



Arts and Culture

Working Group
Transition Team Report

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Photo: Kit Pyne



Photo: Commonwealth
Shakespeare Company



“How do we make Boston a municipal arts leader?”

INTRODUCTION

Arts and culture are at the heart of every great city. Mayor Martin J. Walsh has spoken eloquently about the power of the arts to create a Boston where each resident’s potential is nurtured and the culture of our diverse neighborhoods is celebrated. Boston embraces the unique character of 140 ethnic communities, offering everyone the opportunity to reimagine the possibilities for our city and the new histories being created every day.

At their best, arts and culture act as a mirror, reflecting both the beautiful and brutal realities of the world while at the same time asking what else might be possible. They provide a pathway to wholeness, a way for diverse citizens to find voice and civic harmony. They attract talented young people of all ages, create jobs, and draw in visitors.

Boston's rich tradition of arts and culture is deeply rooted in American history. We are home to America's first public park, public library, public secondary school, public school for African American students, school for visually impaired students, and America's oldest performing arts organization, the Boston Symphony Orchestra. But today, despite its storied and vibrant cultural past, Boston is not a municipal arts leader in America. Mayor Walsh has asked: "How do we make Boston a municipal arts leader? In other words, what can Boston city government do to promote arts and culture in and around Boston? Where and how can the arts and culture community assist in advancing the aims of the city government?"

THE PROCESS

To answer these questions, the Arts & Culture Working Group sought guidance through public hearings, consultation with peers, and research. A clear consensus emerged around vision and values.

In order to unleash Boston's great potential, we need an equitable partnership among City Hall, citizens, private philanthropy, and business, all working together with a common purpose and plan.

Great cities – as well as cities in the midst of revitalization – hold these beliefs at their core:

- 1) Arts and culture are powerful means to engage residents in creating a collective vision of their city's future.
- 2) Participation in cultural activities that reflect

the diversity of a community fosters respect and understanding and strengthens communities.

- 3) A city's cultural prowess and economic success are closely linked. The creative economy attracts an educated citizenry that is sought after by businesses of all sizes.
- 4) Arts and culture are woven into the fabric of government, business, philanthropy, and civil service. The city and its mayor play an essential role leveraging relationships and resources of the public and private sectors, championing the arts locally, nationally, and internationally.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Our investigation identified six priorities for action. To become a municipal arts leader, the mayor, his administration, and the City of Boston must:

- 1) Commit dedicated funding to the arts and increase that funding until Boston ranks among the top five cities in the nation as measured by per capita support for its diverse arts and culture activity.
- 2) Embark on an inclusive and comprehensive process to create and deliver a cultural plan that will provide a path to greater success within eighteen months.
- 3) Embrace the arts as an essential component of the education of all Boston students.
- 4) Release the pent-up potential of our artists and organizations through a streamlined, transparent, and functional permitting system

for events, performances and public art.

- 5) Recognize that affordable housing and workspace for artists and cultural organizations are integral to successful neighborhood and community development.
- 6) Embrace cultural equity and the rich diversity of Boston's population by supporting a wide range of arts and cultural traditions and by engaging historically disadvantaged communities.

Taken together, these actions will help make Boston a great, culturally vibrant city. In the brief that follows the Arts & Culture Working Group recommends a bold vision and leadership role for the City of Boston that maximizes the potential of its arts and culture sector.

On behalf of the arts and culture community, we offer recommendations organized under five broad themes:

1. City Hall embodies an attitude of "Yes."
2. The Mayor, his senior staff and all City Hall departments serve as visible, engaged cultural advocates.
3. There is a shared agenda among arts and cultural sector stakeholders.
4. The City of Boston dedicates adequate resources to finance the sector's priorities.
5. All Boston's residents, especially our children, have access to the arts.

The report that follows details Keep/Implement/Dream strategies.

“This Country cannot afford to be materially rich and spiritually poor.”

