challenges such as parking, lack of private restrooms, and high advertising costs.

Medford has emerged as an active cultural hub anchored by the well-recognized performance space in its municipally owned Chevalier Theatre. Though it has only five venues, its municipal venues offer dedicated venue space to balance its occasional venues. The Chamber of Commerce has a strong interest in supporting local venues and better distinguishing among the several types of independent venues, including nonprofit arts organizations and for-profit operators.

Everett's ecosystem is composed entirely of occasional venues with limited capacity. Arts and culture spaces like Art Lab Everett and Haitian Community Center play a key role in supporting local artists and cultural activities in this Gateway City. The Recreation Center and Connolly Center are large public spaces for big events. Overall, Everett's cultural economy remains very locally oriented, with few people traveling from other communities. Many young residents prefer to attend events in nearby cities like Somerville and Malden.

Chelsea is the smallest Gateway City in the study area by population and has incorporated cultural programming as part of its economic development strategy for Downtown Chelsea since 2017. The initiative Chelsea Prospers offers the most prominent cultural programming and promotes tourism. The City has also hired dedicated arts and culture staff. Gradually, the city has experienced an increase in visitors. Despite these municipal efforts, existing venues and local promoters constantly face permitting challenges. The Chelsea Theater Works, the home of the



multi-awarded Apollinaire Theater Company, is the only dedicated venue in Chelsea. Most cultural programming takes place in public spaces.

Melrose is the smallest city in the study area, and its ecosystem is dominated by the dedicated municipal venues of Memorial Hall and Beebe Estate, with very few occasional venues. Memorial Hall is the heart of cultural programming and has been the home of the Melrose Symphony Orchestra, the oldest continuing all-volunteer orchestra in the US, since its creation in 1918. It operates under a rental venue model, mostly utilized by local dance academies for recitals and non-profit organizations. Beebe Estate is occasionally used for events as a rental venue as well. However, the city neither advertises the venues nor the events. Melrose Creative Alliance, a local artist network, is highly active in promoting cultural programming on digital platforms.

The scarcity of dedicated small and mid-sized independent venues and their uneven concentrations in a few cities with prominent cultural hubs creates barriers to Metro Boston's residents' awareness of and access to cultural programming, particularly among the municipalities near the casino. In communities without dedicated venues, alternative and public spaces play a vital role in supporting live music and performance. Restaurants and bars are particularly important to providing access to cultural programming and made up 62% of all occasional venues across the study area.

Casino Impacts

The impact of Encore Casino on small and mid-size independent venues is multi-faceted. Within an industry where standard booking contracts include a radius clause that prevents acts from performing within a specific geographic radius for a designated period, Encore's ability to attract and book acts directly limits other venues' access to those artists in the catchment area. Encore can leverage the advantage it has in the fee expectations and contract terms it offers, which are typically more generous than what stand-alone venues could match. Since casinos' business model is sustained through gambling revenues, they are not reliant on ticket sales unlike other live entertainment venues' business models. Competition with the casino has resulted in economic loss for venues and municipalities. The Melrose Memorial Hall experienced the relocation of boxing events in 2019. In 2021, the City of Lynn reported losing a variety of shows during 2019, such as Tony Bennett and the B52s. Five fewer shows represent a loss of approximately \$1,000,000 in ticket sales and over 10,000 visitors to Lynn's downtown.⁵

Massachusetts General Law (M.G.L. c. 23N, § 3; 205 CMR 247.01) establishes that "a gaming license shall only be permitted to build a live entertainment venue that has less than 1,000 seats or more than 3,500 seats." In 2022, the Chevalier Theatre and the Hanover Theatre complained to the Mass Gaming Commission⁶ that Encore violated the law by hosting several events at the Picasso Ballroom, ranging between 1,000 to 3,500 tickets sold. Testimonies allege that the following shows were held in the casino's ballroom and sold between 1,000 and 3,500 seats: The B-52s in October 2019, Straight No Chaser in December 2019, Wayne Brady in January 2020, Dropkick Murphys in March 2020. These complaints were dismissed on the grounds that the law only applies to the number of seats in purpose-built venues, not ticket sales for shows taking place in flexible spaces like conference rooms or lounges. To mitigate the impact on nonprofit and municipal performing venues, the state has established the [Gaming Mitigation Fund](#) to offset the

⁵ City of Lynn 2021 Gaming Commission Community Planning Grant Application, Appendix F.

⁶ Sparks, Veronica. "MGC 'Parsing Words' Regarding Live Entertainment Gaming Statute," *PlayMA*, March 27, 2022.



loss to venues from touring shows or touring artist fees captured by the casino. However, many venues do not qualify for funding.

Getting more visibility is a significant challenge among small- and mid-size dedicated venues and occasional venue spaces. Most of these venues operate with limited resources for operations and paying artists and staff. Marketing activities are deprioritized, and many venues report relying on newsletters, word of mouth, or promotion led by visiting artists. Most independent venues cannot afford marketing strategies employed by Encore and other Live-Nation affiliated venues like billboards, search engine optimization strategies, or ad spots in major publications like the Boston Globe or Boston Magazine. Compared with Encore, independent venues' visibility to potential audiences is limited.

Encore Casino benefits from the national and international marketing capabilities of [Wynn Resorts](#). Although the Encore Regional Marketing Plan for its grand opening promised "sharing the best of Massachusetts with the world", including local entertainment and culture, this has not materialized. The municipalities around the casino and their cultural offerings are not widely advertised as tourist destinations by the casino.

