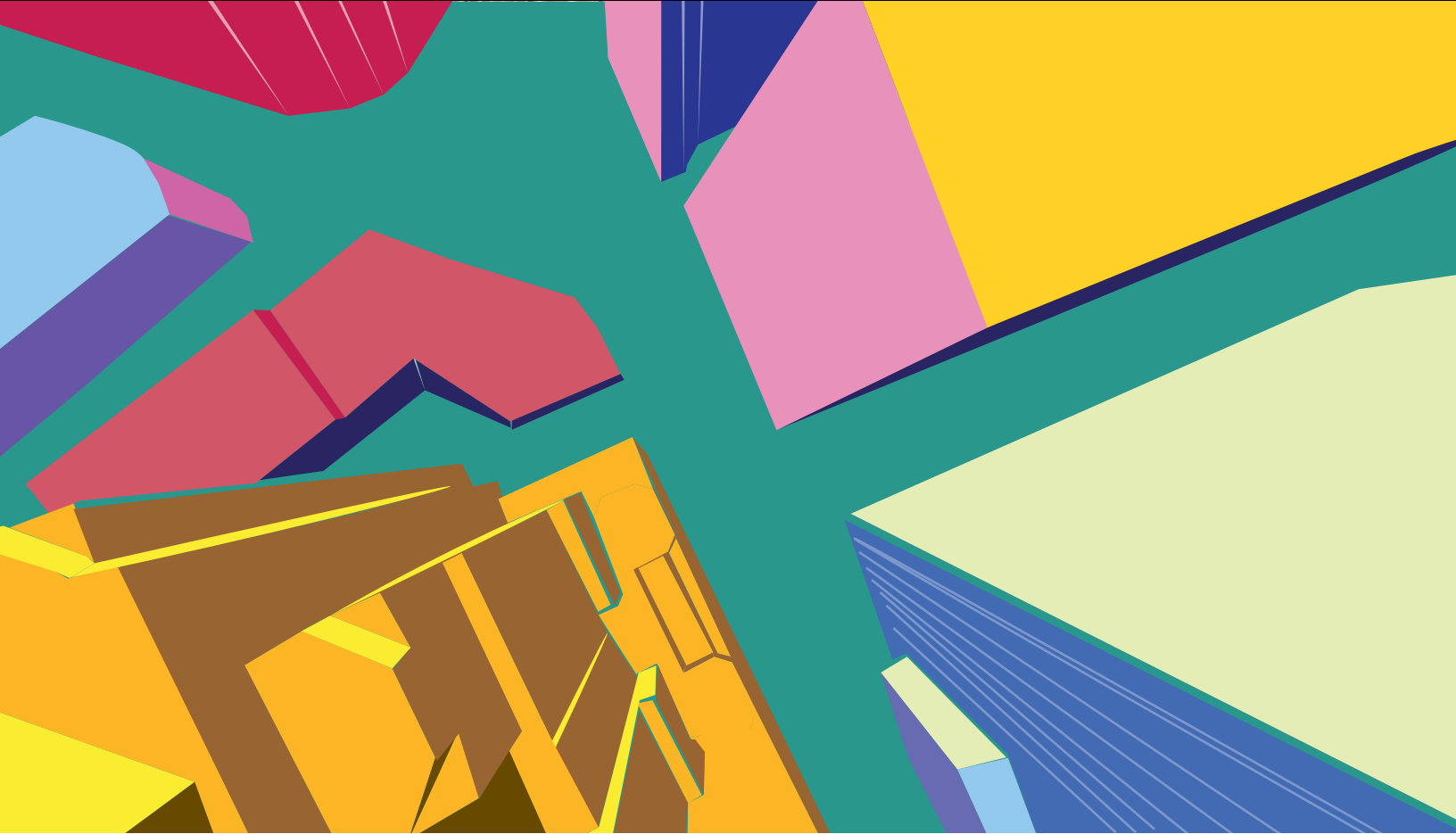


MAKING SPACE FOR ART

Securing Cultural Infrastructure in Boston, Cambridge & Somerville



Regional Policy Agenda



CITY of **BOSTON**



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Executive Summary

Creative spaces are spaces dedicated to the production and presentation of creative practices in Metro Boston. These spaces and the artists and creative workers that rely on them are at high risk of being displaced due to development pressure in the region.

Making Space for Art is the first regional planning effort to address the rapid loss of creative spaces in the face of development pressure, led by MAPC's Arts and Culture Department in partnership with the cities of Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville. Launched in 2022, the project's goal was to address regional challenges related to creative space. At the time, the three municipalities understood that progress on stabilizing creative space required a regional approach - the creative economy and the sector's challenges, and the solutions, extend beyond municipal boundaries. *Making Space for Art* offers an innovative anti-displacement strategy to protect, preserve and expand existing creative spaces and ensure more equitable access to space in the metropolitan area.

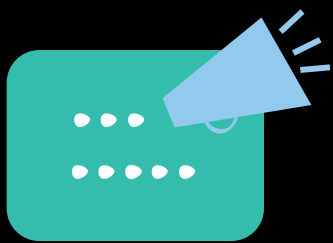
The project builds upon previous work by MAPC and the project partners. MAPC's [Somerville Arts Space Risk Assessment Study](#) released in 2022, analyzed risks posed to artists and arts organizations relative to development pressures across Somerville. Additionally, the 2021 [REVIVE Cultural Indicators Project](#) with Arlington, Beverly, Boston, and Franklin documents the impact of COVID-19 on the creative sector through identifying baseline data and metrics to regularly assess municipal investment in and the health of local arts and culture sectors.

Key partners for *Making Space for Art* include the City of Boston's Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture (MOAC), City of Cambridge's Director of Arts and Culture Planning, the Cambridge Arts Council (CAC) and the Somerville Arts Council (SAC). Between 2022 and 2023, over one hundred (100) individuals, including cultural space stakeholders and municipal staff, informed this work through interviews and focus groups. Their feedback informed three municipal action plans developed in 2024 and finalized in 2025 as well as a regional policy agenda for creative space completed in 2025.

The creative sector drives significant dollars into local economies, aggregated to \$29.7 billion dollars in value added to the Massachusetts economy in 2023¹. However, this project's key findings show that creative spaces, with few exceptions, remain invisible in municipal policies and planning efforts. There is a great need for a culture shift in municipal planning to recognize creative spaces as a foundational infrastructure for the region's creative economy and overall economic prosperity. The region also needs guidance on how to access data on creative spaces, how to integrate arts and culture data and stakeholders into planning and policymaking, and what additional structures are needed to support the work.

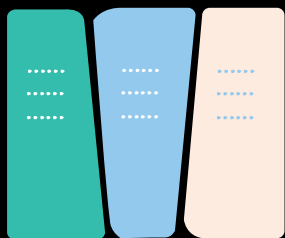
¹ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis & National Endowment for the Arts, Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ASPSA), 2023.

Making Space for Art provides:



A regional agenda

This agenda establishes a framework to support more accessible, affordable, attainable arts and cultural production and creative economic activity. The agenda recommends proactive use of data to **map arts and culture** activities and spaces so they can be preserved and to identify gaps and opportunities. In parallel, municipalities need to **define arts and culture** within local plans and policies, especially zoning, to enable multifaceted uses. Municipalities also need to systematically assess how permitting, licensing, and other policies restrict and eliminate cultural activities and revise them to **allow arts and culture to happen**. Finally, municipalities need to **expand cultural infrastructure** by adopting funding and financing tools for cultural preservation and development, and by developing affordable housing for artists. These regional strategies should be implemented in future efforts to protect, preserve, and develop creative spaces in the metro area.



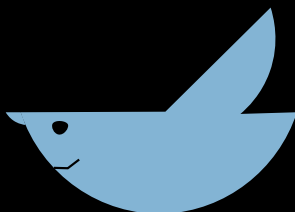
Three supportive briefing papers

- a. [*Zoning for Cultural Use*](#) offers a primer on how to use zoning to support arts and culture in Massachusetts.
- b. [*Housing our Region's Artists*](#) offers strategies to expand access to arts supportive housing.
- c. [*Agent of Change in Sound Policy*](#) offers a policy tool to manage conflicts over sound generated by arts and culture venues and activities.



A digital mapping tool prototype

Municipalities now have a tool to create and update an inventory of creative spaces that generates a GIS map layer of those spaces that can be integrated with municipal GIS systems. With this platform, municipalities can now analyze creative space data across the three municipalities to track trends and gather insights to inform policy and planning.



Municipal action plans

Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville have action plans tailored to their needs and context that include supporting information on their development review processes. These plans, developed in 2024 and finalized in 2025, identify roles, responsibilities and the timeline for implementing the recommendations.

The project was funded through a technical assistance grant that included funding from the Barr Foundation to support the work of the MAPC Arts and Culture Department.

Since the initial stages of this project, MAPC and the participant cities have taken steps to advance the work through a combination of policy changes, advocacy, and innovative solutions.

Implementation of the regional agenda is a core element of *ArtsForward Metro Boston*, MAPC's programmatic area that advances arts and culture as a strategic priority for MAPC² and supports [MetroCommon 2050](#) regional plan implementation. In 2022, in partnership with MASS Creative, MAPC's Arts and Culture Department informed an advocacy effort to advance state-wide cultural space policies, that resulted in the drafting and 2024 revision of the Creative Space Act Bill [H.3587/S.2334](#). This proposed legislation, reported favorably out of Committee in the 2025-2026 Legislative Session, would provide municipalities with a definition of creative spaces, allow preservation restrictions to be used for creative and cultural uses, and enable municipalities to establish trusts to aggregate funding and hold real property as a tool for subsidizing and preserving creative space. Over four hundred (400) cultural organizations and artists have endorsed the bill.

Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville have also demonstrated their commitment to this work by acting on learnings from the project. Boston has published a [map](#) of artist workspaces and launched the Creative Space Commercial Connector, a program to connect creative workers looking for space with commercial spaces looking for long term tenants. More recently, Boston has joined The World Cities Culture Forum, a global network of cities united in using culture to shape more inclusive, creative, and resilient cities. Boston has also launched its Anti-Displacement Action Plan, which explicitly addresses cultural displacement in its scope and recommendations. Boston is also working on Creative Space Typologies Design Guidelines 2026 to help ensure cultural infrastructure is designed to be functional. These guidelines will be released in 2026. The City has also released an RFP to develop a Cultural Infrastructure Framework that will include both an inventory of civic and cultural spaces, as well as recommendations for zoning and policies changes to support those spaces, and to define *arts and culture*.