John F. Kennedy, State of the Union Message, January 14, 1963

FOCUS 1: CITY HALL EMBODIES AN ATTITUDE OF “YES”

The arts and culture community needs a public sector that embraces its role as partner. It must support artists and performers and help make events, performances, and public art flourish throughout the city instead of focusing on its role as regulator.

KEEP

- 1) **Public Art Program:** Keep and enhance Boston’s Public Art Program and perform an assessment of existing exhibition and presenting programs.
- 2) **Maintain current regulations on co-op housing:** Maintain the city’s laws and regulations governing artists’ co-op housing and vigorously oppose any changes to the state’s current laws and regulations governing it. Champion the creation and sustainability of co-ops on both residential and business levels.

IMPLEMENT

- 1) **Permitting:** Centralize the permitting process for arts events and public arts projects in a dedicated office associated with or subsidiary to the new Office of Arts and Culture.
 - a) To ensure transparency and efficiency, post the rules and requirements for permits with clear instruction and links to an

online permitting process on the city website.

- 2) **BRA Artist Housing Initiative:** Reexamine and retool the BRA’s artists’ housing initiative to better serve artists. Ensure that all units are affordable, are occupied by working artists, and are large enough to support those artists’ creative needs.
- 3) **Adopt federal policy for MAGI:** Use Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) as the measure for income eligibility for income/ need based housing and for other need based city programs. MAGI is used by the Federal Government for the Affordable Care Act.
- 4) **Fair Labor Practices:**
 - a) Employ Fair Trade principles in all venues where artists perform or sell their work.
 - b) Ensure that Boston abides by fair labor standards and that artists of all disciplines are not expected to provide their work and services for free or below appropriate wages when employed by the city.
 - c) Make the meaningful remuneration of artists participating in public events an economic prerequisite in planning the event. Student artists should not be employed as “cheap labor.”
- 5) **Establish an Artist Services Program:** The city can be a connector and create an Artist Services Program within the Office of Arts and Culture for artists across disciplines.
 - a) Move the BRA Artist Certification



Program to this new program and charge it as a program that provides information on networks, connections, and resources for artists.

- b) Establish a relief fund that offers disaster aid to individual artists of all disciplines.
- c) As part of disaster aid, make no-interest loans and microloans available to artists by the city credit union.
- d) Implement the Artists First Initiative which includes an occupational health and wellness program.

6) Poet Laureate: Relaunch the city’s poet laureate program.

DREAM

- 1) Convert unused/underused buildings: The City of Boston takes the lead to convert unused and underused buildings to living and working spaces for certified and verified artists, musicians, actors, dancers, and writers. To ensure and preserve affordability, the city can encourage use of mechanisms such as limited equity ownership and control.
 - a) Enforce rules that artists’ spaces must have working artists living in them.
 - b) Support the creation of community arts centers and maker spaces, allowing for innovative ways to make affordable workspace available to Boston’s artists in all neighborhoods.
 - c) In creating artist spaces include a “cradle to the grave” philosophy that enables artists, during all their life stages, to learn, create, mentor, and share art among themselves and the community while sustaining a livelihood by practicing their discipline.
- 2) Preserve existing arts communities: Preserve existing arts communities threatened with displacement due to redevelopment and escalating rents. To accomplish this, strengthen the enforcement of existing regulations and requirements regarding cultural use in mixed-use development projects.



2) Seasonal anchor events: Keep and improve (see implement) already successful events but promote them in a more cohesive and strategic way. This should include, but is not limited to the activities of Boston Harborfest/July 4, Boston Arts Festival, Gospel Fest, Caliente (Latin Music), Boston Urban Music Festival, Hip Hop Festival, Mayor's Holiday Spectacular, First Night Boston, Open Studios, Paint Box, and performances by Commonwealth Shakespeare Company on the Boston Common.