Local Independent Venue Inventory Analysis

To understand the potential for regional resources to enhance visibility and marketing for independent venues impacted by Encore Casino, the project began by assembling an inventory of venues in Everett, Somerville, Cambridge, Medford, Malden, Revere, Chelsea, Lynn, and Melrose. The project focused on local independent venues as distinct from corporate venues affiliated with Live Nation and other national and multi-national promoters. The project uses a definition of local independent venues that aligns with the National Independent Venue Association's membership criteria⁷, defining these venues by their ownership structure – that they are not publicly traded, multinational or multi-state – and by their business model – that they offer access to live performances of music, comedy, and other performing arts with ticketing or cover charge to ensure that artists are paid fairly. The project definition is more expansive than NIVA's membership criteria and includes venues that lack defined performance and audience space and those that lack staffing for sound, booking, promotion, box office and security. These venues may operate as non-profit, government-owned, or for-profit ventures. While the local independent venue definition includes alternative spaces that offer cultural programming, including hospitality and community-based spaces, school auditoriums, churches, and outdoor open spaces were intentionally excluded in the project.

To assemble the inventory, MAPC compiled existing datasets from NEFA's CreativeGround directory, data from the U.S. Small Business Association Shuttered Venue Operators Grants (SVOG), and data compiled by MAPC from previous research on cultural facilities. MAPC's dataset includes data from the Mass Cultural Council's Cultural Facilities program, the since-ended SpaceFinder tool, and MAPC project data. By combining and cleaning these datasets, the MAPC team assembled draft inventories for each municipality and verified the data with municipal staff from the nine municipalities. MAPC created a final inventory that identified one hundred twenty-two (122) venues in the study area. Of the 122 venues, 75 were identified in MAPC's databases. However, there was significant overlap with other data sources, with thirty-one (31) venues listed on the MAPC, NEFA's and SVOG lists. Twenty-nine (29) of the 122 venues were also identified in CreativeGround, but only 12 of those 29 were not already included in MAPC's database. Eight

⁷ National Independent Venue Association Membership Requirements. <https://www.nivassoc.org/join>



(8) venues were also listed on the SVOG data, but only one of them was not listed either on MAPC or CreativeGround. An additional thirty-four (34) venues were identified through this project, accounting for more than one-quarter of the total inventory.

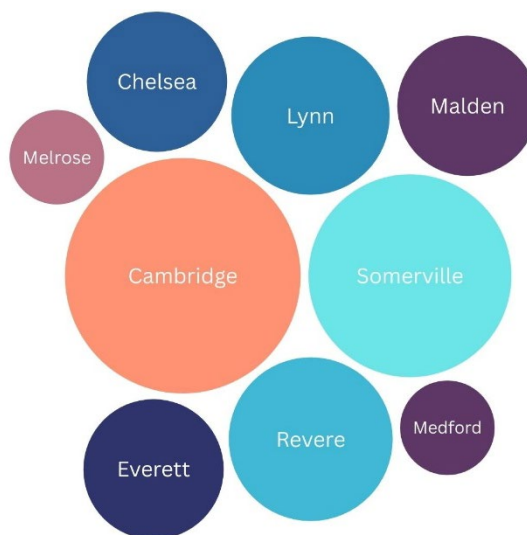
Table 1. Distribution of Venues Among Data Sources.

Data Source	Count of Listed Venues	Percentage of Total
NEFA's CreativeGround ONLY	12	10%
MAPC ONLY	44	36%
Shuttered Venue Operator Grants ONLY	1	1%
New Venues Identified	34	28%
Multiple data sources	31	25%
Grand Total	122	100%

Venue Ecosystem Findings

Venues in the study area geography are concentrated in Cambridge and Somerville, the cities closest to Boston with the best transit access. Cambridge is an important hub in the venue ecosystem outside of Boston and is home to a wide range of dedicated and occasional venues across the full range of operating models. Dedicated venues are concentrated in Cambridge, Somerville, and Lynn, the largest municipalities in the study area by population, while occasional venues are more evenly distributed across the study area. Occasional venues outnumber dedicated venues across the study area, with three occasional venues present for every dedicated venue. Restaurants and bars are the most common type of occasional venue, accounting for 62% of occasional venues. While non-profit dedicated venues outnumber for-profit dedicated venues, more than 60% of occasional venues operate under a for-profit model. This means that most venues across the study area are businesses that function as venues as a secondary use.

Figure 4. Relative share of all venues by municipality.



Geographic Concentration of All Venues

Venues in the study area are concentrated in Cambridge and Somerville, accounting for approximately 42% of all venues listed in the inventory. These two cities are the closest to Boston, the metropolitan center of the region and both are served by multiple transit lines and buses.



Table 2. Geographic Distribution of Dedicated and Occasional and All Venues Across Study Area.

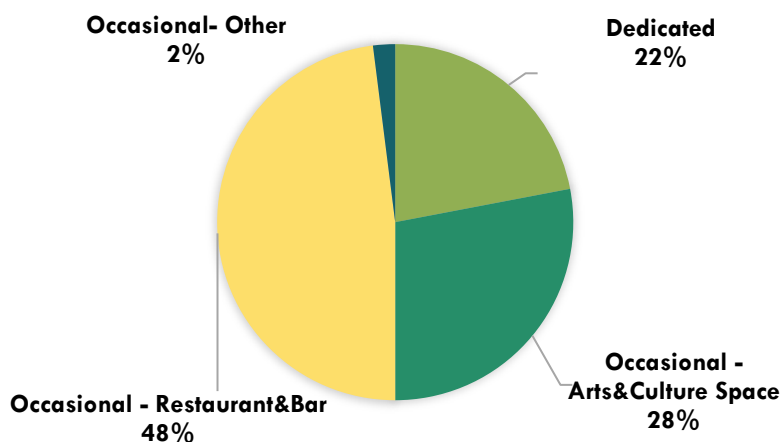
City	% Study Area Population	Venue Count	Venue %	Dedicated Venue Count	City Share of Dedicated Venues %	Occasional Venue Count	City Share of Occasional Venues %
Cambridge	19%	28	23%	13	48%	15	16%
Somerville	13%	23	19%	5	19%	18	19%
Revere	10%	15	12%	1	4%	14	15%
Lynn	17%	14	11%	3	11%	11	12%
Malden	11%	11	9%	1	4%	10	11%
Everett	8%	11	9%	0	0%	11	12%
Chelsea	7%	10	8%	1	4%	9	9%
Medford	10%	5	4%	2	7%	3	3%
Melrose	5%	5	4%	1	4%	4	4%
Grand Total	100%	122	100%	27	100%	95	100%

