

# CRAFTING CONNECTIONS

**ART AS A CATALYST FOR ACCESS & BELONGING**

*A CASE STUDY COLLECTION FOR THE BAY TRAIL* | FEBRUARY 25, 2025

**SUMMARY REPORT**

Prepared for



Prepared by

**STREET  
PLANS**

# THANK YOU

*Thank you to all of our interviewees who contributed their time and expertise.*

## **Albany Bulb Art (Albany, CA | City of Albany)**

- » Jeff Bond, City of Albany
- » Julia Price, Love the Bulb

## **Coastal Stories Grant Program (California, Statewide | California State Coastal Conservancy)**

- » Erica Johnson, Coastal Conservancy of California
- » Shalini Kanann, Coastal Conservancy of California

## **NYC DOT Art Program (New York, NY | New York City Department of Transportation)**

- » Talisa Almonte, Artist
- » Vanesa Álvarez Díaz, Artist
- » Jaclyn Whitney, NYC DOT Art
- » Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy, NYC DOT Art
- » Leah Rosofsky, NYC DOT Art

## **Go Human Grant Program (Southern California | Southern California Association of Governments)**

- » Andres Carasquillo, Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)
- » Rachel Om, SCAG

## **Artist in Residence Program (National, Bureau of Land Management)**

- » Madeleine Grace Kelly, King Range National Conservation Area/Shelter Cove Arts & Recreation Foundation, Artist
- » Lisa Rock, Black Rock Desert National Conservation Area, Artist
- » Courtney Sennish, Black Rock Desert National Conservation Area, Artist
- » Greg Shine, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- » Kathy Torrence, BLM, Black Rock Desert National Conservation Area

## **Thank you as well to the following people for early advice to support identification of potential case studies:**

- » Carrie Ann Christensen, Senior Planner - Leader in the Creative CityMaking Program + Indigenous Acknowledgment And Reconciliation Project

## **Cultural Strategists-in-Government Program (Oakland, CA | City of Oakland)**

- » Vanessa Whang, Cultural Strategist-in-Government Program, Senior Program Consultant

## **Creative Strategist Program (Los Angeles County | Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture)**

- » Kim Glann, LA County Department of Arts and Culture
- » Clement Hanami, Artist

## **Parks Ambassador Program (Twin Cities region, MN | The Metropolitan Council)**

- » Amanda Lovelee, Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities
- » Witt Siasoco, Artist

## **Atlanta BeltLine Public Arts Program (Atlanta, GA | Atlanta BeltLine Inc and Atlanta BeltLine Partnership)**

- » Nedra Deadwyler, Scholar-in-Residence (2020)
- » Miranda Kyle, Former Chief Curator, Arts& Culture Program Manager, ABI

## **Thank you to the Project Team**

- » Street Plans: Tony Garcia, Julie Flynn, Cata Ruiz Luzio, Angie Rendon (Consultant Team)
- » MTC: Lily Brown, Nicola Szibbo (Client Team)
- » Mariposa Planning: Chris Lepe (Advisor)

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# OVERVIEW

# **How are government agencies collaborating with artists to advance community equity goals and/or foster a sense of belonging in public space?**

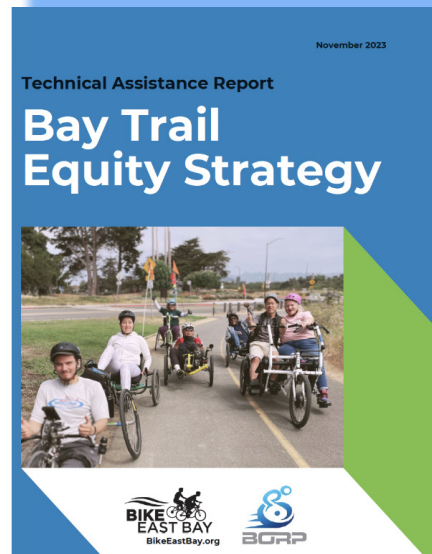
**IDENTIFY REPLICABLE BEST PRACTICES**  
FOR COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN ARTISTS AND  
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO INFORM MTC'S  
APPROACH TO THE BAY TRAIL PROGRAM

**UNCOVER EXAMPLES** OF HOW ART HAS  
ENHANCED ACCESS TO AND FOSTERED A  
SENSE OF BELONGING IN PUBLIC SPACES  
OR TRAIL SYSTEMS

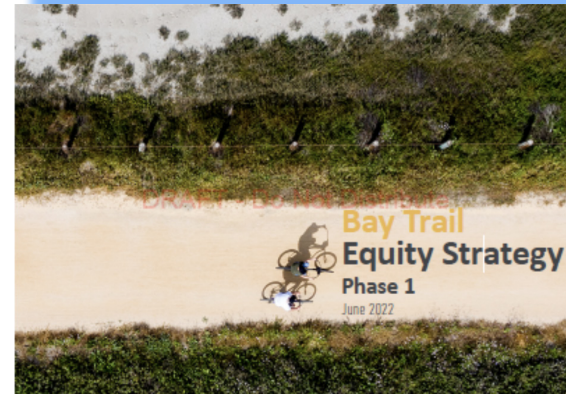
## **PROJECT PURPOSE + SUMMARY**

**EXPLORE A RANGE OF PRECEDENTS** - THIS  
MIGHT INCLUDE PUBLIC ART PROGRAMS, ARTIST-  
IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAMS, POLICIES AND OTHER  
EFFORTS THAT INCREASE CONNECTION TO  
COMMUNITY THROUGH ARTIST PARTNERSHIPS