Cambridge is exploring changes to their zoning to better support arts and creative activities. The City of Cambridge has been exploring how to incorporate arts and culture policies into zoning for the area around the Central Square Cultural District. In addition, BioMed Realty, the developer of a new building at 585 Third Street, partnered with Global Arts Live to include The Platform, a new 45,000 square foot arts and culture center, in the development.

The City of Somerville completed a Cultural Capacity Plan in 2025 and convened an Arts and Culture Subcommittee for an Anti-Displacement Task Force, which released a report with recommendations for prevent cultural displacement in Somerville in 2025. In November 2025, MAPC and the City of Somerville released a memo outlining a strategy to establish a local Cultural Trust as a model for funding and managing creative spaces at the municipal level.



² Metropolitan Area Planning Council, "Strategic Plan 2025-2030," February, 2025. https://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/MAPC_Strategic-Plan_2025-2030-final-updated.pdf

All three cities are deepening their understanding of the creative economy as a driver of economic prosperity and pathway to stable, well-paid jobs, and exploring how to ensure that arts and culture is integrated into planning and decision-making. The project highlights that aligning definitions across the region and the Commonwealth can lead to more consistent consideration of creative spaces in planning, preservation, and development. Although some progress has been made, there is an urgent need for a more comprehensive and well-resourced approach to creative space protection and access. As challenges persist, state and local elected officials and policymakers need to work to ensure that Metro Boston continues to benefit from a thriving creative economy and to be known as a home for artists and an international cultural hub.



1. Introduction

Massachusetts is home to a diverse array of cultural institutions, artists, cultural organizations, and creative enterprises. The National Endowment for the Arts and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reported in April 2025 that arts and culture contribute an estimated \$29.7 billion in economic value and account for 4% of the Commonwealth's economy. This wealth of activities, practices, and artistic trajectories generates a complex and intricate network of diverse disciplines, each with its own needs and requirements. And, exploring deeper into the creative sector, everyone within the ecosystem has their own unique needs.

Creative spaces are buildings and spaces within buildings that are used for creation, practice, presentation, exhibition of art, creative or cultural expression, and for artist housing. These spaces are critical infrastructure for a prosperous, thriving region. Creative workers need workspaces to develop their practice, craft, and art and presentation spaces where they can connect with audiences and markets and community. Without creative spaces, many artists, makers, fabricators, performers, and cultural producers cannot pursue these careers and take part in the region's creative economy. Creative spaces encompass two primary categories: spaces for production, where art is created or practiced, and spaces for presentation, where artists showcase, present, perform, and exhibit their work.

Metro Boston's creative ecosystem operates on a regional scale - creativity and creative work permeate municipal boundaries - musicians rehearse and perform throughout the region, freelance graphic designers and photographers take on jobs across the different cities, and people find housing where they can afford it and studio space where it is available. Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville are not only the dominant cities for arts and culture activity in the metropolitan area; they also make up an interconnected network of artists, creative industry workers, cultural spaces and skills networks.

In 2022, these cities did not have a shared approach for defining, tracking, and planning for creative space. Municipal efforts to create and maintain a creative space inventory were piecemeal and incomplete. They included a subset of existing assets and information on some new initiatives but lacked information on recent closures or relocations and lacked a platform to manage creative space data. This limited municipal staff ability to analyze and understand the landscape of cultural infrastructure.

The three municipalities were also grappling with the challenge of how-to better support artists, culture-bearers, and organizations to access the spaces they need to do their work, a problem exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ongoing development pressures and a lack of public investment in the sector have resulted in a fragmented landscape of creative workspace vulnerable to development pressure.

Creative Space Displacement

Two years after the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the region was experiencing the rapid closure of numerous rehearsal and performance venues. Cambridge lost two important spaces in 2018 with the closure of Ryles Jazz Club, the second-oldest jazz club in the region, and the displacement of musicians from the EMF building as a rehearsal facility. Somerville lost the ONCE Ballroom in 2020, and the City of Boston faced the potential loss of two creative workspaces between 2022 and 2023 with Charlestown Rehearsal Studios threatened with closure and the closure of the Sound Museum in the Brighton neighborhood³.

Artists spared from these closures still experienced temporary loss of access to their workspaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic and faced long-term risk of losing space due to the slow recovery of the arts and culture sector after the pandemic, precarious rental arrangements with landlords, and high development pressures across the region. Among other challenges, artists and creators face barriers to accessing creative spaces that meet their needs. These barriers include the high cost of housing and workspace, lack of transportation access, and lack of transparent information about space availability.

³ Gay, Malcolm. "Long pushed out when neighborhoods change, artists are fighting back, and getting help." *The Boston Globe*, August 5, 2023.

Somerville's ONCE Lounge And Ballroom Announces Permanent Closure

By [Jim Sullivan](#)

November 25, 2020

[Share](#)



Source: *WBUR News*, Jim Sullivan, "Somerville's ONCE Lounge And Ballroom Announces Permanent Closure," Nov. 25, 2020.

MAPC's 2022 Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment identified three criteria known to be associated with heightened exposure to development pressure. These criteria can be quantified using a set of data indicators as a proxy. While relative exposure to development pressure does not always or directly correlate with displacement, exposure analysis helps to visualize the geography where displacement may be more likely. In 2022, a total of 2,786,383 square feet of building area in Somerville housing arts and culture uses was classified as exposed to the High or Highest level of development pressure.

While development pressure plays a role, displacement is also influenced by other factors, including the parcel owner's interest in selling the property and arts organizations' capacity to withstand redevelopment pressure through ownership of their space, their ability to negotiate with a new property owner, or their ability to pay increased rent.

WHAT MAKES ARTS SPACES VULNERABLE?

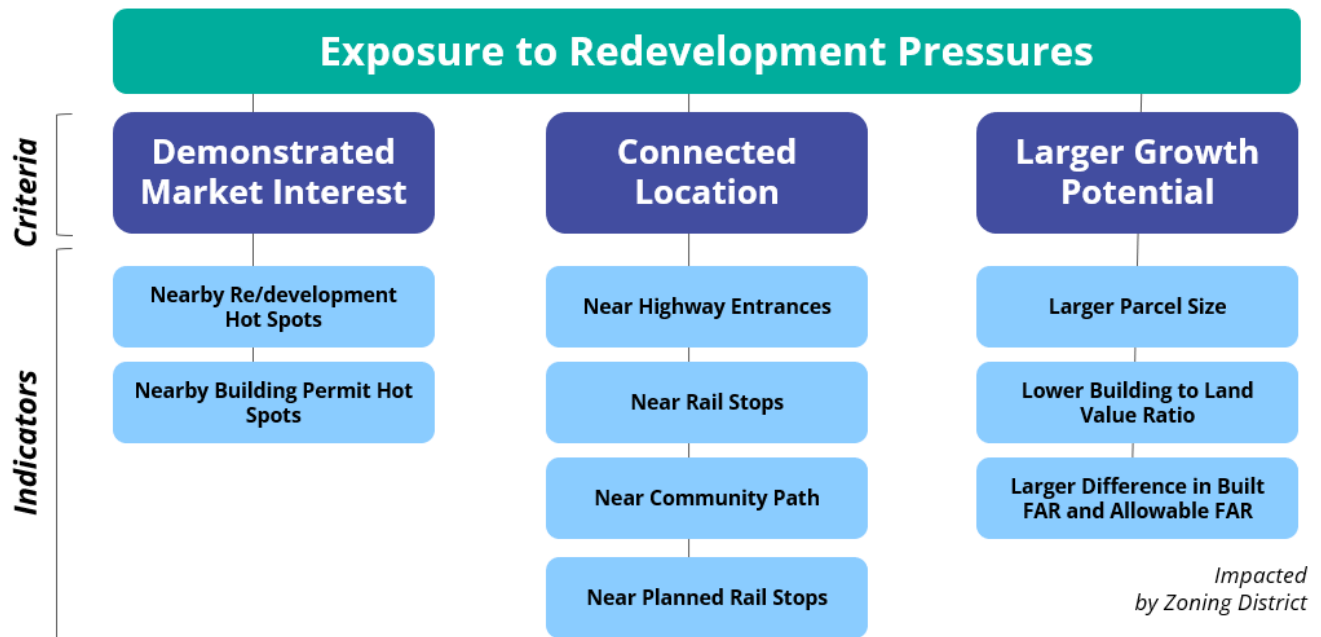


Figure 1. Development pressure exposure analysis from Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment, 2022.

Municipal Response to Creative Space Displacement

Prior to and during this project, the three cities expanded their cultural planning capacities by hiring additional dedicated staff. In addition, each city has experimented with strategies and initiatives to support creative spaces. One of the most remarkable is Somerville’s adoption of the Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) land use definition in its 2019 Somerville Zoning Ordinance and the City’s requirement that new developments reserve a percent of their floor area for ACE uses in some zoning districts. *Learn more in the [Zoning for Cultural Use briefing paper](#)*. Other examples from Somerville include the use of acquisition through eminent domain to prevent the loss of the [Somerville Armory](#) as a creative space in 2021 and the multi-year process of negotiating a Community Benefits Agreement through local advocacy that will ensure over 100,000 square feet of new ACE space in [Somerville’s Somernova](#) expansion. Somerville also commissioned a Creative Capacity Plan, released in 2025, and convened an Arts and Culture Subcommittee for an Anti-Displacement Task Force, which released a report with recommendations for prevent cultural displacement in Somerville in 2025.

In 2021, a partnership between a mission-driven developer, non-profit funders, and the City of Boston leveraged \$1.7 million in one-time funding to preserve [Humphreys Street Studios](#) in Dorchester⁴. Between July 2022 and June 2023, Boston launched the [Cultural Space Fund](#), which provided funding to seed, stabilize, and expand cultural spaces in the city. The fund, which has been challenging to sustain or grow, allocated resources including contributions from the Mayor’s Office of Arts and Culture (MOAC) annual budget and was directed toward projects in designated neighborhoods. Boston has published a [map](#) of artist workspaces and launched the Creative Space Commercial Connector, a program to connect creative workers looking for space with commercial spaces looking for long term tenants. Like Somerville, Boston has launched an Anti-Displacement Action Plan, which explicitly addresses cultural displacement in its scope and recommendations.