Geographic Concentration of Dedicated Venues

Venues were also categorized by whether they are dedicated venues or occasional event spaces. Cambridge is home to almost 50% of all dedicated venues in the study area, and functions as an important hub of venue activity in the region. The geographic disparity among municipal venues is even more disproportional between Cambridge and the other seven municipalities in the study area in relation to dedicated venues. Except for Everett, each city in the study area has at least one dedicated venue, and outside of Cambridge, no city has more than five. Half of the municipalities have only one dedicated venue.

There is a strong reliance on occasional venues across all Gateway Cities in the study area. The 4 Gateway Cities located closest to Encore – Everett, Chelsea, Malden, and Revere – have the fewest dedicated venues in the study area, and occasional venues represent over 90% of the venues in each city. Occasional, and sometimes unconventional, venue spaces play an outsized role in hosting cultural programming in communities without dedicated venue space. Overall, occasional venues represent a majority of venues in all municipalities. In Medford and Cambridge occasional venues represent a lower share of all venues than the average across the study area.

Share of Venue by Type



Characteristics of Occasional Venues Across Study Area

More than three-quarters of the identified venues are occasional event and performance spaces, confirming that dedicated independent local venues are limited in the study area. Occasional venues mostly operate as for-profit businesses. Restaurants and bars are an important business type that provides occasional venue space. Among ninety-five (95) occasional venues, fifty-nine (59) are restaurants and bars that periodically host live music events or other performances. This highlights the key role of the hospitality industry in supporting and providing local cultural offerings.

Outside bars and restaurants, occasional venues are largely centers for arts and culture that also produce and host occasional events. These centers are represented in all ownership structures, and are most commonly non-profit entities, with fifty-eight percent (58%) of these spaces operating with that ownership structure. In addition to these two categories, the study area is also home to two occasional venues that are neither bars nor restaurants nor arts and culture centers: one private club and one business that offers social dance events combined with dance lessons.

Table 3. Operating Models of Occasional Venues in Study Area.

Occasional Venue Type	Venue Count	Venue %	For Profit Count	Non-Profit Count	Municipally Owned	University-Owned
Arts & Culture Space	34	36%	7	21	5	1
Restaurant & Bar	59	62%	59	0	0	0
Others	2	2%	2	0	0	0
Grand Total	95	100%	68	21	5	1

Occasional non-profit venues are typically multipurpose, multi-use spaces in mixed-use buildings (e.g., Arts at the Armory, Dance Complex, 585 Arts, Arts Collaborative Medford, Art Lab Everett, and Jean Appolon Expressions).

Restaurants and Bars as Occasional Venues

Revere, Lynn, and Malden have a higher share of restaurants and bars that operate as occasional venues – restaurants and bars represent 70% or more of all occasional venues in those three cities. In most of the municipalities, bars and restaurants represent the majority of occasional venues. In Cambridge, Melrose and Medford, arts and culture spaces represent the majority of occasional venues. Averaged across the study area, bars and restaurants make up close to two-thirds of all occasional venues.

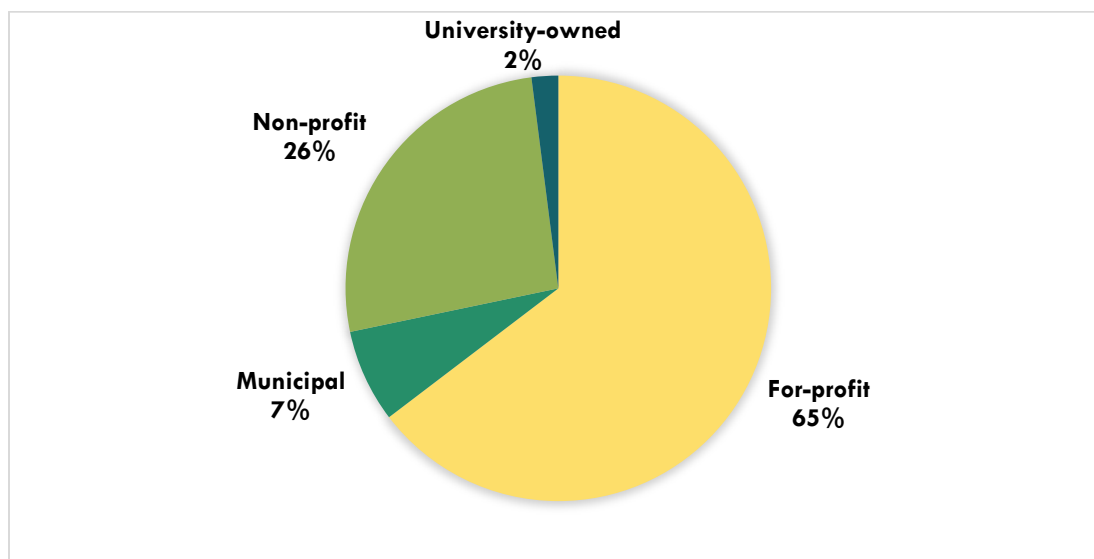
Table 4. Type and Distribution of Occasional Venues by Municipality.