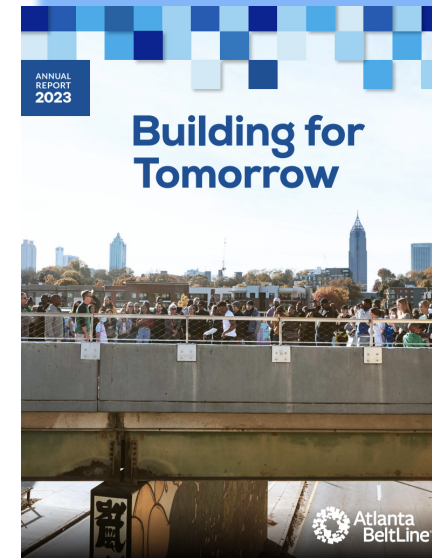
# BACKGROUND RESEARCH



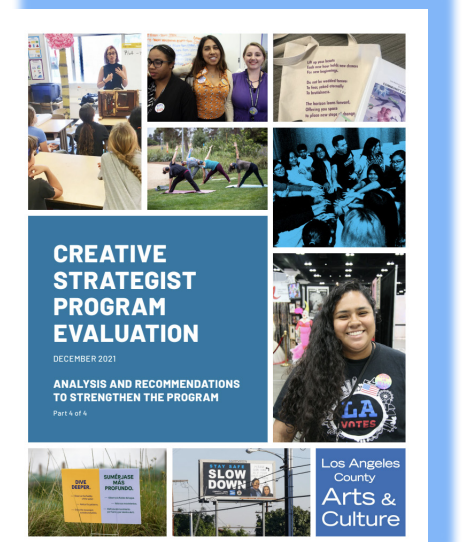
**Bay Trail Equity Strategy  
Technical Assistance Report  
(Nov. 2023)**



**Bay Trail Equity Strategy  
Phase 1 (2022 DR document)**



**Atlanta BeltLine Annual  
Report (2023)**



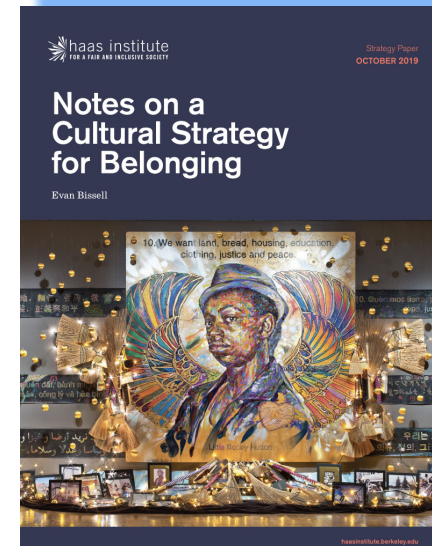
**Los Angeles County Creative  
Strategist Program Evaluation  
(Dec. 2021)**



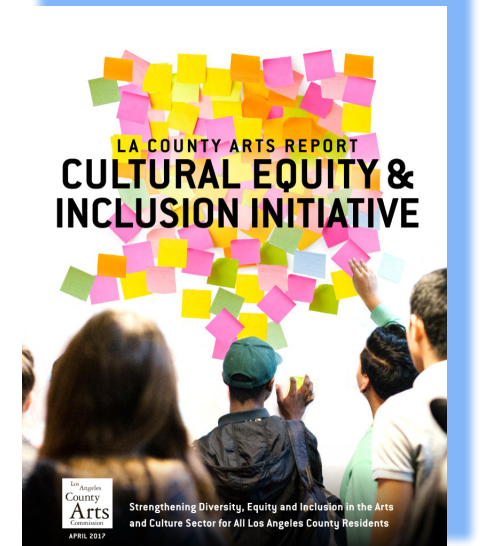
**Bay Trail Equity Strategy  
Phase 1 (Jan. 2023)**



**Cultural Strategists-in-  
Oakland City Government  
Report (Apr. 2024)**

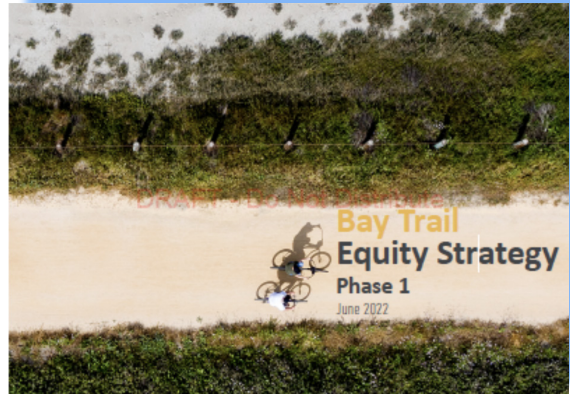


**Haas Institute: Notes on a  
Cultural Strategy for Belonging  
(Oct. 2019)**



**LA County Arts Report: Cultural  
Equity & Inclusion Initiative  
(Apr. 2017)**

# BACKGROUND RESEARCH FRAMING REFLECTIONS

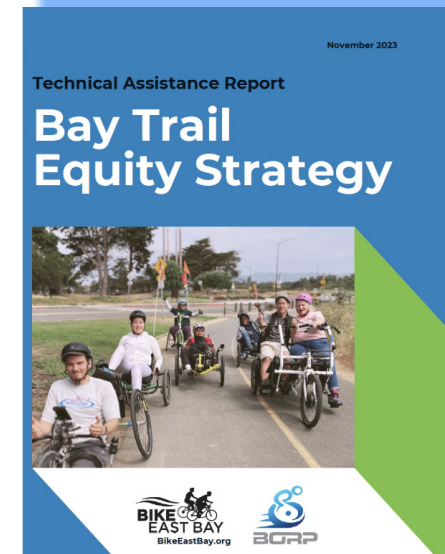


**Bay Trail Equity Strategy  
Phase 1 (2022 DR document)**

## How might we conceptualize what "improving access" to the Bay Trail means?

### Highlight reflections:

- *Equity Priority Communities need better access to the Bay Trail*
- *In its most literal sense, "access" means geographic access – providing safe and convenient connections from neighborhoods to the Bay Trail, while removing physical barriers. But improving "access" also means reducing all barriers to use including cultural, financial, and linguistic barriers and establishing a sense of belonging.*