IMPLEMENT

1) Office of Arts and Culture: Shape a new, stronger, and adequately staffed Office of Arts and Culture:

- a) Appoint the Chief of Arts and Culture as a cabinet-level position.
- b) Play a central leadership role as convener, knowledge provider, and network builder to strengthen communities through arts, culture, and heritage activities.
- c) Conduct a thorough assessment of current MOATSE programmatic activity with a goal of focusing existing resources where they can provide maximum benefit.

- d) Move Tourism and Special Events to a different department.
- e) Fundraise from federal and state sources to augment city support for arts and culture.
- f) Co-lead a public cultural planning process with leaders in the arts, philanthropy, and business community that creates a vision for a culturally vibrant Boston (see below).
- g) Allocate General Fund money to support the core functions and activities of the Office.
- h) Work with the Commission on Affairs of the Elderly to find ways to better support Boston's mid-to-late career artists. Address issues such as age bias in the arts sector, support for artists to continue creating work, mentorship of young artists by master artists, and planning by artists to establish estate and legacy plans for their creative work.
- i) Establish and promote the Office of Arts and Culture as a model of teamwork and collaboration, both internally and externally. Facilitate coordination among arts education programs offered by the creative community.
- j) Enhance the city's website to include inventive social media access using tools such as Four Square, Facebook, and Twitter to help promote the Boston arts and culture sector in ways that have been successful in cities such as Philadelphia.

2) Include arts in marketing Boston: Convene

tourism and cultural promotional partners (GBCVB, MOTT, MCCA, Massport, ArtsBoston, etc.) to develop cohesive strategies that will elevate the arts when promoting the City of Boston and Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

DREAM

- 1). Increase national and international exchange among artists and arts leaders: Include artists and arts leaders as part of Boston's sister cities programs and trade exchanges.
- 2) Encourage cross sector arts strategies: Community development corporations, human service providers, and civic organizations are ideally situated to support and increase community-based arts activity. The city can help them adopt arts strategies. In the longer term, private companies can be required to develop and implement arts strategies as a condition of receiving city contracts.
 - a) Appoint practicing artists to serve on all city commissions, housing agencies, advisory boards, and citizen boards.
 - b) Integrate public art, visiting artists' programs, artists-in-residence programs, and arts programs into all of the city's programs.
- 3) Integrate the arts across sectors. The arts can be pivotal to achieving several top city priorities. Empower the Office of Arts and Culture to facilitate a process of collaboration between arts and other areas such as the departments associated with:
 - a) Transportation, by including artists' input into project design and street beautification

policy and projects

- b) Neighborhood Services, in the design of Little City Halls and support for arts events
 - c) City archives, which should be more accessible and encouraged to collaborate with the public libraries, the Boston Public Schools, and the higher education sector as well as with artists and the arts community.
- 4) Develop and launch a large-scale, comprehensive branding campaign for Boston's entire arts sector.
 - a) Build a multicultural, multigenerational promotional campaign that can be customized by different subgroups and individual artists
 - b) Address deep-seated concerns regarding cultural inequality and the legacy of racism by representing the arts community as an inclusive, diverse, and safe place





where people can come together to create, experience, and enjoy activities together.

- c) Encourage people to explore the city and go beyond the “comfort zones” of their own neighborhoods.
 - d) Secure significant media assets, including outdoor, transit, and digital platforms that Boston can leverage to communicate its brand. Use these new outlets to augment existing city-owned platforms such as street lights and neighborhood street banners.
 - e) Promote seasonal activities, including events on City Hall Plaza, neighborhood festivals, public art, and Open Studios, to showcase the best Boston has to offer.
- 5) Make the arts central to human services. Recognize and support the role of the arts in human development, trauma recovery, and political empowerment. This work will require both funding and a willingness to rethink traditional divisions of expertise and policy oversight. Areas of potential impact include
- a) Public Safety through arts-based diversionary programs and a more collaborative, less adversarial approach to street art.
 - b) Public Health using the arts to raise awareness of public health issues and addiction rehabilitation.
 - c) Social services work with communities of identity including youth, elderly, communities of color, women, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, immigrants, and veterans.
- 6) Create a competition for The Next Great Festival. Invite members across the Boston community to generate innovative ideas for signature arts events. Create an open competition and implement the winning entries.
- 7) Establish Boston Arts Festival 2.0: a multi-day, large-scale, city-sponsored arts event
- a) Create a significant, community-driven