City	Occasional Venue Count	Occasional - Arts & Culture Spaces Count	Arts & Culture Spaces %	Occasional - Bars & Restaurants Count	Occasional - Bars & Restaurants %	Occasional - Other Count	Occasional - Other %
Cambridge	15	9	60%	5	33%	1	7%
Somerville	18	6	33%	12	67%	0	0%
Revere	14	1	7%	12	86%	1	7%
Lynn	11	3	27%	8	73%	0	0%
Malden	10	3	30%	7	70%	0	0%
Everett	11	5	45%	6	55%	0	0%
Chelsea	9	3	33%	6	67%	0	0%
Medford	3	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%
Melrose	4	2	50%	2	50%	0	0%
Grand Total	95	34		59		2	

Venue Operating Model Trends

Venues across the study area also varied by ownership model, falling into one of four categories: for-profit, non-profit, municipally owned or university owned. Ninety percent (90%) of all venues across the study area use either a for-profit or non-profit ownership model.

Share of venues by operating model



The remaining venues are either municipally owned or university owned. Dedicated venues are more evenly distributed across ownership models, with non-profit venues making up the largest share at 41%. In contrast, more than 70% of occasional venues are operating using a for-profit business model.



Table 5. Operating Models Across Dedicated and Occasional Venues.

Venue Use	Venue Count	For Profit Count	For Profit %	Non-Profit Count	Non-Profit %	Muni Count	Muni %	University Count	University %
Dedicated	27	10	37%	11	41%	4	15%	2	7%
Occasional	95	68	72%	21	22%	5	5%	1	1%
Total	122	78	64%	32	26%	9	7%	3	2%

Cambridge is the only municipality in the study area with more non-profit venues than for-profit venues. It also is one of only two municipalities with university-owned venues. Because of the concentration of occasional venues in Gateway Cities, and the correlation between occasional venues and a for-profit operating model, Gateway Cities tend to rely more heavily on for-profit venues than non-profit venues. University-owned venues are the least common operating model in the study area. Municipally owned venues are the most evenly represented across the study area ranging from zero to three per municipality across the study area. Medford and Melrose have the most even distribution of venues across the different operating models, with Medford home to at least one venue of each operating type.

Table 6. Venue Operating Models as a Share of Venues in Study Area Municipalities.

City	Venue Count	For-profit	For-profit %	Non-profit	Non-profit %	Muni Count	Muni %	University Count	University %
Cambridge	28	12	43%	13	46%	1	4%	2	7%
Somerville	23	16	70%	6	26%	1	4%	0	0%
Revere	15	15	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Lynn	14	9	64%	4	29%	1	7%	0	0%
Malden	11	9	82%	2	18%	0	0%	0	0%
Everett	11	6	55%	2	18%	3	27%	0	0%
Chelsea	10	8	80%	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%
Medford	5	1	20%	1	20%	2	40%	1	20%
Melrose	5	2	40%	2	40%	1	20%	0	0%
Grand Total	122	78		32		9		3	

Implications for Marketing and Visibility

Dedicated and occasional venues that operate under a non-profit business model are often multi-use or “layered” spaces that provide a diversity of activities. Sustaining these activities requires diverse funding streams, including programming, membership, class fees, philanthropy, rentals, etc. This also means these venues have audiences that range from the hyper local to regional and national depending on which activity audiences are entering through. These venues often operate with larger budgets than for-profit venues and are more likely to have communications staff that can support marketing. University-owned venues can typically leverage university networks and resources to support marketing activities.

Dedicated independent for-profit venues are typically smaller spaces with limited or no marketing capacity compared with larger venues operated by larger promoters like Live Nation/Ticketmaster, Bowery Presents, or Crossroads Presents. These venues have a greater mix



of local and touring acts, and an ability to set programming goals as compared to other venue types in the region. They also make themselves available to rent for events and programming. There are also municipally owned facilities dedicated as performances spaces. The operations and programming of these venues vary by municipality. These for-profit venues are less likely to be eligible for or to receive government support and may have trouble competing with non-profit and university-owned venues that have more revenue to support marketing.

Stakeholder Engagement

From April 2025 through July 2025, the project team conducted interviews with municipal staff and venue operators to identify challenges and opportunities related to audience attraction and marketing, including technology needs. For this project, marketing efforts are defined as any print or digital advertising, promotional tactics, or sales strategies with the goal of generating revenue or attracting larger audiences. Marketing efforts have become a key component in shaping audiences' experiences through merchandising, exclusive perks, VIP packages, etc. The project team put special emphasis on digital marketing tools to understand whether existing regional tools, specifically the NEFA CreativeGround directory and the ArtsBoston Calendar could be leveraged to provide marketing support and visibility to venues impacted by the Encore Casino.

Engagement Process Overview

Engagement for the project focused on municipal staff working in study area cities; venue staff working in venues within the study area; and individuals familiar with the venue ecosystem of metro Boston. The engagement process encompassed three stages of engagement activities: (1) interviews with municipal and venue stakeholders; (2) three listening sessions; (3) user testing of the CreativeGround platform.

In the first stage of engagement, MAPC interviewed twelve (12) municipal representatives and sixteen (16) local venue stakeholders. Municipal interviews engaged ten (10) municipal staff in positions related to economic development (5), arts and culture (2), communications (1), planning (1) and Mayoral staff (1) as well as two (2) members of local cultural councils. These interviews provided insights into how municipalities engage with local venues, what coordination efforts with local venues exist, and how municipal marketing resources are used to promote local cultural programming. These interviews established a baseline understanding of how municipal governments interact with their local venues.