**Bay Trail Equity Strategy  
Technical Assistance Report  
(Nov. 2023)**

## The importance of improving access to what already exists

### Highlight reflections:

- *Balance trail completion efforts with initiatives that improve access and sense of belonging on trail segments that already exist*



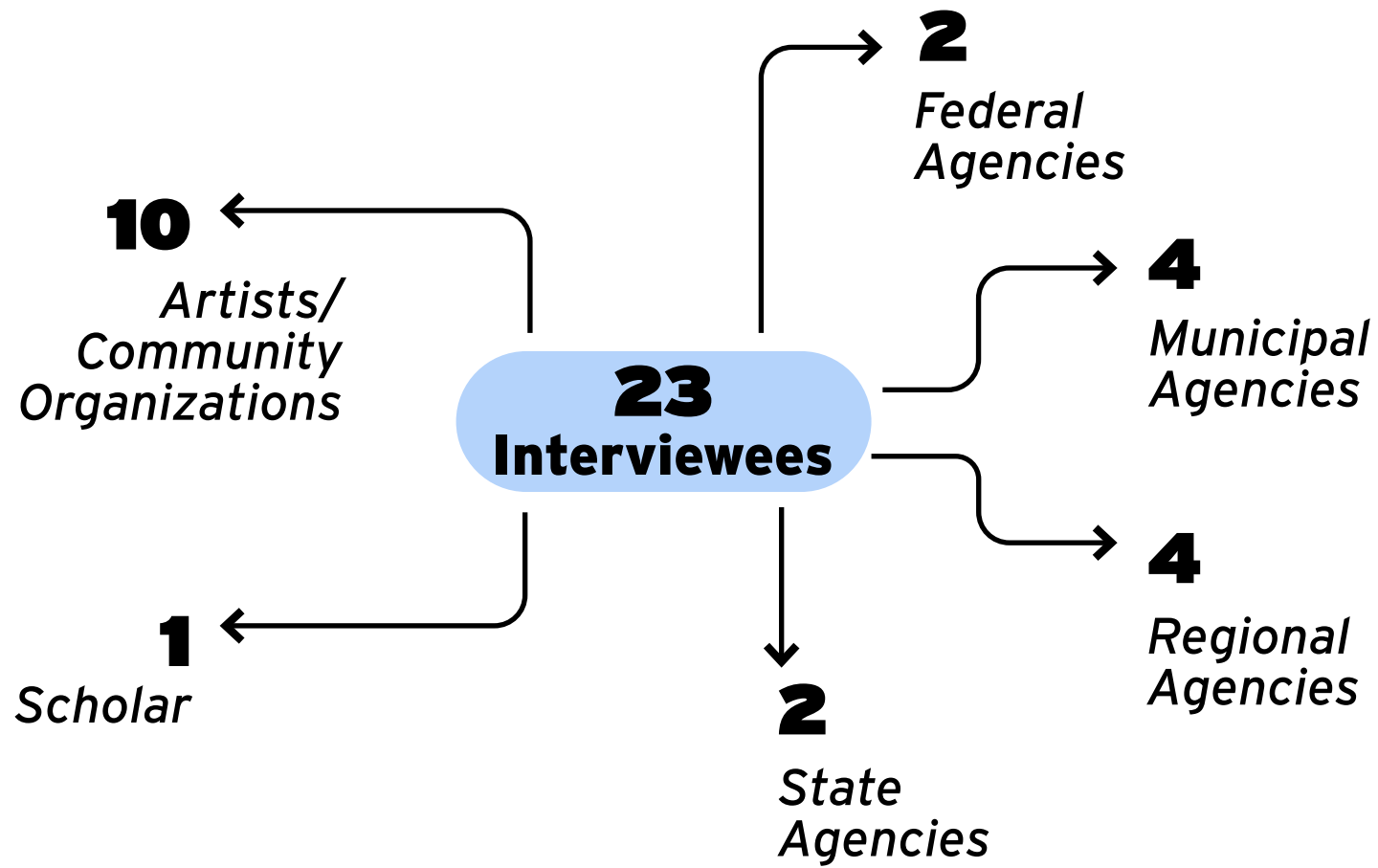
**Bay Trail Equity Strategy  
Phase 1 (January 2023)**

## What could "cultivating a sense of belonging" look like?

### Highlight reflections:

- *Desire for public events as well as opportunities for more intimate community and cultural gatherings*