festival that reflects the diversity of Boston's neighborhoods and provides a larger, integrated platform for all the other events for which the city is currently responsible including Gospel Fest, Caliente (Latin Music), and the Boston Urban Music Festival.

FOCUS 3: THERE IS A SHARED AGENDA AMONG ARTS AND CULTURAL SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

The existence of a master cultural plan will enable the arts and culture sector to identify opportunities and gaps, and to set priorities. An inclusive and participatory process will build capacity within the sector, setting the stage for ongoing dialogue and helping to ensure that the plan is being implemented and, if needed, adjusted to meet changing realities.

KEEP

1) Mayor as Convener: The city has an essential and unique role to play in fostering conversations among artists, their advocates and partners inside and outside the sector.

IMPLEMENT

- 2) A comprehensive and inclusive plan for Boston's arts and culture sector: Initiate a citywide public engagement process led by the mayor that will identify goals and strategies for the arts and culture sector to grow, integrate, and foster economic and human development in the city.
- 3) A standing advisory committee on the arts: Take full advantage of the Working Group's past efforts and organize a proactive committee of arts leaders to facilitate meetings and networks across the sector, including every art form, culture, and community.
- 4) Annual arts summit: Host an annual State of the Arts summit hosted by the advisory committee and the Office of Arts and Culture to support accountability, build shared visions and community, and create an opportunity for celebration.
- 5) Create a comprehensive Arts and Culture web portal:
 - a) Promote all cultural events with a comprehensive online calendar, possibly in partnership with existing media listings.
 - b) Provide online services for the permitting process and information about fair labor standards and the use of city parks and real estate for temporary arts installations and performances.
 - c) Support the design and implementation of a dynamic social media and internet strategy promoting arts activities that include

everything the city has to offer. Improve the channels of communication and awareness among city departments about arts events and activities.

- d. Highlight free and low cost performances throughout the neighborhoods to ensure all Bostonians have access to arts.

DREAM

- 1) National and international conferences: Create conditions in which Boston is a top tier choice to host national and international arts and culture conferences that incorporate local artists and performances as part of their conference agendas, including the annual meetings of Americans for the Arts, Dance USA, Opera America, Theater Communications Group, International Society of Performing Arts, Music Educators, Grantmakers in the Arts, etc.
- 2) Partner with MCCA and hotels: Integrate the marketing and sales efforts of MCCA and Boston hotels for large scale arts events



(festivals, public art projects) to increase tourism.

FOCUS 4: THE CITY OF BOSTON DEDICATES ADEQUATE RESOURCES TO FINANCE THE SECTOR'S PRIORITIES

KEEP

- 1) Boston Cultural Council: Retain the Boston Cultural Council as a grant-making agency.

IMPLEMENT

- 1) Match the Massachusetts Cultural Council funding of the Boston Cultural Council at a minimum one-to-one level in the first year of the administration.
- 2) Individual BCC Artist Grants: Make individual artists eligible for Boston Cultural Council's grants.

DREAM

- 1) Invest in the arts and culture sector
 - a) Establish a Percent for Arts program, dedicating one percent of all private and public development projects as a permanent fund for the arts and culture sector.
 - b) Increase dedicated funding in the city budget until Boston ranks as one of the top five cities nationally for per capita funding of the arts and culture sector.
- 2) Create an Innovation Fund for the Arts

- a) Consistent with Boston’s prowess in the areas of medicine, research, and technology, where there is funding for experimentation and “cutting edge” work, create an Innovation Fund for the Arts to encourage more experimental art across all disciplines. The Fund could also support larger scale public art activities and other strategies for bringing the arts to people in unexpected ways outside of concert halls, galleries, museums or theatres.