Venue interviews engaged sixteen (16) local venue stakeholders, including booking agents, marketing staff, executive directors, and artistic directors. These individuals provided perspectives on their programming, target audience, marketing strategies, networks, and views of the broader ecosystem. They described their current interactions with their respective municipal governments and the ways they hope to interact with municipal government in the future.

In the second phase of engagement, the project team engaged a total of twenty-four individuals over three (3) listening sessions in June and July 2025. Two virtual listening sessions engaged fifteen individuals. The third, in-person, session engaged twelve (12) participants at The Rockwell in Davis Square, Somerville. At the final listening session, MAPC shared findings from prior engagement, and representatives from NEFA and ArtsBoston provided an orientation to those platforms. MAPC facilitated a conversation among participants about the initial findings and the potential value and relevance of NEFA and ArtsBoston's platforms as regional marketing tools.



Listening Sessions	Participants
Virtual Sessions	15
In-Person Session	12
Total (*3 participants attended both sessions)	24

For the third phase of engagement, MAPC scheduled user testing of the CreativeGround platform with two independent venues to identify opportunities for CreativeGround to support venue marketing and to engage participants in more in-depth conversations about their marketing needs and use of these digital tools.

Engagement Findings

The engagement process identified a high degree of alignment among municipal staff and venue operators around the value of venues as local destinations that drive economic activity and areas where support could be strengthened. Because many municipalities operate venues, municipal staff have an awareness of some of the challenges facing venues in terms of operation and competition.

1. Programming in communities often depends on available venue space.
Each venue space is unique, and operators consider what programming makes sense for each room, how people interact, and what makes them feel comfortable. How venues are set up, in terms of the stage, seating, lighting, and acoustics, all shape the experience for artists and audiences. Some rooms are more appropriate for specific art forms than others, and many local nonprofit venues are not purpose-built, but repurposed spaces.
2. Local independent venues connect to a variety of networks in the greater Boston ecosystem. Venues express a desire to connect with other independent venues and meet more regularly; they value building relationships as a sector and developing a larger regional scene. Venues play an important role in talent development and there is desire to cultivate a culture of celebrating and exporting local talent. Venues and artists are already organizing efforts to connect and network by municipal geography and discipline-specific work. Nonprofit venues report working to expand their network to include arts-related businesses. While venues operate regionally, they report perceived and real barriers that prevent audiences and artists from participating in their programming including the Charles River, public transit access, and commuter rail schedules. Working with municipalities can be challenging for both for-profit and nonprofit venues.
3. Municipal and local independent venue stakeholders want to develop and support the independent venue ecosystems in the region.
Municipal staff in the region recognize the disconnect between local cultural councils and performing artist communities and see opportunities artist liaisons to help overcome this disconnect. These stakeholders want to learn how to best support local independent venues as integral parts of the local economy, regional ecosystem, and cultural identity of Metro Boston. Local independent venues recognize the need for coordination and collaboration and are curious about how to better support the larger independent venue ecosystem. Topics of interest include operational models, residency programs, local ticketing platforms, and other existing resources. Specific needs mentioned include a map of local venues, opportunities for supporting local and touring acts, and networks for artist development that can help export talent outside the region.



4. Local independent venues work creatively to market themselves. Many local venues lack the financial resources or time for dedicated marketing spending. While some nonprofit venues use grant funds to experiment with influencers to reach new, younger audiences, many venues struggle to find their footing in the region. Smaller venues with minimal staff focus on word of mouth, a touring artist's following, or personal databases to promote shows. When it comes to scarce resources for operations, marketing, although important, is sacrificed, and most participants agreed that word of mouth is the strongest avenue of communication.
5. Local independent venues use a variety of existing tools to support marketing. Venues in the study area use resources that fall into four categories to promote events and rent their space – direct outreach, local media, social media, and online promotion platforms. Direct outreach methods and social media were mentioned by both nonprofit and for profit venues.

Direct Outreach	Social Networks	Local Media	Online Promotion Platforms
Flyers	Facebook	Boston Art Review	Eventbrite
Institutional Partners	Instagram	Cambridge Day – Arts Fuse	DICE (dice.fm)
Newsletters	MeetUp	Chelsea Prospers	Get to the Gig Boston
Promoters	Peerspace	Cache Medford Arts Calendar	Ticketmaster
Venue website			
Word of Mouth			

6. Local independent venues see value in the ArtsBoston Calendar and NEFA's CreativeGround platforms as regional resources, with some limitations. Venues find the time required to update the ArtsBoston Calendar with events to be a barrier to their ability to use it consistently. NEFA's CreativeGround platform is valued as an artist directory but is not seen as a marketing and promotional tool by venues. Nonprofit venues reported that some grants require them to update their profile in CreativeGround, while most for-profit independent venues do not have profiles in the platform. Many venue operators would not think of using CreativeGround to increase visibility of their venue. Stakeholders see the potential for CreativeGround to promote, showcase, and export local talent to other communities. Venue operators see value in a platform that can export peer venues and offer a tool to connect or rate experiences with artists and venues.

Assessing Marketing Support Opportunities

Engagement with municipalities and venues validates that increasing venue visibility through regional resources would add value to local independent venues and enhance municipalities as destinations for arts and culture programming. Analysis of venue representation in the CreativeGround database also reveals opportunities to expand the impact of that tool for increasing venues' representation and visibility. Meeting the needs of venues and supporting their marketing needs would likely require an intermediary site that can be custom built to showcase venue information through the CreativeGround API while also highlighting municipalities as destinations with supportive amenities.