# INTERVIEW SUMMARY



## RESEARCH CATEGORIES



**Program Overview + Purpose**



**Community Engagement**



**Program Development**



**Program Evaluation**



**Program Operations + Resources**



**Equity + Belonging**



**Administration + Agreements**



**Key Challenges + Assets**

## BREAKDOWN BY CASE STUDY

Case Study Name	Organization Category	Name of Interviewee/s
Albany Bulb Art	Municipal Agency + CBO	Jeff Bond + Julia Price
Coastal Stories Grant Program	State Agency	Shalini Kannan + Erica Johnson
NYC DOT Art Program	Municipal Agency + Artists	Jaclyn Whitney, Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy, Leah Rosofsky, Vanesa Alvarez Díaz, Talisa Almonte
Go Human Grant Program	Regional Agency + CBOs	Rachel Om, Andres Carrasquillo + multiple CBO representative testimonial review
Artist in Residence Program	Federal Agency + Artists	Greg Shine, Kathy Torrence + Madeleine Grace Kelly, Lisa Rock, Courtney Sennish
Cultural Strategists-in-Government Program	Municipal Agency (Consultant Representative)	Vanessa Whang, Senior Program Consultant
Creative Strategist Program	Regional Agency + Artist	Kim Glann + Clement Hanami
Parks Ambassador Program	Regional Agency + Artist	Amanda Lovelee + Witt Siasoco
Atlanta BeltLine Public Arts Program	Former Municipal Agency representative, Artist/Scholar	Miranda Kyle (former Chief Curator, Arts& Culture Program Manager, ABI), Nedra Deadwyler

# ART + GOVERNMENT

*Our research revealed a spectrum of program models in which governments are working with artists to foster a sense of belonging in public spaces and advance equity goals.*

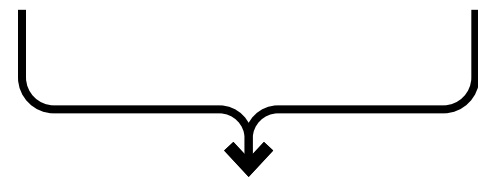
**ALLOW**

**PLAN FOR**

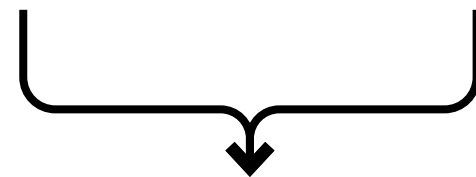
**SUPPORT**

**EMBED**

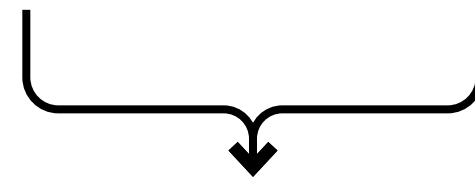
**CO-CREATE**



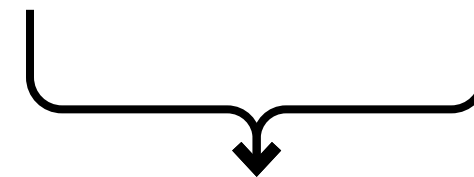
**UNSANCTIONED  
ART: LOOK THE  
OTHER WAY**



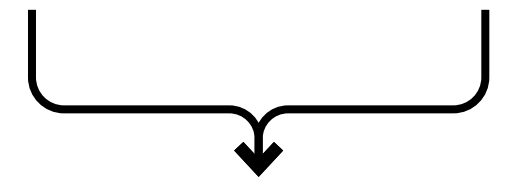
**CULTURAL  
STRATEGIES +  
POLICIES**



**OPERATING +  
FUNDING PROGRAMS  
(ART, COMMUNITY,  
ETC.)**



**ARTIST IN  
RESIDENCE  
PROGRAMS**



**EQUITABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
INITIATIVES; ARTISTS  
IN LEADERSHIP;  
INCUBATORS**

# CASE STUDIES OVERVIEW



**ALLOW**

**PLAN FOR**

**SUPPORT**

**EMBED**

**CO-CREATE**



IMAGE SOURCES | TOP L > R - Albany Bulb, Kelly Sullivan, Berkeleyside; Coastal Stories, Irene "Xirenita" Juarez O'Connell, image by Erin Lory CWC; LA County - cover of 12/21 Creative Strategist Program Evaluation Report; Parks Ambassador, signs created by Witt Siasoco; BOTTOM L > R - NYC DOT, "Shadowbox" by Gavin Snider in partnership with NY Cares and JP Morgan Chase & Co., Barrier Beautification (2018); SCAG GoHumans - Ashley Wright holding her piece "The Last Climb"; Cultural Strategist-In-Government Program, photo posted by @azhiablackgrl; BLM Artist-in-Residence Painted Mountains Tour with Delbert Anderson and D'DAT photo by Greg Shrine; Atlanta BeltLine dance performance by Nadya Zeitlin, photo via Atlanta BeltLine website

**A PROCESS TO WORK WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO INVENTORY THE ASSETS THAT MAKE UP AN AREA'S EXISTING CULTURAL "ECOSYSTEM" AND A STRATEGY TO PROTECT THOSE ASSETS AGAINST THE PRESSURES OF GENTRIFICATION (MOST RELEVANT FOR PUBLIC ART PROGRAMS IN PHYSICAL SPACE)**

**AN EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK THAT EMBRACES "LEARNING IN PUBLIC" AND ALLOWS FOR COURSE CORRECTION WHEN NEEDED**

**IDENTIFICATION OF FUNDS FOR AT LEAST A "PROTOTYPE" PROGRAM, INCLUDING RESOURCES TO DOCUMENT SUCCESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

**AN ATTITUDE THAT EMBRACES FLEXIBILITY AND THE IDEA THAT "THE PROCESS CAN BE THE PRODUCT"**

## **CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE GETTING STARTED**

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A MANDATE FOR THE PROGRAM WITHIN A PLANNING OR POLICY DOCUMENT**

**No matter the program path, Case Studies revealed the following items as preconditions for success in an arts-based program that aims to advance equity goals**