- b) Appoint a superintendent who is committed and dedicated to the arts and who will champion the BPS Arts Expansion Initiative.
- 2) Partnership with Edvestors: Work in tandem with Edvestors to ensure that arts and culture are an important component of the curriculum.
- 3) Boston Arts Academy (BAA): Continue to promote the institution as a model of excellence and employ the school and its students to advance arts and culture throughout the city. Promote employment of BAA graduates as ambassadors for Boston’s creative sector.
- 4) Parks and Recreation: Parks are where many residents experience the cultural life of the city. Encourage the city’s Parks and Recreation Department to continue to host and facilitate a range of cultural activities. In park revitalization efforts, continue to include artists in the design process and to commission public art, such as in the current proposal for Town Field in Dorchester.
- 5) Neighborhood-based offerings (festivals, parades, performances): Make the vital role that the network of artists and arts institutions play in keeping the city connected and making its diverse neighborhoods accessible explicit to the public.

FOCUS 5: ALL BOSTON’S RESIDENTS, ESPECIALLY OUR CHILDREN, HAVE ACCESS TO THE ARTS

Participation in arts and culture events and performances must reflect the diversity of Boston’s residents. It is particularly important to foster the engagement of young people in creating, performing, and in taking part in our city’s cultural institutions and activities.

KEEP

- 1) BPS Arts Expansion Initiative: Continue the Initiative and challenge BPS to fulfill its mandate.
 - a) BPS Arts Office and the Office of Arts and Culture should continue to coordinate their efforts to ensure that the implementation of arts initiatives in the school system is a priority.

IMPLEMENT

- 1) Boston Public Schools:
 - a) Hire a BPS superintendent committed to increasing the amount of in-school, quality arts experiences for young people at all grade levels.

- b) Insist on the addition of the arts throughout all BPS curriculums. Ensure that the transition from STEM to STEAM is achieved in Boston schools.
 - c) Establish Art Pathways throughout BPS. Leverage and promote the arts programs for Boston high school students and teens offered by local colleges, universities, and nonprofits.
 - d) Support the Boston Youth Fund and arts and cultural organizations that offer summer employment for youth.
 - e) Expand the Mayor’s Mural Team into the Mayor’s Public Art Team so that young people can work on public art projects, performances, and events with professional artists and receive training in art entrepreneurship and innovation including administrative, office, writing, and fundraising skills.
 - f) Partner with Boston arts organizations to provide more free programs and free admission for teens, and work with Boston artists of all disciplines to provide additional programming for the BPS system.
- 2) Arts in all the parks: Plan beyond individual events and parks to create a citywide program of cultural activities in designated “Arts Parks” offered to youth, adults, and seniors alike.
- DREAM**
- 1) Neighborhood Libraries: Ensure our neighborhoods have public libraries that can also serve as gathering places and showcases for local artists and as venues for neighborhood performances and exhibits.
- 2) Improve access to the arts for all Boston children and families:
 - a) Develop an “arts map” by neighborhood so that residents know what’s available.
 - b) Organize an “arts access card” to encourage families with young children to visit museums and attend art exhibits, concerts, and theatre productions.
 - c) Develop an arts event database with a robust social media component that is accessible to families seeking programs for their kids outside of school time.
 - 3) Connecting the city with institutions of higher education:
 - a) Connect existing city databases to the new arts database to leverage a network of college performing arts programs and opportunities.
 - b) Engage college students as mentors for BPS students interested in the arts.
 - c) Promote opportunities to showcase college-level Boston artists.
 - d) Establish an annual arts career fair, bringing together Boston’s many cultural organizations to present career networking opportunities for high school and college graduates and for young artists hoping to live and work in Boston.

Arts & Culture Working Group

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Organizational titles and affiliations are provided for identification purposes only.