Venue Representation in CreativeGround Database

The NEFA CreativeGround database has an opportunity to expand representation of venues through this project. It has the most robust representation of non-profit venues, with 56% of these



venues listed in the platform, and university-owned venues, with two-thirds of these venues listed. Overall, at the onset of the project, CreativeGround included only 24% of venues identified in the project, representing a significant opportunity to expand venue representation in the platform. Among venues in the database, dedicated venues are more heavily represented with 44% of dedicated venues from all sources in NEFA's database, compared to only 18% of occasional venues.

Table 7. Venue Representation in CreativeGround by Type.

Venue Use	Total Venues	NEFA CreativeGround Database	% of Total Venues
Dedicated	27	12	44%
Occasional	95	17	18%
Grand Total	122	29	24%

Among occasional venues, arts and cultural spaces are more likely to be in the CreativeGround database, however, only 41% of these spaces are in the platform. Restaurants and bars have a much smaller presence; only 7% of restaurants and bars that serve as venues are listed in the platform.

Table 8. Occasional Venue Representation in CreativeGround by Type.

Occasional Venue Use	Total Venues	NEFA CreativeGround Database	% of Total Venues
Arts & Culture Space	34	13	38%
Restaurant & Bar	59	4	7%
Others	2	0	0%
Grand Total	95	17	18%

For profit venues and municipally owned venues represent the largest opportunity for expanding venues in the CreativeGround Platform. These are the two operating models with least access to incentives for updating information in CreativeGround. Developing a platform to support visibility and connection among venues could help create an incentive structure for maintaining the data over time.

Table 9. Venue Representation in CreativeGround by Operating Model.

Venue Operation	Total Venues	NEFA CreativeGround Database	% of Total Venues
For-profit	78	6	8%
Non-profit	32	18	56%
Municipal	9	3	33%
University-owned	3	2	67%
Grand Total	122	29	24%

Geographically, the largest areas of opportunity to increase venue representation in CreativeGround are the City of Somerville, which has only 17% of its venues listed, and the Gateway Cities of Chelsea, Everett, Malden and Revere, which have minimal to no representation in the platform. Medford, Melrose and Lynn have the most robust representation in CreativeGround, with 40% to 60% of their venues in the platform. While Cambridge has the highest number of venues in the database, less than a third of its venues are listed. Creating



opportunities for municipal staff to access and use the data in the platform may also incentivize their support in entering and updating venue data.

Table 10. Venue Representation in CreativeGround by Municipality.

City	Total Venues	NEFA CreativeGround Database	% of Total Venues
Cambridge	28	12	43%
Lynn	14	6	43%
Somerville	23	4	17%
Medford	5	3	60%
Melrose	5	2	40%
Chelsea	10	1	10%
Everett	11	1	9%
Malden	11	0	0%
Revere	15	0	0%
Grand Total	122	29	24%

CreativeGround User Testing

To better assess the digital platforms' capabilities, the project team conducted user testing with two stakeholders that participated in the listening sessions. The user testing participants voluntarily agreed to test the use of CreativeGround and to provide feedback on the ArtsBoston Calendar. User testing participants had distinct characteristics. One organization is a well-established non-profit dance company with a staff of eleven people. The organization is completing construction of a dedicated venue. This organization was represented in user testing by its executive director and four staff members. The second organization also operates as a non profit and has existed for two years with one person on staff, the executive director. The organization's executive director and a board member participated in user testing. User testing took place on Friday, November 21, 2025, and Tuesday, November 25, 2025, respectively.

Both groups were familiar with the website and had profiles already created. They both primarily use CreativeGround when engaging with NEFA, Mass Cultural Council (MCC), or other funders. The ArtsBoston Calendar was less known, but both testing teams had at least one member that was aware of the tool prior to testing.

User testing participants were asked to share their screen and walk MAPC through two tasks. Task one asked users to update their profile, and task two asked users to search for a venue or an artist that they would be interested in working with. While completing tasks, the groups discussed the tool, the needs of their venues specifically, and the state of the independent venue ecosystem at large. Users were also asked about usability upgrades they would like to see on CreativeGround, how this tool could be integrated into their marketing efforts, and what other resources their venue would need to thrive.

For the first task, both user testing came to their respective sessions with their organization's login information. In both cases, the executive directors of the venues were updated their organizations' profiles. Neither user testing group made major changes to their profiles but both found updates needed.



For the second task, the first organization's user testing team began the task by looking for dancers but decided not to continue the search. The team expressed preference for using their own contact lists and relationships when looking for talent or venues. The second organization searched for relevant profiles related to film and media. Initially, the team had trouble deciding the best search category for film but selected "Media." This first search showed 210 results. After finding the list view overwhelming, the team switched to the map view to see which profiles were near the organization. The map view showcased a much smaller set of results compared with the results shown in the list view. In this sense, both user testing participants did not feel CreativeGround was the first tool they would leverage to connect with their local ecosystem.

Case Study: ArtsHub of Western Mass

To understand opportunities and functionality of intermediary websites, MAPC conducted research on ArtsHub of Western Mass as an example platform. Powered by CreativeGround, [ArtsHub of Western Mass](#) was launched in 2022 as a website created to amplify the promotion of resources and events in Western Massachusetts. Primarily designed to provide artists with information like job and grant opportunities and residencies, ArtsHub of Western Mass also hosts a calendar that shares arts and cultural events. MAPC interviewed ArtsHub staff to better understand the website features and marketing practices.

The site is a bulletin board-style website that displays selected information directly from the CreativeGround database. All data is synchronized in real time, and only key categories are highlighted. The site also allows users to submit events, space, and funding resources, with an option to connect submission to existing CreativeGround profiles. The site controls a user-friendly interface while leaving flexibility for users to publish content. Staff monitor content.