⁴ Cate McQuaid, “At Humphreys Street Studios in Dorchester, organizing leads to action to support working artist-tenants,” *The Boston Globe*, October 20, 2021. [At Humphreys Street Studios in Dorchester, organizing leads to action to support working artist-tenants - The Boston Globe](#)

In 2022, Cambridge completed a \$45.5 million public investment with the opening of the Foundry. This 50,000 square-foot mixed-use creative space comprises offices, space for visual and performing arts, and maker space. The Foundry was conveyed to the City as part of the consideration for a zoning amendment. This amendment, now incorporated into the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance as Section 13.59.10, expresses a preference for municipal or community uses⁵. It also requires that at least 10,000 square feet of the property's gross floor area be dedicated to educational, cultural, or institutional uses, as permitted under the Zoning Ordinance and at a time and in a form acceptable to the City.

The development process started in 2015 when the City of Cambridge partnered with the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) to plan and develop the future use of this space. CRA's resources from a successful urban renewal venture contributed \$35 million. The Foundry illustrates how expensive it is to build creative space and how long it can take to secure permanent creative space. It also demonstrates the powerful role that redevelopment authorities can play in financing and developing creative spaces. Municipalities do not possess the financial tools, bonding authority, or development mechanisms available to redevelopment authorities. The Foundry is a successful example of how municipalities can produce and secure creative space using redevelopment authorities, if they have them.

Other recent creative space projects in Cambridge include the partnership among Global Arts Live, the City of Cambridge, BioMed Realty and Takeda Pharmaceuticals to develop [The Platform at 585 Kendall](#) as a 45,000 square foot performing arts center⁶, as well as the philanthropic intervention to purchase [Arrow Street Arts](#) in Harvard Square⁷.

Addressing the Regional Need

Despite these efforts, the need for creative spaces is not being met and the preservation of creative spaces is not guaranteed. Developers and the arts community lack access to consistent, transparent municipal processes to preserve and develop spaces. Existing creative spaces in proximity to new development can face increased financial pressure, heightened scrutiny in code enforcement, direct displacement, or potential conflicts with new neighbors. When artists can advocate for municipal support, the municipalities' ability to respond often depends on one-time circumstances and customized solutions that are not replicable. These approaches do not provide permanent or long-term strategies to preserve, protect, or develop arts space.

Municipalities have limited tools to protect, preserve, and expand creative spaces. Where tools exist, such as Somerville's zoning for creative space or Boston's cultural space fund, they are specific to individual municipalities and not widely adopted. This contributes to a regional environment that lacks cohesive strategies to ensure equitable access to available spaces. There is still a need for greater consistency across municipalities to support the region's arts and culture sector. This report seeks to provide strategies that can be adapted and adopted across municipalities to establish a more consistent environment for the preservation and development of creative space.

1.1 Project Structure and Timeline

Making Space for Art began with three goals – enhanced stability of cultural spaces and creative sector workers across Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville, increased access to and control of cultural space for diverse arts producers, and increased investment in tools to sustain and grow cultural infrastructure. To accomplish these goals, the projects was structured in three parallel and overlapping workflows: landscape

⁵ Cambridge Redevelopment Authority & City of Cambridge. (2017, September 25). *The Foundry Building amended demonstration project plan* (Amended ed.). https://static1.squarespace.com/static/685741b7a86daa47be48f7da/t/6896c1f55432ee7820594348/1754710518220/Foundry+Demonstration+Amendment_Adopted_9.25.17.pdf

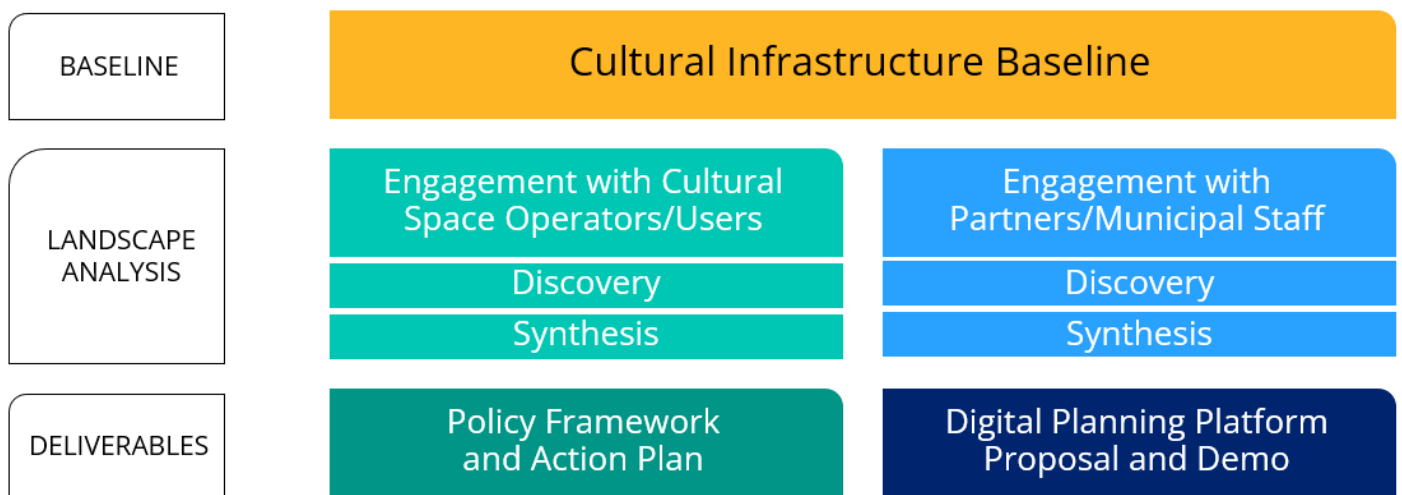
⁶ Albrecht, A. (2025, September 26). New Cambridge performing arts complex officially named "The Platform." *WBUR*. <https://www.wbur.org/news/2025/09/26/global-arts-live-platform-kendall-square>

⁷ Mason, A. (2024, April 12). Get a peek inside Cambridge's new community theater space. *WBUR*. <https://www.wbur.org/news/2024/04/12/arrow-street-arts-cambridge-harvard-square>

analysis, policy research, and data platform development. These workflows leveraged the expertise of four departments at MAPC: Arts and Culture, Data Services, Community Engagement, and Land Use. They resulted in a package of deliverables that includes this regional policy agenda, municipal action plans, a digital mapping prototype for cultural space, and briefing papers on key policy areas related to cultural space.

Project Workflows

PROJECT WORKFLOWS



The landscape analysis was informed by cultural space stakeholders, including stakeholders representing disciplines with distinct space needs as well as individuals experiencing space challenges. The *Making Space for Art* project used qualitative research methods, including interviews and focus groups as part of the landscape analysis for this project. Engagement with cultural space stakeholders primarily informed the policy framework, action plans, and briefing papers.

The policy research workflow began with an assessment of the cultural infrastructure baseline in the three cities through an audit of existing policies and available data related to cultural space. This baseline informed engagement with municipal staff from arts and culture and planning departments in the three cities. Over the course of the project, the workflow expanded to include research into specific policy topics including sound management, artist housing, and zoning for cultural use. Findings from these research efforts are packaged into three briefing papers: [Housing our Region’s Artists](#), [Agent of Change in Sound Policy](#), and [Zoning for Cultural Use](#).

The digital mapping prototype workflow began with a discovery process that focused on understanding the data resources available in the three cities, the ways that data is currently integrated into planning processes, how cultural space data is integrated into planning processes, and the ways that a new digital mapping tool might be used. The discovery process began with the cultural infrastructure baseline and included engagement with municipal staff from arts and culture, planning, and data departments. Findings from the discovery process informed one round of prototype development and user testing, as well as the delivery of a final prototype. Additional work is needed to collect data on existing cultural spaces to allow the tool to produce meaningful analyses.

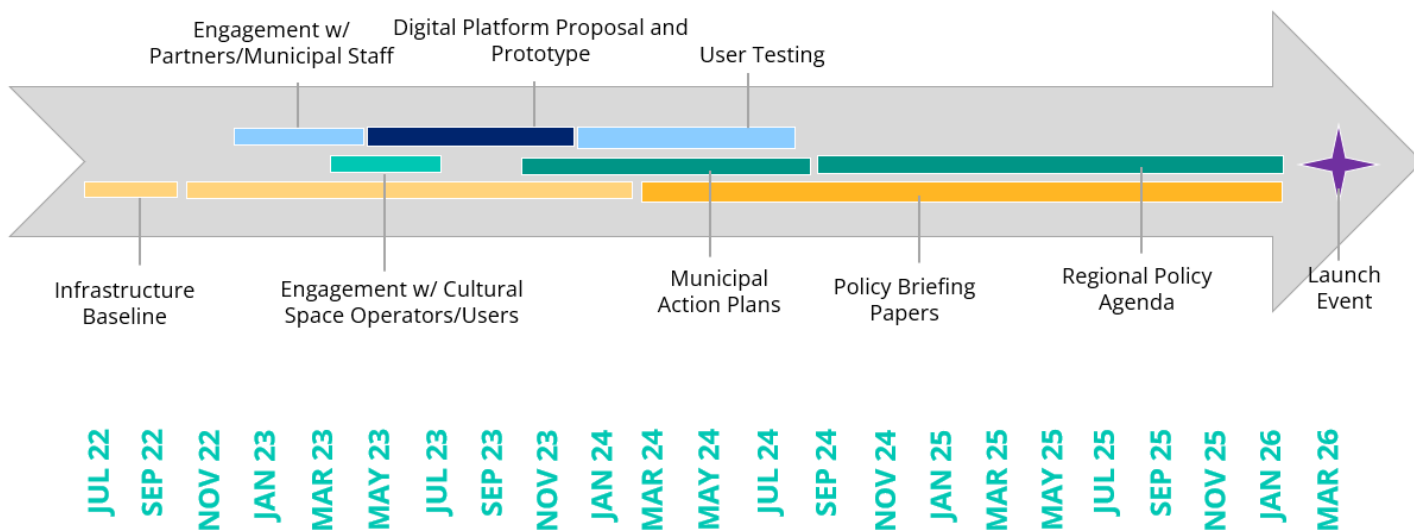
Timeline

The project kicked off in July 2022 with initial conversations with the three cities to determine priorities, collect existing data, and finalize the scope and timeline. MAPC convened Arts and Culture staff from Boston,

Cambridge, and Somerville monthly from September through November in 2022 to launch each of the project workflows. In 2023, MAPC convened quarterly coordination meetings in February, May, October, and December supplemented by individual check ins with each municipality. This period coincided with engagement with cultural space stakeholders and the discovery and development of the digital mapping platform.