**CLEAR PROGRAM GOALS THAT ARE ALIGNED WITH THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO AGENCY PROGRAM STAFF AS WELL AS THE CREATIVE PARTNERS INVOLVED**

**CULTIVATION OF CHAMPIONS: AT THE LEADERSHIP AND IDEALLY ELECTED OFFICIAL LEVEL**

# CASE STUDIES

# ALBANY BULB ART

**Place:** Albany, CA

**Agency:** City of Albany

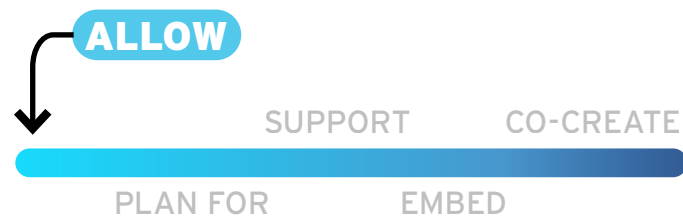
**Interviewees:**

- Jeff Bond, Community Development Director
- Julia Price, Program and Volunteer Coordinator of Love the Bulb



Top: Dapper Dan 9 (Atlas Obscura User) | Right: Mad Marc's Castle, Photo by Peter Merts, <https://www.michaeljohngrist.com/>

*There is a strong feeling among stakeholders that artworks on the Albany Bulb are important, character-defining elements of the site.*



## Program Overview + Purpose

On the Albany Bulb, a former debris landfill that sits on the San Francisco Bay, creativity runs free. In addition to hiking, dog walking, and sightseeing, people have been making informal art from discarded materials there since the landfill ceased operations in 1984, and it has since become a cultural and recreational site for the Bay Area community. Artworks on the Bulb have historically been created through unsanctioned and informal channels, with little to no curation. Works have been created by people ranging from well-known locals - like artist and attorney Osha Neumann - to unhoused artists who found refuge at the Bulb at various points in time. For example, Mad Marc's Castle, a "house" built out of scavenged concrete and plaster in 2000, is

used as a canvas for colorful murals and remains a popular landmark today. Thus, the Albany Bulb represents a key example of a completely bottom-up public art display that is the antithesis of an official art or residence program. Notwithstanding the lack of a formalized program, the Albany Bulb is widely known as an inclusive art space worth honoring and protecting.

## Program Development

Numerous factors are at play in creating the conditions for an informal art scene at the Bulb. First, from a physical standpoint, the Bulb is an out-of-the-way landform, cut off from the City of Albany by the 80 and 580 highway overpasses. Additionally, it has a complex jurisdictional makeup with no clear singular

entity responsible for stewardship. Large portions of the Bulb are owned by the City of Albany, but the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) is another major property-owning agency with jurisdiction over portions of the site. Additionally, there are land and waterway areas owned by the State of California immediately surrounding the Bulb. Among these agencies, there is no formalized effort to manage or encourage the artwork that is created there. The role of public agencies with respect to art has primarily been to allow it to occur or remain in place, save the emergence of a safety issue or public complaint.

In recent years, there have been attempts to adjust ownership and jurisdiction of the site. The most recent effort occurred in 2016, when the city adopted a transition study to identify goals for the future of

the site and explore the transfer of full ownership of the site to EBRPD. The transition planning was stalled due to several challenging conditions, including political and community concerns, as well as the high cost of remediation needed in certain areas of the site. Though the plan was stalled, it did include recommendations on management of the informal art. These recommendations have remained a guidepost to the City. Specifically, the study states that: "While property management transitions, preserving the tradition of public art will be an important strategy for maintaining site character." Strategies to preserve the art include leaving existing works that don't pose a safety hazard; moving pieces threatened by deterioration or sea level rise to another location; and cataloging existing art and the history of the art as a community resource.

Despite these preservation strategies, the plan raised specific concerns from community stakeholders that changing management could put an end to the unconventional and informal spirit of the art. In part emerging from this community dialogue, in 2016 local residents and artists formed Love the Bulb, a grassroots organization dedicated to preserving the Bulb as a platform for artistic expression.

Since its formation, Love the Bulb has emerged as a key advocacy organization dedicated to preserving the creative spirit of the Albany Bulb, enhancing it as an inclusive cultural zone for all people, and protecting its rich natural habitats. In fulfillment of this mission, Love the Bulb has presented dozens of art, performance, and education events and successfully advocated for more art-friendly policies. They also hosted BulbFest in 2019 and 2020, a two-day festival that features dance performances and new art installations. Love the Bulb has also established a native plant garden and has partnered with the City of Albany on stewardship projects. Finally, the organization's BulbLab project provided a framework for a loose collective of artists to use the Bulb both as a location for artmaking and as inspiration for investigations of the relationship between humans and nature.

Source Photo By Kelly Sullivan



## Program Operations + Resources

The City of Albany and other stewardship agencies do not have any formal art programming for the site. Love the Bulb has worked to nurture the space for both visual and performing arts and programming. However, Love the Bulb is currently funded on a small scale through grants from several foundations, and it remains primarily volunteer-run.

## Administration + Agreements

As mentioned previously, The Bulb is managed by multiple agencies. The EBRPD maintains the smaller parcels that connect to state-owned waterfront property. The City owns the access roadway and "bulb" shaped public space site jutting out into the water. These agencies collaborate with a low-touch stewardship approach. Both the City and EBRPD keep trash cans empty and pick up hazardous waste, and police patrol the site to enforce the no-camping mandate. There is no formal maintenance of the art, save for removing unsafe works. Love the Bulb also carries out stewardship in terms of volunteer-led clean-ups, etc., sometimes in collaboration with the city. For many visitors, the site's unkempt, gritty character has been the main attribute that makes the Bulb a fascinating place for exploration and spontaneity.