A high-quality visual aesthetics is a key feature that keeps users engaged. The site prioritizes usability, including user-friendly interfaces, concise content, and strong visual design to keep audiences engaged. The aesthetic experience, such as colors, fonts, and overall visual design, and consistent updates are central to usability and help keep users on the site.

The ArtsHub team has taken an adaptive approach to improving their site and responding to users' changing needs. Creating individual subregional pages has helped the site better connect with local audiences. A few articles featuring talented artists also proved successful in attracting visitors. Other ongoing explorations include designing a customized mailing list by targeted categories and sending e-blasts three times a week to encourage members to share their activities and connect with one another. The site also provides links to other regional and local resources.

The team also integrated social platforms into their outreach strategy, running two Facebook groups composed primarily of artists and a few arts organizations. Social media content is high quality, well designed, and easy to navigate. Though the account has been active, overall traffic is still low. More regular posting and cross-platform coordination with venues could strengthen ArtsHub's social reach.

ArtsHub's value to the regional ecosystem extends far beyond the site. The team works hard to increase visibility through highly organic outreach such as attending regional and local events, walking into local venues, having conversations with government departments, and cold calling. The team also hosts networking events and supports other programs that provide artists with financial or administrative aid. ArtsHub's community engagement leader is an artist who keeps open communication with the artist community to understand their needs. This role plays an active,



on-the-ground role in bridging regional and local resources and advocating for artists. The team also emphasized the importance of keeping regular communication with municipal departments, especially Cultural Councils, and Chambers of Commerce. These conversations are essential to advocating for better support to the creative sector.

Although the platform is not primarily focused on highlighting local independent venues, the site has potential to promote local events and artists through working more closely with venues. The ArtsHub team is also exploring ways to strengthen connections, while navigating challenges. Venues often rely on their own marketing networks and have limited capacity to manage other digital tools. One strategy under consideration is inviting venues to sponsor individual town pages on the site and tailoring features to support their promotional needs, which could also generate revenue for ArtsHub.

Overall, ArtsHub received positive feedback from users, and the team has successfully connected artists, municipalities, and local arts and culture stakeholders. The site also received a large volume of unexpected visits from tourists and new visitors to the region, highlighting its potential to promote local venues and events to regional audiences. ArtsHub shows the possibilities to integrate CreativeGround in a more user-friendly digital environment and intentionally dedicated to market regional assets.

Marketing Support Opportunities

Venues and municipalities recognize the value that venues bring to local communities and the region but lack effective mechanisms to increase visibility and support for the regional venue ecosystem.

1. **Municipalities have opportunities to support venues as destination anchors.**

Municipalities and venues both recognize the value of venues as anchors to local commercial areas where local businesses can serve the needs of venue audiences, and both municipalities and venues need support to coordinate that work. Municipalities lack dedicated staff to support local venues, with municipal staffing dispersed across cultural planning, tourism promotion, and small business services. Venues largely lack connection to municipalities, chambers of commerce, and other entities that could strengthen the venues' impact as an anchor to a district destination through coordinating efforts. Multiple venues in the region work with international artists and host global audiences. This represents an opportunity for an intermediary to support relationship building and marketing that positions venues as part of municipal commercial district destinations.

2. **Social networks are the primary marketing strategy for venues.**

Direct outreach through word of mouth is the most common tool venues use for increasing visibility and attracting audiences. This strategy typically includes the use of flyers and newsletters to promote events. It also includes digital tools like the venue's website and social networking platforms like Facebook, Eventbrite, and Instagram to elevate and market programming through the social networks held by individuals affiliated with the venue. Venues operators also emphasized the role of hospitality and customer experience as critical to repeat customers and positive word-of-mouth exposure.

3. **Media coverage of live entertainment is limited.**

Venues highlighted the value of traditional media sources like the Boston Art Review, Fuse, and arts and culture reporters at the Boston Globe and WBUR for increasing the visibility of



arts and culture programming in the region. They also highlighted the opportunity for these media outlets to highlight and uplift the diverse and dynamic programming that venues in the region are producing. Many venues reported that a scarcity of local media has made it more difficult to get adequate coverage. At the same time, social media, while regularly used by venues, is an extension of existing word-of-mouth efforts, as it relies on sharing of content through social networks. Venues would benefit from a wider range of strategies to build visibility beyond their existing audiences and networks.

4. Financial constraints limit the marketing capacity of venues.

Many local venues do not have financial resources, staff, nor time for dedicated marketing spending. Venues affiliated with universities or other institutions can leverage institutional networks and communications for marketing purposes. Some nonprofit venues also use grant funds to experiment with curatorial pieces with influencers to reach new, younger audiences. For venues that operate as non-profits, cuts to funders such as the National Endowment for the Arts have restricted operational capacity. Municipally owned venues and for-profit venues are most likely to struggle to afford marketing for their programming. Venues note that maintaining affordability for their audiences drives ticket prices to stagnate, while production costs continue to rise. These pressures on venues mean they rarely have operational support to fund or manage robust marketing efforts and reinforce the benefits that would be realized by an intermediary that can promote regional visibility of venues.

5. CreativeGround and the ArtsBoston Calendar represent an opportunity for venues.

Most participants at the listening sessions were aware of CreativeGround, and many participants reported awareness of the ArtsBoston Calendar. Users found CreativeGround to be a relevant and informative tool. User testing emphasized that user profiles in CreativeGround can help touring artists and new venues that want to expand their audiences and programming and the data provides a way to understand the venue ecosystem of the region. Both platforms are currently underutilized. Data analysis shows that only 22% of venues identified in the project were already listed in the CreativeGround dataset. Because many venues view the dataset as a directory rather than a marketing tool, the time required to submit content was seen as onerous. User testing participants expressed that they do not have the capacity to update their profiles regularly. While a complete profile is an informative profile, gathering all the components needed for a complete profile is labor intensive if it isn't already integrated into a venue's marketing processes. Instead, venues turn to tools that are less time intensive, have higher returns on audience connection and feedback (follows, site analytics, etc.), and are more aligned with word-of-mouth discovery.