In 2024, MAPC presented the municipal partners with draft action plans and development review diagrams, and an initial framework for the regional policy agenda. In July 2025, MAPC convened the project partners to review the revised policy agenda framework and provide updates on briefing papers in development. In December 2025, MAPC shared drafts of all project deliverables for review and feedback. MAPC completed final edits and formatting of the project deliverables between January and March 2026.

TIMELINE



2. Landscape Analysis

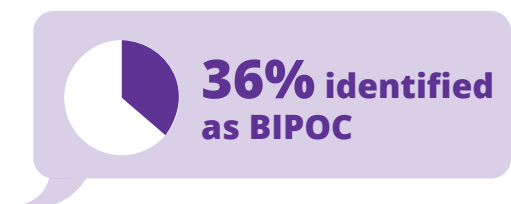
To better understand artists' experiences with creative space and the causes and impacts of displacement on artists and creative workers, MAPC conducted a landscape analysis through engagement with cultural space stakeholders. These stakeholders were identified by the municipal staff to represent disciplines known to be facing distinct challenges related to creative workspace and to represent individual experiences with barriers to accessing space and engaging in creative practices.



2.1 Cultural Space Stakeholder Engagement

In 2023, MAPC's Arts and Culture Department conducted twenty-nine (29) interviews and seven (7) focus groups, engaging with seventy-seven (77) participants. Approximately 36% of participants across interviews and focus groups identified as BIPOC, which helped to elevate the disparities in access and enforcement, although it was not a representative sample of the three cities. The share is noticeably lower than the share of people of color in Boston (59%), Cambridge (49%) or the three cities together (55%). A targeted follow-up study with artists of color to understand issues of racial equity related to creative space is warranted.

SEVEN
focus
groups
77
29
INTERVIEWS
77
PARTICIPANTS



After anonymizing responses, the project team used qualitative analysis tools to highlight core themes and identify trends in municipal- and discipline-specific challenges as well as issues that persist across municipalities. This analysis informed the action plans for each municipality and the overarching framework of the regional policy agenda.

Creative Space Stakeholder Interviews

In February and March of 2023, MAPC interviewed thirty-one (31) cultural space stakeholders. Throughout (29) project interviews, participants included ten (10) individuals identified by the City of Cambridge, (9) nine by the City of Somerville, and (6) six by the City of Boston. In two interviews, participants brought along a colleague. In addition, the project team interviewed (4) four individuals who reached out about the project individually. Of the 31 individuals interviewed, (10) ten identify as BIPOC individuals and (13) thirteen identify as women.



Participants were asked to share insights from their experiences navigating cultural spaces in the region. These interviews provided in-depth information about cultural space challenges that informed the structure and questions of discipline-specific focus groups.

Creative Space Discipline Focus Groups

From April to June 2023, the MAPC’s Arts and Culture Department engaged forty-six (46) participants in seven (7) focus groups, including (6) six discipline specific focus groups and one (1) larger cross-disciplinary focus group. Eighteen (18) participants identified as BIPOC individuals. Focus groups were grouped as follows, listed in chronological order:

Focus Group Category	Participants
Dance, Movement and Theatre	10
Nightlife and Performance Venues	7
Film, Photography and Production	5
Galleries	6
Music Production & Rehearsal Space	5
Faith Communities & Community Organizations	4
Cross-Discipline Creative Space Stakeholders	9
Total	46

Municipal project partners selected most participants to highlight specific challenges faced by specific creative disciplines. In some cases, individuals invited to the focus groups were unable to attend and recommended another individual to participate, and participants were encouraged to invite additional participants from their networks. Each focus group was held via Zoom and lasted ninety (90) minutes.

During the focus groups, participants were introduced to MAPC and the project scope and goals. Participants were informed about how their information would be used. Focus groups were facilitated by MAPC staff using protocols developed in partnership with municipal staff. Discussion was organized around three key questions: where participants do their creative work, what their creative space needs are, and what opportunities and challenges do participants experience related to space. Participants shared their personal and professional experiences navigating access to cultural spaces in Metro Boston. The information gathered throughout the series of focus groups was anonymized and coded using Dedoose software and then analyzed to identify key themes by discipline and municipality.

2.2 Landscape Analysis Findings

Interviews and focus group notes were anonymized and coded using the qualitative research software Dedoose. Coding focused on core challenges and desirable space characteristics. Coded responses were analyzed to identify patterns and themes.

2.2.1 Shared Creative Space Challenges

Equitable Access to Space and Policy Enforcement

Existing creative spaces are in high demand, and demand often exceeds space availability. Racial equity in access to cultural space and opportunities to engage in creative practice is another cross-cutting concern for creative space stakeholders. The inequitable enforcement of policies is also a pressing concern.

Affordability and Displacement

Space affordability is a consistent issue, and many practitioners feel their spaces are precarious and vulnerable to displacement due to rent increases. Nearly all participants expressed concern about development pressures and anticipated displacement due to redevelopment. Artists and creatives workers find working with developers extremely challenging, and there is a desire for transparent policies regarding new space development and support for relocation.

Marketing and Promotion

All disciplines across the municipalities lack marketing and promotional strategies. There is a strong demand for finding more and better ways to promote events, resources, and opportunities across the region.

2.2.2 Shared Desirable Space Characteristics

Transit Access and Parking

All disciplines identified transit accessibility and parking availability as desirable characteristics for creative spaces. Parking availability is needed for the loading and unloading of equipment, artwork, and supplies as well as the need to park vehicles used to transport artists, materials, and equipment. Transit accessibility is critical for ease of access to spaces for both artists and audiences.

Specialized Building Features

Creative space stakeholders across municipalities and disciplines identified a desire for more spaces with specialized features to support creative practice. Many existing creatives spaces were not originally designed for creative practices, and newer purpose-built spaces can be expensive to access, which makes it difficult for artists to access spaces with the features that they need.

2.2.3 Takeaways by Municipality

Boston: Equity and Access

In Boston, concerns about racial equity were mentioned the most, followed by limited access to public officials. Other concerns and challenges elevated in Boston included limited access to the spaces owned by colleges and universities in the city.

Cambridge: Housing Cost and Development Pressure

In Cambridge, cultural space stakeholders referenced the challenge of sustaining the city's creative ecosystem in the wake of the biotech boom in Kendall Square and the high cost of housing.

Somerville: Displacement and Working with Developers

In Somerville, the risk of displacement represented the primary challenge for cultural space stakeholders, followed by navigating relationships with developers as part of the implementation of the Somerville's Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) set aside.

2.2.4 Takeaways by Creative Discipline

Focus groups provided the opportunity to gain more specificity on shared challenges and identify unique challenges by discipline.

The cross-discipline and faith-based community focus groups elevated some general themes and creative space challenges based on participants' experiences.

Cross-Discipline Creative Space Stakeholders

- Affordable housing is crucial to retaining artists in the region.
- Current arts initiatives lack strong BIPOC representation.
- Outreach efforts should be expanded to reach audiences outside social media or digital platforms.
- Grant programs should give equal opportunities to all artists by simplifying language, providing better rubrics, and training.

Faith Communities & Community Organizations

- Communities trust these organizations.
 - Most of the faith communities are run by volunteers and need more budget to cover operational costs.
 - Desire to deepen partnerships.
 - Organizations need municipal support.
-

Discipline Specific Creative Space Trends

Discipline-specific focus groups offered insights into creative space opportunities and challenges experienced by different creative disciplines. Issues related to access to spaces were the most frequently identified among performing arts, film production and music rehearsal space users. Regulations related to sound were the most pressing issue for nightlife and performance venues.

Dance, Movement and Theatre

Access: Studios are racially segregated.

Representation: Creative space conversations need to be representative of the larger demographics of the cities.

Film, Photography and Production

Access: [Peerspace](#) is the most used platform for location scouting, but it is an imperfect tool.

Galleries

Access: Securing permanent space is critical to sustaining galleries' business models.

Access: Some galleries face challenges meeting accessibility requirements in historical buildings.

Access: The region lacks space for young artists to exhibit their work.

Affordability: Prices vary depending on the gallery, studio, or event location.

Marketing: Outside events or open studios events, local artists and galleries do not get enough publicity and are hard to find.

Music Production & Rehearsal Space

Access: The region has a strong need for rehearsal spaces.

Access: Many artists must improvise to make existing spaces work.

Safety and Affordability: Finding safe and affordable options is challenging.

Nightlife and Performance Venues

Regulation: Sound ordinances are inconsistently enforced and left to the discretion of inspectors.

Regulation: Sound enforcement authorities often lack proper equipment for inspections.

Regulation: Municipally owned spaces present unique challenges.

Regulation: Neighbors to music venues create challenges for venues related to noise and trash.

Discipline Specific Space Needs

Focus groups also identified space needs specific to different disciplines. Most disciplines benefit from large spaces with an open footprint and no support columns. Access to sufficient power and sound proofing are important for film production, music production, and performance spaces. Galleries have distinct needs related to visibility to local foot-traffic and proximity to high-traffic retail clusters. Galleries do not have

a need for large footprint spaces with sound-proofing, which was common for other disciplines. Music rehearsal spaces differ from other space types by their need for more security for equipment and a lack of visible signage that would draw attention to their locations.