## Community Engagement

The city has engaged in ongoing dialogue with community members, advocacy groups, and stakeholders to address the complex issues surrounding unsanctioned art on the Bulb. Community outreach was crucial during the production of the 2016 transition study; the city held a series of community meetings from 2015 to 2016 to collect and integrate public feedback on park issues, including public art. This resulted in the creation of the art preservation strategies previously mentioned. Furthermore, Love the Bulb successfully advocated for the Bulb's inclusion in the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan when it was updated in 2022. The plan acknowledged the role that unsanctioned art plays in making the Bulb one of the most regularly visited parks in the city. The Bulb was not included in the previous master plan, so this was a big step in recognizing its value as a cultural asset in the city's park planning. The community was



Walking event at Albany Bulb, by Love the Bulb

deeply involved in the production of the plan. Public workshops were held both on Zoom and in-person to refine community feedback into site-specific project ideas and policy recommendations. Love the Bulb encouraged frequent users to participate in the workshops and advocate for the Bulb, resulting in numerous recommendations in the plan for art programming.

## Equity + Belonging

The Albany Bulb truly promotes inclusivity and a sense of belonging by empowering anyone to express themselves. It's such a unique and beloved space because visitors are free to participate in the art in any way they want, whether it's by making sculptures and murals or simply leaving small drawings. The lack of art-restricting policy means that visitors are limited only by their imagination and basic safety considerations. Visitors find it fun to return to their works to see how others have added to them. The Bulb's body of art is a never-ending collaborative project between artists and members of the community from all walks of life. Furthermore, the various community-led advocacy efforts around the art's preservation have been key in fostering a sense of ownership and belonging amongst residents who feel connected to the site.

## Key Challenges + Assets

The Bulb's history as a former dumping ground created unique conditions that have allowed the site to flourish into an eccentric community space. Because it's unlike Albany's other parks, the inter-jurisdictional collaboration with EBRPD has been helpful in stewarding such a unique space. Advocacy efforts led by members of the community have ensured that the art on the Bulb remains preserved and recognized as a cultural treasure. However, though the Bulb's unsanctioned art has been incorporated into the city's parks framework, there have not been any government resources dedicated to art programming.

Interviewees from both the city and Love the Bulb articulated concerns over imminent climate change issues such as sea level rise and erosion. In this context, the site's history as a dumping site raises challenges and concerns. In past years, numerous costly studies have been needed to evaluate landfill materials. Neither the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board nor the City of Albany has specific knowledge of any actionable public health and safety issues. However, there remains a concern that as erosion occurs, it could uncover hazardous materials that are at risk of being carried into the Bay. As such, it is possible that climate change may force a change to the loose regulations on the Bulb

## Resources + Links

- Albany Bulb Webpage <https://www.albanycalifornia.gov/Residents/Parks-Open-Space/Waterfront/Albany-Bulb>

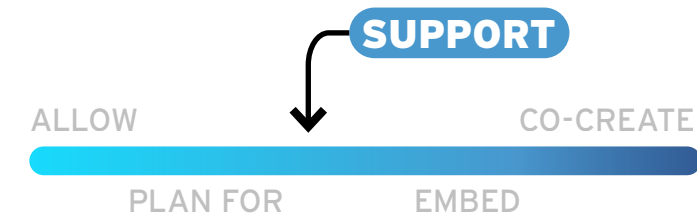
# COASTAL STORIES GRANT PROGRAM

**Place:** California (Statewide)

**Agency:** California State Coastal Conservancy (SCC)

**Interviewees:**

- Shalini Kannan, Project Manager & Tribal Liaison
- Erica Johnson, Project Manager



Top: Coastal Stories funded Mural in Maywood, Los Angeles. Photo: Agua por Vida | Right: The Tlaloc storm drain mural in Beach Flats Park by artist Irene Juarez O'Connell, sourced from coastal-watershed.org



*“Having your goals really clearly defined is important so that when stickier situations come up you can go back to them as guideposts.”*

- Staff Interviewees

## Program Overview + Purpose

Coastal Stories is a new grant program by the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) that seeks to foster inclusivity and belonging in outdoor spaces through storytelling. The program funds projects that implement storytelling installations representing communities whose stories and perspectives have been historically excluded from California’s public outdoor spaces. This new grant program falls within the SCC’s larger Explore the Coast program (ETC), which provides coastal experiences for people who face barriers accessing the coast. The priorities of Coastal Stories program are to (1) engage representatives of Black, Indigenous, and People

of Color (BIPOC) and other historically excluded communities to develop and share their coastal stories through creative storytelling and (2) improve educational content in California’s outdoor spaces by retelling stories in more inclusive ways and sharing untold stories.

Tribes, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies are given grants of up to roughly \$175,000 to implement projects that add storytelling and interpretive elements to existing waterfronts, trails, and other public spaces in the Conservancy’s jurisdiction. Past installations have included multilingual signage, interpretive exhibits, audio and video content linked to QR codes, murals, and public art.

## Program Development

Coastal Stories grew out of the Conservancy’s Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) staff committee, which was established in 2017 to address inequities in the grantmaking process, improve community engagement, and increase staff diversity. In 2020, the committee developed the JEDI Guidelines to lay out an overarching equity framework for the Conservancy’s ongoing work. The Guidelines included a push to fund more programs and projects that increase equity and environmental justice throughout the coast. The committee also published a plan that identified specific actions to advance the guidelines, which included a goal to

“Support messaging that demonstrates and shows what diversity of coastal access experiences looks like; elevate coastal stories and histories told by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities.”