6. Platforms powered by an API from CreativeGround, like ArtsHub of Western Mass, can expand visibility for venues.

ArtsHub of Western Mass demonstrates that the API from CreativeGround can be leveraged to market the artists and arts assets of a region effectively. It also highlights the need for the digital tool to be supported with staffing and be complemented with community engagement activities. Expanding visibility and connecting with local and regional audiences requires efforts beyond digital platforms. Meaningful engagement depends on direct outreach and partnerships with regional and local organizations. Tailoring content to subregional and local audiences is key. Curated content and the intentional features of artists and venues are effective strategies for boosting engagement and creating pathways for deeper venue involvement. Sustained staffing for relationship-building and coordination efforts are key for securing the success of CreativeGround and Arts Boston Calendar as marketing tools and for meeting the needs of venues and municipalities.



Recommendations

The project findings strongly support the potential for the CreativeGround database to support increased visibility of venues impacted by the Encore Casino through an intermediary digital platform. The ability of CreativeGround platform to collect and share information relevant to artists, producers, and audiences lends value to the venue ecosystem; however, it is not designed to be a marketing resource for venues on its own. The creation of an intermediary platform presents additional opportunities to strengthen the region's venue ecosystem. The staffing support required for the platform also creates opportunities to better communicate with and coordinate among venues and municipalities. The site should provide a simple user interface that provides functionality to audiences, venues, and municipalities.

1. Establish a digital platform for the purpose of increasing the visibility of local venues as part of local destinations.

Create a regional webpage dedicated to independent local venues in this region. This platform should leverage the existing regional resources that collect and share information about venues, events, and arts and culture assets.

2. Use the API from CreativeGround and test the API for ArtsBoston.

Maintaining a consistent, central database has demonstrated value and has the potential to increase venues' visibility across many platforms. The new platform should link back to the CreativeGround data and it should be staffed in a way that helps venues keep their profiles updated regularly. The ArtsBoston platform offers additional information about venue and program accessibility that would be valuable information for venues and audiences.

3. Develop features that meet the needs of audiences.

Existing websites that promote local shows and venue offer models for meeting audience needs. These include:

Spectacle Live manages multiple venues and its website includes the following features:

- Options to view information by events/tickets or by venue;
- Event listings with images of the featured artist and information about date, time, event name, location, and links to more information and tickets;
- Venue listings that include options to download a seating chart with a link to ticketing from each venue page;

Get to the Gig, Boston, is an entity that books music gigs around Boston, and provides a digital platform to access tickets. Its platform does not highlight specific venues. Its event listings are presented as thumbnails with a similar format to Spectacle Live. In addition to date, time, artist name, and location, this platform also includes information about the age range and genre of each show.

In addition, the platform should offer translation and other language access features.

4. Develop features to support the needs of venues.

Venue operators emphasized the importance of simplicity in the interface with a small set of categories that are easy and intuitive to use. Venues identified value from the ArtsBoston calendar's accessibility features and would be interested in accessing CreativeGround information in ways that allows them to identify local and regional artists for outreach to build their calendars. Including a venue interface that allows for communication and information sharing among member venues could support the desire to build a stronger regional venue ecosystem.



5. Include features that promote municipal destinations.

Some venue websites include a “Plan Your Visit” link in the menu bar. This offers access to information about local hotels, restaurants and bars as well as directions to the venue and information about parking. Incorporating this information into the platform would increase the visibility of the local destination areas surrounding local venues. Updating this information could also help municipalities and venues connect with their local Chambers of Commerce and hospitality industries. Connecting this hub to municipal calendars would also ensure that municipalities are partners in showcasing the events and activities offered by their local venues.

6. Staff the digital platform in order to coordinate support for venues, municipalities, and the hospitality industry.

The Arts Hub of Western Mass demonstrates the importance of maintaining staff support for digital platforms designed to promote visibility and coordination among arts and culture venues and artists. Given venues’ need for support with marketing, coordination, and data entry activities, appropriately staffing the platform will be critical to its success. In addition to providing support with data entry and maintaining the technology, other responsibilities should include the following.

- Increase relationships with local arts and culture planners and facilitate regional networks that articulate specific programmatic areas.
- Support coordination among venues and municipalities.
- Explore partnerships with local hotels, restaurants, and local cultural stakeholders and engage with the hospitality industry to coordinate efforts.
- Track and evaluate the impact of the platform.

7. Strengthen arts and culture ecosystems in municipalities impacted by the Encore Casino, especially Gateway Cities.

Venues and municipal staff reported running into obstacles from municipal policies and practices that make it difficult to be successful as a venue for arts and culture. MAPC can work with municipalities in the area impacted by the Encore Casino to incorporate the arts and culture sector into economic development planning and implementation efforts. Municipalities can work with MAPC to develop and adopt venue-friendly policies to incentive cultural programming and support these venues as small businesses. This work can complement efforts to actively invest in sustained tourism strategies and provide a foundation of regional collaboration to support the creative economy.

In addition to these regional recommendations, venues expressed a need for access to mentorship and support to learn the industry and build effective business strategies for venue management. This aligns with state priorities for supporting business acumen for artists and individuals in the arts and culture sector.⁸

⁸ Massachusetts Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council Report to the Governor, April 2025. Accessible online at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/cultural-policy-development-advisory-council-report/download>.



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