Discipline	Space Characteristics	Sound	Site and Amenities
Dance, Movement and Theatre	<p>Size: Large square footage and sized to generate ticket revenue</p> <p>Features: No support posts</p>	Sound proofing needed	Amenities: Mirrors for dancers
Film, Photography and Production	<p>Size: A minimum of 3,000 square feet</p> <p>Power: Adequate power and electrical distribution</p> <p>Features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No support posts • 15-foot ceilings • Freight elevator • Loading access <p>Other: ADA accessibility</p>	Sound proofing needed	Parking: Many practitioners travel from out of town with large and expensive equipment and need safe parking options.
Galleries	<p>Power: Good lighting</p> <p>Features: Walls for display</p> <p>Signage: Exterior signage</p>		<p>Location: Locations near other retail spaces or with high foot traffic are preferable.</p> <p>Location: Galleries in residential neighborhoods are hard for potential clients to find.</p>
Music Production & Rehearsal Space	<p>Size: Space to accommodate a rhythm section with console, live room, and space for an entire band simultaneously</p> <p>Power: Access to a reliable power grid</p> <p>Features: High ceilings are beneficial but considered a bonus</p> <p>Signage: Large storefront signage is unnecessary. These spaces prefer to be discreet for safety reasons</p>	<p>Sound proofing needed.</p> <p>Floors and ceilings are the hardest to isolate.</p>	<p>Security: Instruments and equipment are expensive and precious and require secure spaces.</p> <p>Location: Because sound travels through floors, recording studios should be located away from busy roads.</p>
Nightlife and Performance Venues	<p>Size: Large</p> <p>Power: Generator running during performances contributes to noise ordinance issues</p> <p>Features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open footprint • High ceilings 	Sound proofing needed.	Parking: Parking for performers and artists, particularly with touring buses.

3. Cultural Data Discovery

Data is a critical tool for understanding community needs and for supporting policy and program decisions in local government. In a planning and land use context, the prevalence of data management and GIS systems as well as the availability of dedicated technical staff has allowed geospatial and tabular data analysis to be increasingly integrated into various municipal processes and programs and projects. The municipal staff engagement process was focused on discovery of existing data sets, existing data use and a vision for what future use of cultural data might include.

3.1 Municipal Staff Engagement

MAPC engaged twenty-seven (27) municipal staff and one artist in residence in Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville to better understand the project’s context and to assess the arts and culture data available within and used by each city hall. The project team documented relevant information on municipal data management, planning and policy development, and decision-making at local and regional levels.

Interviews + Data Workshop

Initial key informant interviews with arts and culture project staff were conducted in early November 2022, followed by a workshop conducted on November 14 focused on gathering additional input on how arts and culture officials hoped to use creative space data in their work. Additional stakeholder interviews were conducted with planning staff and other relevant department staff, as well as with data and IT staff from each of the three cities beginning in February of 2023 and continuing through March 2023.

In total, thirteen (13) interviews and one (1) workshop were conducted.

Municipal Staff Category	Boston	Cambridge	Somerville
Key Informants (Arts & Culture Staff)	3	2	2
IT and Data Staff	3	5	2
Planning and Policy Staff	4	4	3
Total	10	11	7

Interviews explored the availability and role of data in local government processes and existing software, data systems, and data workflows within each city hall. Interviews also prompted staff to identify goals, challenges and opportunities to leverage data to support arts and culture staff, especially in supporting creative spaces.

In addition to supplementing and contextualizing arts and culture stakeholders’ experiences navigating creative spaces and space policies regionally, these interviews were instrumental in clarifying key actions needed for the municipal action plans. The municipal staff engagement also informed the Development Review Process documentation for each municipality.

3.2 Discovery Process Findings

The discovery process found that all three cities maintain and use civic data resources, including software tools and systems, open data portals, and IT and GIS staff.

While these resources routinely enable data-driven municipal work in planning arenas like transportation, housing, economic development, and open space, municipal arts and culture staff, in contrast, often lack

the data needed to advance their work. This lack of data to identify and map cultural facilities where artists present or produce creative works limits the ability of municipalities to preserve, support, and expand those spaces, a critical need identified by municipal arts and culture staff.

This discovery process also provided insights into existing datasets of cultural facilities held by each municipality. These datasets were often atomized, messy, incomplete, and contained either too many fields or too few to facilitate integration and categorization by type and discipline. Much of the relevant data was anecdotal and held in the minds of individual arts and culture staff. This data was not part of any existing dataset.

Two of the three cities publish some data online as open data, such as [Cambridge's open dataset of arts organizations](#), [Cambridge's Arts Grant Dataset](#), or [Boston's Entertainment License data](#), but much of the relevant arts and culture data and data relevant to creative spaces is not published online on municipal open data portals.

Further, while data may exist on certain types of arts or cultural facilities or locations, such as entertainment venues or live-work space, more data (or improvement to existing data) is needed to classify spaces by type and discipline, and to document their size and other characteristics identified as important for creative space planning. Manual work will be needed to improve existing data and generate new data.

3.3 Cultural Data Opportunity

Despite the lack of data, arts and culture staff envision data as an asset for advancing support for the arts community, including supporting cultural facilities in the three cities. They understand cultural space data as (1) a community asset, (2) a tool for planning and policy, and (3) a tool for regional coordination.

Cultural Data as a Community Asset

Arts and culture staff seek better data in order to (1) help residents and artists find creative spaces and venues; (2) make arts and culture assets “visible” to planners and decision makers, and (3) provide baseline community context to understand arts and culture assets alongside other data like housing data, demographic data, transportation data, open space data, etc. While arts and culture staff acknowledged that the collection and use of data is currently limited, they shared that one key goal for building and maintaining datasets on creative space is to surface and keep track of informal arts spaces.

Cultural Data as a Tool for Planning and Policy

In addition, arts and culture staff shared a vision for creative data to be a policy and planning support tool. For this purpose, they share a goal of using data to document knowledge held by staff so that it can be shared with others and used to inform decision-making. Within this vision, they view data as a tool to advance equity, to identify opportunities and risks, to promote the arts, and to advance cultural policy.

Cultural Data as a Regional Coordination Tool

Finally, arts and culture staff articulated the potential for cultural data to promote information sharing and regional coordination among the three communities to better understand the greater arts/creative ecosystem across city borders. The importance of understanding the regional ecosystem was echoed in the creative space stakeholder interviews, which highlighted the ways that artists move among the three cities in their work.

3.4 Cultural Data Needs

To achieve this vision for cultural data, updated, integrated, validated, and appropriately categorized datasets are needed.

Data Must be Compiled from Different Sources

Data exists in a hodge-podge of sources that are not set up with standard fields, definitions, or categories. Cities expressed interest in third-party data sources (e.g. Creative Ground, Eventbrite, Space Finder, Peerspace, etc.) but few, if any, city staff used such sources in their arts and culture or planning work. A lack of standard definitions limits data integration. There is no clear existing shared definition or data standard for creative spaces, but cultural facilities plans and zoning definitions provide a starting point.

Existing sources include:

- Live-work spaces inventory
- Grant applications data (MCC Grants)
- Permit data (ex. entertainment licenses)
- Arts nonprofits data
- Artist surveys or crowdsourced art spaces submission forms
- GIS maps or data associated with specific projects or research reports
- Artist or arts organization mailing lists
- Cultural event calendars
- Zoning (overlay) data
- NAICS codes / NTEE codes

Integration with ArcGIS Would Facilitate Use of Data by Municipal Staff

ESRI ArcGIS was named as the primary mapping software by all three cities. Other potentially relevant software systems included SmartSheets, as well as website backends and content management systems (CMSs). At least one city also mentioned data dashboarding and visualization tools, such as Tableau, as potentially relevant to how arts spaces data might be used or displayed.



Figure 2. MAPC's observations about the availability and use of data by arts and culture staff within Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville, noting challenges and opportunities informed development of the Digital Mapping Tool Prototype.

While arts and culture municipal staff wanted to build and maintain a data inventory of arts spaces to map and share these spaces, city planners wanted access to creative space data near new or proposed real estate developments to better understand neighborhood context and consider impacts on these creative spaces during the development review process.

4. Digital Mapping Prototype

The project developed a digital cultural facilities data platform to allow municipal arts staff to compile, clean, and share creative space data. This arts spaces data platform was designed as a Minimum Viable Product (MVP), meaning it was intended as the simplest solution that would address the highest priority data needs identified to accomplish the intended goals.

The platform includes three elements.

- A form
- A database
- A map and dashboard

"Having a simple map of data points is probably the best launch point, and other things can build off of that."

Digital Form

The digital form is set up in the Airtable platform and allows for simple data entry and external contributions to document creative space locations and characteristics.

MAKING SPACE FOR ART

Add a New Space

Use this form to submit a new entry into the inventory of Arts & Culture spaces in Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville

Name

What is the name of this space?

Type

Is this space primarily for creating art (production), displaying it (presentation), or both?

Production

Presentation

Address (Line 1)

Address (Line 2)

Studio, Floor, Apartment, Unit, etc.

Figure 3. Making Space for Art digital form on Airtable.

Digital Database

The digital database is also set up on the Airtable platform and allows shared data management, detailed data entry, and viewing and filtering options. Access granted to municipal staff supports internal and cross-municipal collaboration. The database also has an interface with a summary view that shows progress on arts space data entry by municipality. The data entered into the platform via the form or database can be downloaded from Airtable in bulk as a CSV file.

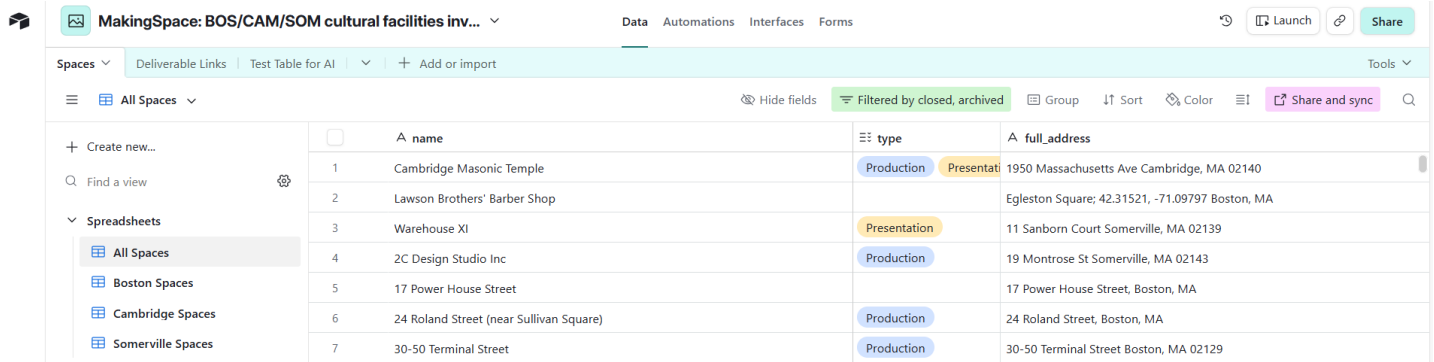


Figure 4. Making Space for Art digital database on Airtable.