After the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, the committee wanted to fund more community-based work led by BIPOC people, for BIPOC audiences. They were inspired by an article from the Atlantic, “Five Ways to Make the Outdoors More Inclusive”, which suggested that park systems should correct their one-sided histories and hire historians to tell stories that relate to communities of color. Launched in 2021, the Coastal Stories program is an effort to advance these goals. The Conservancy then embedded this strategy in its Strategic Plan for 2023 through 2027.

## Program Operations + Resources

The Coastal Stories program is just one of the many grants that the Conservancy awards. To identify funding for the new grant program, SCC staff worked with executive officers to identify existing resources that would be appropriate to leverage. For example, existing bond funding streams allowed for funds to be applied to many relevant categories, including “interpretive exhibits” and “educational exhibits”. With this strategy, all 2024 Coastal Stories projects could be funded by the agency’s Proposition 40 bond appropriation. The program has also been able to pull from the Conservancy’s general funds because there’s agency-wide support and precedent for spending more money on community engagement. General funds are more flexible and have been used for projects that are not eligible for bond funding. Even with these sources, funding can remain a challenge, as funding levels fluctuate with the state budget. The 2024 cycle will be the last round of grants SCC undertakes until the program identifies more funding sources.

From a staffing standpoint, the program does not have a dedicated program manager. Staffing is distributed to regional program managers across the agency who take an interest in particular projects. There’s a core team of passionate staff that have also worked internally to amend their job descriptions to formalize their time allocation to the program.

Program staff is selective about the projects that get chosen for funding. Every project must present a story in a physical location to fulfill the program’s goal of making the outdoors more inclusive. In the first iteration of the program, staff found that the program description was too open-ended and people applied for funding for digital projects such as podcast and documentary productions, elements

Bottom: Photo by Don Leach



that don’t result in physical installations in public space. In the subsequent cycles, staff have refined the program’s priorities and eligibility and clarified project goals. The program also focuses on awarding grants to CBOs rather than entities such as museums to prioritize public access.

## Administration + Agreements

The program requires a partnership between the applicant and the landowner to ensure that both parties are committed to implementation. Grant awardees are required to have a signed landowner access agreement before the project can begin, and the program provides an agreement template to facilitate this. Grantees are also responsible for acquiring permits and permissions, and grant funds can be used to pay for permitting costs. The program does not provide administrative assistance for permitting but is considering acquiring a consultant on retainer to help CBOs navigate this, as it is often a challenge.

Maintenance terms vary depending on the realistic lifetime of each type of project, but most are expected to be maintained for 5–15 years. Program staff help CBOs determine their projects’ maintenance terms and requirements. Tasks might include replacing weathered signs, removing graffiti, and updating web-based information for projects that incorporate QR codes. The program does not fund maintenance; applicants are required to have plans and parties responsible for this following installation. In the future, Conservancy staff plan to form partnerships with external organizations to preserve and steward the stories, and eventually develop a Coastal Story library.

## Community Engagement

All Coastal Stories projects are deeply community-focused. One of the six project selection criteria states that projects must be “Planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.” All 2023 awarded projects will actively engage their corresponding community in project design and implementation. Most of the grantees are led by BIPOC applicants or are partnered with historically excluded communities to co-create the project. Other projects engage with communities through interviews, community meetings, and tribal consultations. For example, one project created two large-scale murals that document the historical



Chinatown Bridge Monument, sourced from coastal-watershed.org

relevance of the Sleepy Lagoon for the Mexican American community along the Los Angeles River, and project leaders recruited local youth for participation and the mural artist organized painting events to foster community ownership.

## Program Evaluation

The program does not yet produce annual evaluation reports. This could be because Coastal Stories projects are given around 2 years to complete, meaning that even some projects from the first round of grants in 2022 are still in their final stages. As part of the program’s focus on community engagement, one key metric that program staff collect each year is the number of partner organizations that the projects engage with. For example, the six projects awarded in 2023 will collectively engage 32 community organizations, allowing them to reach more people.

Coastal Stories plays an important role in the SCC’s overall goal to promote inclusivity. As such, the program is included in the agency’s efforts to track progress in implementing JEDI guidelines. Details of the program are summarized in the Conservancy’s public Annual Report.

## Equity + Belonging

Equity goals are intentionally embedded in the Conservancy’s overall framework. Across all of the agency’s grant programs, priority is given to projects that serve disadvantaged communities. Specifically, the Coastal Stories program aims to “reinforce the message that all visitors and their safe uses of

outdoor spaces are welcome and respected and that the full story of the California coast comes from multifold perspectives.” This mission is rooted in the Conservancy’s acknowledgment that the history of injustice and displacement towards California’s Native Americans, Black people, and immigrants has led to the suppression of their representation in the stories of the California coast.

Additionally, in the project selection criteria there is a strong emphasis on working with tribes, stated as: “The project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated with the project area.” Six of the eight projects awarded in 2023 include tribal representation stories and will incorporate indigenous voices and perspectives on the California coast.

## Key Challenges + Assets

Administering large grants to CBOs admittedly has its challenges. The Coastal Stories program has extensive requirements to ensure the success of projects, but these requirements can be difficult for some grantees to manage. For example, before they can begin the work grantees must make a detailed work program, which includes approving subcontractors ahead of time and estimating budgets. This process can take a long time for smaller CBOs with less administrative capacity. The program also has robust insurance requirements that some grantees fail to meet. In some cases, the program has had to waive or reduce liability requirements. Additionally, the grant is dispersed in reimbursements, and this can be hard for smaller organizations without big reserves. The Conservancy recently implemented an advance payment program up to \$10,000, but it might not be enough for some subcontracts.