Digital Map and Dashboard

A digital map and dashboard set up on the ESRI platform includes metrics, and graphs that show key summary information and simple analysis. The dashboard also allows for filtering, which enables municipal or neighborhood scale reports. When data is added or updated in the Airtable database it is automatically geocoded and synched to the ESRI map and dashboard within seconds and can be accessed from the ESRI platform in geospatial formats, allowing planners to reuse cultural facilities data, including point locations, in their own mapping work.

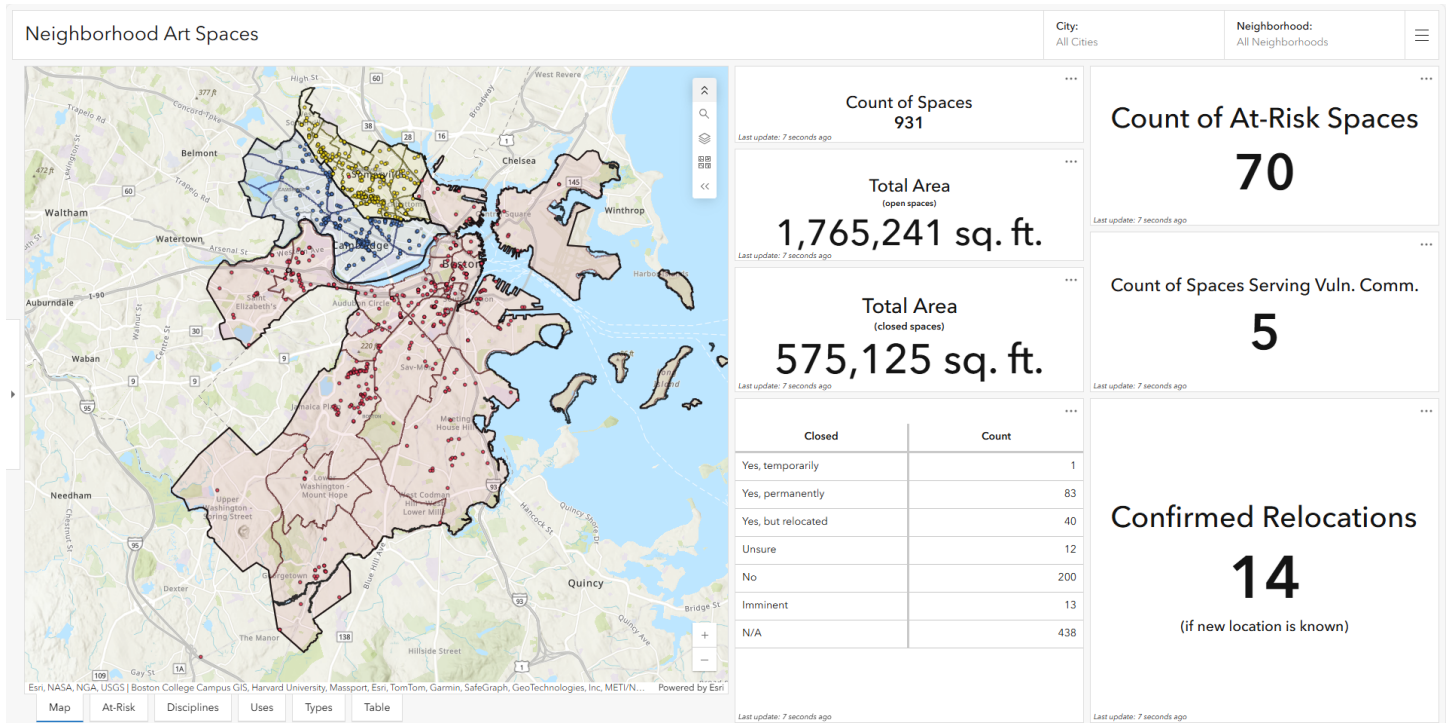


Figure 5. Digital map and dashboard on ESRI.

The primary intended users of the Making Space for Art data platform are municipal arts and culture staff, municipal planning staff, and community development staff. Other potential municipal users and stakeholders include municipal data or GIS staff, or city leadership such as a mayor's or manager's office or city council. Finally, the project also considered potential future use of the platform by external stakeholders, such as arts advocates, artists, property owners, developers, nonprofits, and residents. However, no external users accessed the platform and data as part of this pilot phase of the project due to concerns about privacy (such as the address of a live-work space associated with a particular artist) and the quality and completeness of the current data.

4.1 Prototype User Testing

MAPC introduced an initial version of the tool to municipal staff in early 2023 and conducted individual user testing sessions with each city in late February. Arts staff from each municipality were prompted to visit the platform website and to complete a series of tasks—such as reviewing and exploring creative spaces, adding and removing spaces, and editing and updating space details using the Airtable form and database grid view. These initial user tests validated that arts staff were capable of using the data platform prototype to achieve the desired core functionality of adding and editing creative space data and viewing and sharing it on a shared spreadsheet and map.

Feedback received during this initial testing phase also helped MAPC further develop the data platform into the more fully functional MVP. Users noted various bugs to be fixed and highlighted priority needs. Because arts and culture teams had so much data to enter manually, they wanted features and support to make data entry and review easier. This included guidance on which fields were most important for a “first pass” (such as “arts space name”, “arts space type”, and “full address”), as well as to solicit creative space data from external partners. They also wanted a better way of tracking whether the records that MAPC had pre-populated in the database from existing data sources had been reviewed by staff for accuracy, so could track progress toward more complete/accurate data. Finally, they wanted an easier way to visualize, interact with, and summarize the arts space data, including the ability to search and interact with it on a map. This feedback resulted in the configuration of data submission progress tracking views as well as a form view that could be shared with external partners for crowdsourced data submission in Airtable. It also resulted in the development of the ESRI dashboard and webmap, which better summarized key insights and allowed for geospatial data viewing and exploration.

This more complete MVP was delivered to Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville in the Spring along with tutorials and an “assignment” prompting each city to spend time using the platform to add and update the creative space data in the database—with the goal of reviewing prepopulated arts space data for quality and completeness so that the data could be used. Staff were instructed on how to enter new spaces through the Airtable form, add missing information to spaces already in the dataset in the data table view, and access the map, dashboard, and GIS data using ArcGIS. Municipalities were invited to use the tool and report back on its functionality. This second phase of user testing confirmed that the ability to integrate spatial data with municipal GIS systems was a useful function for municipal staff.

During this second phase of user testing in May and June, the time required for each city to complete data entry and review all arts space records for accuracy emerged as a primary barrier for use of arts space data collected: metrics based on incomplete or inaccurate (pre-populated) data could not be used in planning processes, but municipal staff lacked the time and capacity to review and gather detailed information (such as square footage) on individual spaces. This challenge highlighted the need for either more arts staff capacity (such as an “arts facilities data intern to “own” the task of data entry and maintenance), or for a technical solution, such as a more public data editing interface to allow arts community stakeholders to contribute local knowledge and access and review the creative spaces details, and the need for more automated data aggregation and transformation processes from already structured and machine readable data sources.

Finally, the process showcased the challenge of gathering and categorizing more granular information about spaces such as use type, disciplines, relative risk (of displacement), and communities served. Additional work is needed to create meaningful and consistent definitions for categories of space and the creative disciplines and communities they serve. In the meantime, simplifying the scope of creative space details collected to those that are most clearly defined and feasible to collect may result in a more complete dataset and a more useful data platform.

To overcome these challenges each city selected one neighborhood geography on which to focus efforts with the goal of having creative space data that was high quality enough to allow for use of the data for a neighborhood scale report. This neighborhood data entry was completed by November 2023.

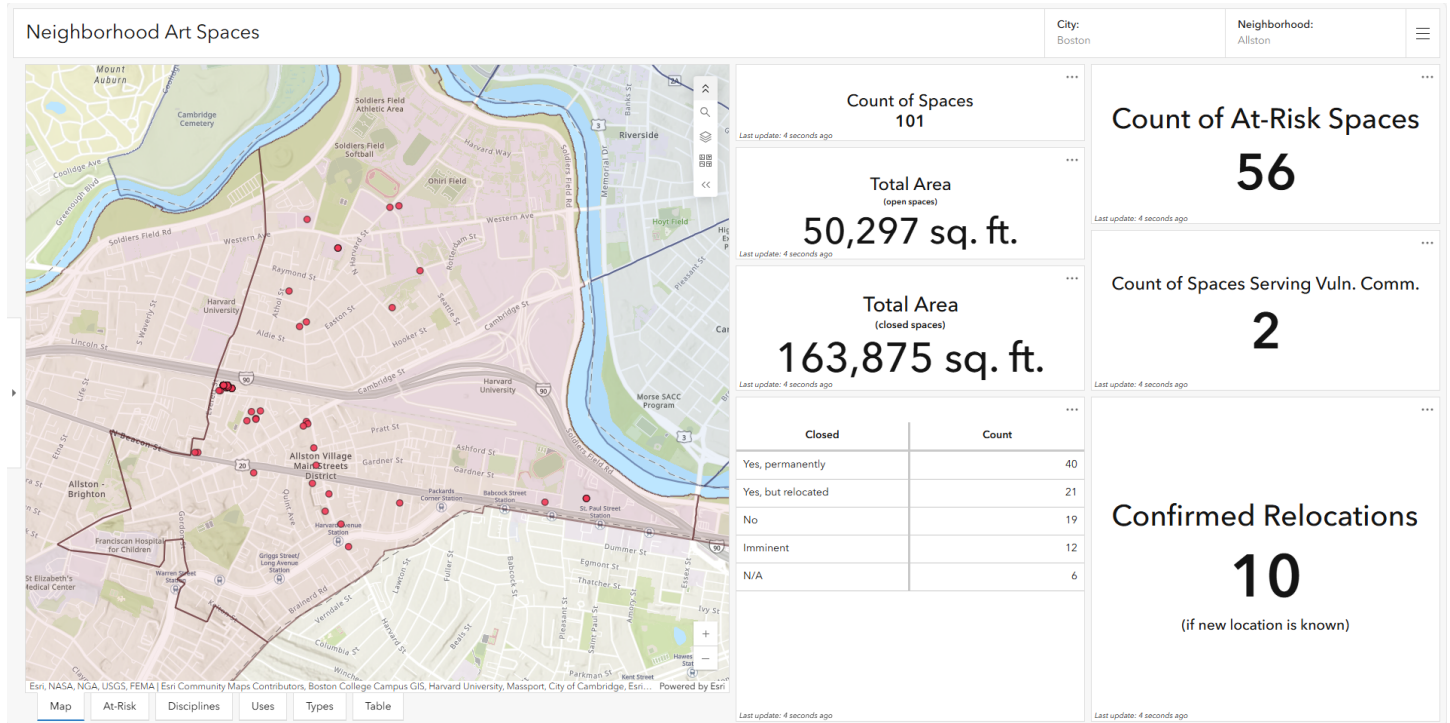
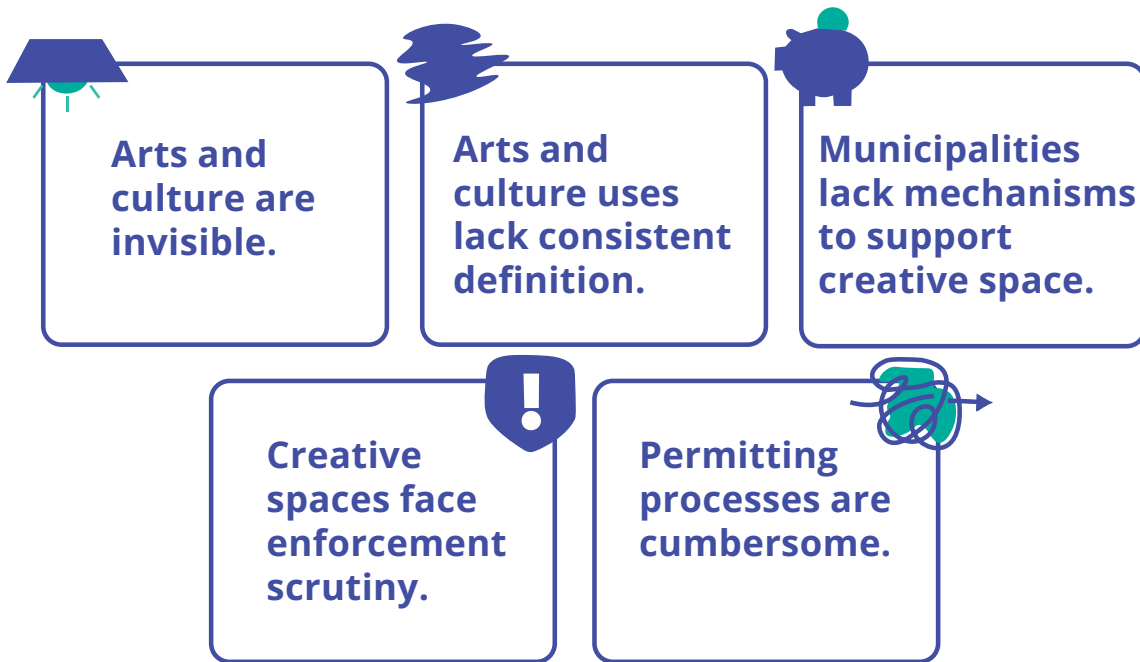


Figure 6. Neighborhood scale dashboard report for Boston's Allston neighborhood.

5. Key Findings

After synthesizing research on existing conditions and creative space data as well as findings from creative space stakeholders and municipal staff, MAPC identified five major obstacles that prevent consistent preservation and expansion of creative space in Metro Boston.



5.1 Arts and culture are invisible.



Protecting creative spaces from displacement is impossible without documenting where they exist and how they function within the arts and culture ecosystem. These spaces operate with varying degrees of visibility. Some spaces are highly visible or publicly known, like large venues for performances or gatherings, or large cultural institutions such as museums and universities. Other creative spaces may choose to be invisible to increase security for expensive equipment and products or because they want to avoid scrutiny related to their rental arrangements or compliance with municipal regulations. Many spaces are invisible not by choice but because municipal data systems do not categorize and track them as creative spaces. When these creative spaces are invisible to planners and policymakers, municipalities have fewer tools to identify and counter the impact of new development or land use decisions on the creative sector.

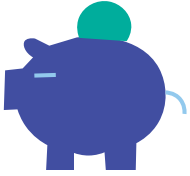
5.2 Arts and culture uses lack consistent definition.



Municipalities lack consistent definitions of creative spaces and primary and accessory creative uses in planning policies and regulations. Creative use activities span industrial, commercial, or residential zoning use categories. Permanent creative spaces are frequently multi-use or multi-purpose spaces, whether those spaces are primarily used as a home, as a commercial space or as a semi-industrial fabrication space. In order to generate sufficient revenue to cover the cost, creative spaces typically need to accommodate the creation of creative work, the teaching of creative practice, the presentation or sales of creative work, and events that gather creative communities and their audiences. This need to sustain multi-faceted uses means that even creative spaces whose primary use is compliant with municipal regulations may struggle to maintain full compliance in relation to their various

accessory uses. The high cost of real estate requires many artists to use their homes as their creative workspace. Since creative uses are largely undefined and undocumented by the policies, plans, and procedures that guide development, local policy makers are left without tools to determine what activities and spaces need protection. They also cannot easily use existing processes to mitigate development impacts, such as the development review process, to protect creative spaces, as these processes require that impacted uses and spaces be visible to planning staff.

5.3 Municipalities lack mechanisms to support creative space.



The high development pressure in Metro Boston has led to the loss of creative space, increased competition with other sectors for available space and higher costs for remaining spaces. Within this context, municipalities need more flexibility to intervene in the real estate market to protect creative spaces at risk of closure or displacement due to redevelopment. Municipalities are currently limited in the financial tools they have to acquire, manage, or subsidize creative space development. Municipalities can create a stabilization fund to aggregate funding across multiple sources and across fiscal years, but disbursements from this fund must be approved by Town Meeting or City Council, so it is not conducive to situations that require a rapid response. Mass General Law defines allowable use restrictions for the purpose of preservation or conservation and authorizes municipalities to create entities to acquire, disburse, and manage real estate through housing trusts, housing authorities and redevelopment authorities for the purposes of urban renewal. Adapting these tools for the purpose of creative space development and preservation requires municipalities to file a Home Rule Petition to the legislature. The existing limit on municipalities' ability to access and aggregate funding from multiple sources across multiple fiscal years and to fund and manage real estate transactions creates real barriers to municipalities ability to preserve and expand creative space.

To protect creative spaces, municipalities need tools to proactively acquire and disburse properties for creative use and provide funding for private sector developers to create new creative spaces – as they are able to do for affordable housing. Other parts of the country have demonstrated the potential for creative space trusts to intervene in the real estate market to prevent artist displacement. The Community Arts Stabilization Trust in San Francisco is an example that was uplifted as a model in the Somerville Arts Space Risk Assessment. Adopting a trust model in Massachusetts would allow municipalities to hold assets and property for the creation and preservation of creative spaces. Structured similarly to affordable housing trusts, they would also introduce a shared governance structure that maintains accountability to the arts and culture community.

5.4 Creative spaces face enforcement scrutiny.



Creative spaces often represent a mix of uses that are subject to various regulations. A space of production may also hold classes, events, and be a site of retail sales. Each use may trigger a mix of regulatory enforcement related to sound, parking, public health and public safety. In addition, these spaces are subject to complaint-driven enforcement of regulations when neighbors consider the activities they host to be “nuisances.” This is particularly true with enforcement of sound ordinances and home-based business bylaws. Sound policy enforcement was identified as the top challenge for nightlife and performance venues.

While municipal codes implement requirements for public safety and public health and ensure ADA accessibility, achieving full compliance is often cost-prohibitive for creative

spaces. More balanced approaches are warranted to enable creative spaces to maximize safety and accessibility within cost and structural constraints. Not only do creative uses lack the revenue required to cover the cost of code-based upgrades, they often require significant structural changes because these uses are often housed in older, formerly industrial spaces.

5.5 Permitting processes are cumbersome.



The process of securing required permits for arts and culture activities is often slow and unpredictable in terms of its outcome. As with other regulations, cultural activities trigger multiple layers of permitting requirements related to fire-safety, police presence, alcohol consumption, food preparation, general event management, and more. Full permitting compliance typically requires review and approval from numerous municipal departments, and a denial from any one department can derail an event or activity completely. Securing a permit can be extremely time-consuming and costly for events, particularly outdoor events. Sometimes, these processes include heightened scrutiny depending on a performing artist's identity, specific musical genre, or the community served by the event. This approach to permitting leaves the arts and culture community feeling discouraged and results in uneven access to meaningful, resonant cultural events and creative activities across the region.

6. Regional Policy Agenda

There is high demand for creative spaces throughout the region and there is a need for municipal planning and regional policies to inform future efforts to protect, preserve, and develop Metro Boston's cultural spaces. Municipalities, developers, and the arts and culture community have been experimenting with solutions to address the ongoing loss of creative space. This policy agenda offers a roadmap to strengthen and sustain these efforts through municipal action and regional coordination.



6.1 Map arts and culture.

Inventory creative spaces.

To protect creative spaces, municipalities should proactively develop local creative space inventories. As arts and culture are experienced differently in each community, documenting creative spaces can clarify what creative uses are present and in need of protection in local policies. Inventories are tools to identify and categorize existing creative uses and to track areas of growth, contraction, and stability. Inventories help the arts community to understand its makeup and strengthen connections across disciplines. Inventories also inform policy makers and municipal staff about how the local built fabric supports the local and regional creative economy.

Existing data can provide a starting point for developing an inventory. The New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) has identified industry and occupation classifications associated with core and peripheral creative economic activities in the New England region. These codes can be used to filter data on private enterprises and workers to those engaged in creative economic activities. In addition, NEFA's Creative Ground Artist directory provides a database of artists and creative businesses that can provide additional inventory data.

Additional local surveys or manual data entry is needed to verify the accuracy of existing data, to identify informal arts and creative spaces, and to record creative workspaces that are not captured in these datasets. Narrowing survey and data cleaning efforts to smaller geographic areas or by discipline

can facilitate inventory management by creating small, coherent, and useful segments of complete and reliable data. Surveys that provide data on existing creative space assets and stakeholders' needs also allow municipalities to identify the strengths and gaps in their local cultural ecosystems.

Maintaining an inventory of what exists can help determine where future investments are needed and incentivize new development. Aggregating local inventories to a regional level provides a more balanced understanding of the larger creative economy. A regional inventory can strengthen municipalities' understanding of the role they play in the ecosystem and can inform a broader awareness of what policy improvements and investments are needed across municipalities.



Map creative spaces.

Including geo-spatial information in the cultural space inventory allows municipalities to map local creative spaces. Understanding spatial relationships among municipal and regional resources is critical for sensitive and strategic planning, policy, and decision-making. Spatial mapping visualizes relationships among creative spaces and other characteristics such as proximity to public transit or neighborhood affordability, and allows planners to assess the relative accessibility and affordability of creative spaces. The Tracking spatial trends related to the presence, absence, and clustering of creative spaces can inform future policy interventions and goals related to efforts to expand creative space or prevent its loss. The Somerville Arts Space Risk Assessment demonstrated the potential for evaluating creative space exposure to development pressure for planning purposes.

A map can also provide a way to integrate creative space into the development review process. A map provides data that allows staff to flag proposed developments based on their proximity to existing creative spaces.

Overall, datasets and maps that provide creative spaces locations and square footage are valuable tools for planning and policy; municipal planners can make data-informed decisions to protect existing spaces in the context of new development.

6.2 Define arts and culture.



Define arts and culture in policy.

Defining arts and culture in zoning and municipal policies creates tools for local government to remove impediments and incentivize arts and culture growth locally. Creative use definitions should support priorities for existing spaces as well as priorities for new creative activities and uses that the community wants to grow. Land use policies must align with and support creative sector goals. Zoning tools like the Arts and Creative Enterprise use definitions and set-aside provision in Somerville provide an example for how land use policies can help expand creative space development⁸.

Defining districts where creative uses are prioritized and incentivized is another important strategy for aligning regulations with creative sector goals. Municipalities can outline priority investments for creative space in defined districts, including cultural districts and zoning districts. Somerville's Fabrication District, Boston's South End Economic Development Area, and Cambridge's Central Square Cultural District are examples of districts where creative use and creative space have been prioritized in Metro Boston.



Define arts and culture ecosystems.

Defining the role of arts and culture clusters play within local, subregional and regional ecosystems would

⁸ More details on Somerville's ACE use definitions and zoning provisions are available in "Zoning for Cultural Use" Making Space for Art Briefing Paper, MAPC, December 2025. https://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Zoning-for-Cultural-Use-Briefing-Paper_FINAL_Feb-2026.pdf

clarify the ways that different geographic areas in our region collectively support the regional creative economy. Defining how the interplay of different kinds of spaces creates different nodes of cultural identity, creative activity, and cultural destinations across the region is a critical first step to understanding how policy can impede or encourage the health of the local and regional ecosystem. Aligning arts and culture definitions across municipalities enables developers and cultural space users to work throughout the region, particularly for space typologies that artists need most, such as housing.

6.3 Allow arts and culture to happen.



Assess restrictive policies.

Permitting requirements and regulations related to public health, public safety, and specific events or activities are experienced at the level of an individual or organization. The challenges of restrictive approaches to permitting are shared anecdotally, but the cumulative impact can be difficult to perceive. Analysis of data on permitting and licensing would provide a more holistic understanding of the impact of the regulatory frameworks on access to creative space and art and culture activities.

The goal of each permitting or licensing requirement for preserving the health and safety of communities is sound and defensible taken one at a time. However, if the cumulative impact of these regulations and their enforcement is a lack of opportunities for community gathering, cultural connection, and a sense of belonging and well-being, the cumulative cost of the regulations may exceed their cumulative value. Certain regulations are enforced based on nuisance complaints. Sound ordinances and home-based business bylaws are examples of policies that can make it difficult to maintain creative practices in dense neighborhoods.

Sound ordinances must provide clear, objective language to inform standardized enforcement and regulation for performances, festivals, and community gatherings. Enforcement and regulation should cite standardized measurements and tools to ensure consistency and avoid arbitrary regulation of events and activities.

Beyond the impact of permitting on creative space, restrictive permitting and licensing practices can yield unintended consequences for a range of arts and culture activities. Further evaluation of the impact of parking regulations, signage bylaws, and food safety regulations is needed to ensure that artists and creative workers can produce, perform, and present work in Metro Boston.



Reorient policies toward allowance.

Balancing the health and safety goals driving permitting and licensing requirements with the benefits of creative activities for community and individual well-being requires a shift in the culture or regulation. Streamlining local permitting processes to include “one-stop” shop procedures to support greater transparency and consistency for approval for special permit applications and temporary events is a starting point. Orienting the process of permitting arts and culture activities toward allowance would shift the question from “should we allow this to happen?” to “how can we help make this happen?” Providing adaptable templates for addressing common concerns related to fire safety and crowd management as well as access to pre-approved equipment and supplies for standard event types would help bring more balance to the permitting and approval process. Large, new and more experimental events be reviewed with an orientation toward finding a path to approval. Standard templates and resources could be applied as appropriate. Aspects of the event that cannot be addressed through standard solutions or practices can be flagged for monitoring during the event.

Similarly, where health and safety improvements to creative spaces are needed, funding and support should be offered to support pathways to compliance. Municipalities should adopt Agent of Change principles,

which assign responsibility for soundproofing to the actor initiating a change in use that introduces conflicts over sound. Sound management policies should reflect this principle. Sound ordinances should distinguish between machine-generated noise and leisure-generated noise and provide clear language to inform standardized enforcement and regulation for performances, festivals, and community gatherings. Enforcement and regulation should recognize that sounds generated by performances, festivals, and community gatherings are wanted by the communities they serve and provide health benefits in addition to the health risks associated with loud sounds. As such, they should employ a balanced and consistent approach that avoids arbitrary regulation of events and activities. *Learn more in the [Agent of Change in Sound Policy Briefing Paper](#).*

Another consideration is that creative spaces can often be temporary or offer pop-up opportunities in vacant storefront spaces, for events, galleries, screenings, or shops. Expanding permitting processes to accommodate temporary use can give more opportunities to artists and cultural stakeholders.

Revising regulatory processes to be clearer, consistent, and more transparent is critical to ensure that arts and culture can thrive in Metro Boston. This shift requires a review of policies' impact on arts and cultural activities and shifting enforcement practices to support the maintenance of safe, healthy creative spaces and activities for all of the cultural communities of Metro Boston.

Overall, pursuing policies and practices that support healthier working relationships between cultural workers and the government is essential for supporting creative spaces.

6.4 Expand cultural infrastructure.



Expand affordable artist housing.

As arts and culture advocates promote the need for more creative space, affordable housing is also a critical element of the region's cultural infrastructure. Artists and creative workers often use their homes as a site of rehearsal and production for their practices. *Learn more in the [Housing our Region's Artists Briefing Paper](#).*

Municipalities must revise home-based business bylaws that restrict arts and cultural activities, particularly given that artist live-work spaces are not defined consistently in local zoning. The [City of Boston Artist Housing Guidelines: Work-Live Space for Boston Artists](#) provides technical design guidelines for various artistic disciplines to support cultural uses, offering an initial regional framework for artist live-work space.

Aligning the artist live-work zoning definitions through a guidance document and establishing a regional artist certification program would streamline access to enable artists to apply for and access live-work spaces throughout Metro Boston.



Educate developers about creative space.

Expanding cultural infrastructure requires that local developers, designers and architects are prepared to incorporate creative space needs into development proposals. Education about creative spaces can build on existing resources and tools, like the City of Boston's [Artist Housing Guidelines](#), which includes design and construction considerations live-work studio space across different creative disciplines.

Resources that provide clarity on how to build and design functional creative spaces are useful for replicating live-work space and other creative spaces. Partnering with groups like the [Boston Society for Architecture Cultural Facilities Network](#) to discuss design considerations in design and building can help improve developments' designs for creative spaces.



Establish municipal tools to incentivize creative space development.

Expanding the region's cultural infrastructure requires municipal finance tools to support the preservation and development of creative space. An example of a new municipal tool is the model outlined in the Creative Space Act (H.3587/S.2334). Filed in the 2025-2026 Legislative Session, this Act would make it possible for municipalities to establish Creative Space Trust Funds that could hold financial assets and real property for the purpose of growing and maintaining creative space. Trustees would include representatives of the local cultural community. Support from municipalities is needed to strengthen advocacy efforts at the state level for this bill to pass.

Moving forward, municipalities need to identify sustainable municipal funding sources to support the expansion of cultural space. Local option taxes, linkage fees, and community benefits agreements have been identified by MAPC as possible funding sources to explore⁹. Establishing governance models that establish shared accountability between the municipality and the artist community is also required.

Other strategies include working with local redevelopment authorities, where they exist, and incentivizing private investment through tax incentives. Further study needs to be conducted to make more specific recommendations.

⁹ Metropolitan Area Planning Council. (2025, November). *Somerville Cultural Trust strategy: Phase one memo*. https://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025_Somerville-Cultural-Trust-Strategy-final.pdf

7. Vision for regional coordination

To implement the project recommendations, municipalities need support to strengthen regional coordination efforts, including enhancing multisectoral relationships and partnerships. As each municipality works within its local context to advance the regional policy framework, MAPC is committed to supporting the work of defining shared goals and evaluating progress towards those goals to maintain regional coordination across local efforts. MAPC envisions a future in which arts and culture and creative work are understood as foundations of healthy, thriving communities and prosperous local economies. Launching a regional planning framework called *Arts Forward Metro Boston*, MAPC will continue to refine, expand and implement the policy recommendations and data resources from *Making Space for Art*. MAPC will share the core principles of this work with other municipalities across the region and gather information to inform a broader regional assessment. Planning efforts related to creative space will focus on expanding artist housing through live-work space and other supportive housing models, strengthening local governance for municipally owned cultural spaces, identifying fiscal mechanisms for municipalities to create and leverage funding sources, and making a culture of allowance actionable. MAPC is well positioned to support ongoing data collection and cleaning efforts led by municipalities and their local arts and culture stakeholders. Building a stronger data infrastructure is MAPC key priority.

Finally, MAPC is committed to working with municipalities and creative stakeholders to establish a multisector collaboration to advance regional and statewide arts and culture policy. This effort invites public, private, and nonprofit partners to build and advocate for a future region that champions arts and cultural activities and provides space for arts and culture to thrive.