## Resources + Links

- <https://scc.ca.gov/grants/>
- [https://scc.ca.gov/files/2024/03/20231130Board18\\_Coastal\\_Stories\\_2023\\_Staff\\_Rec.pdf](https://scc.ca.gov/files/2024/03/20231130Board18_Coastal_Stories_2023_Staff_Rec.pdf)
- <https://scc.ca.gov/files/2023/05/SCC-Strategic-Plan-2023.pdf>

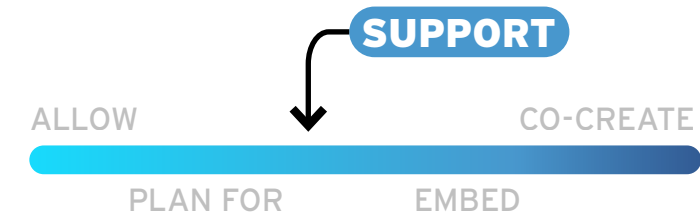
# NYC DOT ART PROGRAM

**Place:** New York, NY

**Agency:** NYC Department of Transportation (NYC DOT)

**Interviewees:**

- Jaclyn Whitney, Director of Digital Communications and Public Art
- Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy, Director of NYC DOT Art
- Leah Rosofsky, Project Manager, NYC DOT Art
- Vanesa Alvarez Díaz, Artist
- Talisa Almonte, Artist



Left: "Union with the Universe" by Vanesa Álvarez Díaz in partnership with Union Square Partnership, Arterventions (2023) | Right: "Exquisite Corpse" by Fanny Allié in partnership with A.I.R Gallery with support from the Fulton Area Business Alliance, Community Commissions (2017)

## Program Overview + Purpose

Supported by the New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT), the NYC DOT Art program aims to enhance New York City's public realm through art, engagements, and cultural programming on NYC DOT property. From colorful murals to eye-catching sculptures, temporary public art is utilized to beautify city infrastructure, such as sidewalks, jersey barriers, medians, and public plazas. Since 2008, NYC DOT Art has programmed over 450 temporary art installations across all five boroughs. In addition to beautifying public spaces, the program also aims to increase access to art and cultural resources, establish partnerships between government and community stakeholders, and provide paid opportunities to NYC creatives.

## Program Development

In 2008, the NYC DOT released Sustainable Streets, a strategic plan centered around the Bloomberg Administration's push for improved transportation policy. The plan outlined ways to increase safety, improve mobility, and enliven streets. Spearheaded by NYC DOT Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan, the agency introduced the Urban Art Program, now known as NYC DOT Art, as part of the large-scale effort to make New York's streets more vibrant and inviting. That year, NYC DOT partnered with local artists and community groups to install public art in Harlem, DUMBO, Chelsea, and Washington Heights.

## Program Operations + Resources

The temporary art permitted through the NYC DOT Art program is installed by artists in partnership with community-based organizations, permitted for up to 11 months. NYC DOT Art funds various programs but also offers permit opportunities for self-funded projects on a rolling basis. Self-funded initiatives, called Arterventions, place the responsibility on partner organizations to fully fund the installation and propose a site. This encourages communities to take accountability for beautifying their streets through public art. NYC DOT finds that organizations come back year after year to partner with them.

Though most installations are Arterventions, NYC DOT also directly funds projects through its Community Commissions program. Community Commissions projects provide funding and project management support to provide partner organizations and artists with the foundational tools to build independent public art programs for NYC DOT property. For Community Commissions, NYC DOT launches open calls to identify community-based partners with experience in executing public programming. Applications are reviewed by the NYC DOT Art Advisory Committee, consisting of a group of outside arts professionals. Once partners and priority sites are identified, an RFP is released to solicit site-specific proposals from professional artists. Partner organizations are provided a budget for the selected artist's work.

NYC DOT Art also releases biennial RFQs for asphalt art projects and barrier beautifications, which happen in partnership with other NYC DOT operating units and are funded by NYC DOT. Artists for asphalt art and barrier beautification are matched with sites as they become available.

## Administration + Agreements

Partner organizations sign an agreement to maintain the artwork throughout its duration, including basic cleaning and retouching if there is major vandalism.

## Community Engagement

NYC DOT Art views the partnerships this program catalyzes as a core part of Community Engagement and the agency is making an effort to reach more communities and new partners every year. NYC DOT is partnering with a diverse range of groups, from BIDs and museums to CBOs and volunteer groups. The program also involves the community in projects, and priority sites for art are identified in collaboration with NYC DOT operating units.

## Program Evaluation

NYC DOT Art posts project-related information on NYC Open Data, an online portal that makes data generated by city agencies available for public use. This data refreshes in real time, so at this point, no annual report is published. A current hope for program staff is to better visualize key takeaways and impact metrics and find standardized ways to quantify the impact of the various projects in NYC DOT Art's portfolio.

## Equity + Belonging

NYC DOT Art specifically aims to provide broader access to the arts citywide, viewing this goal as a central component of equity in the program. Finally, the program broadly enhances equity by forging new partnerships between artists and arts/neighborhood groups and the larger NYC DOT agency - the scale and scope of the NYC DOT Art program gives diverse artists a tangible role in shaping how their city streets look, which fosters belonging in an enduring way. *"Equity is part of what our agency is doing overall, and we want art to be a central part of that,"* staff explained.

## Key Challenges + Assets

Support from the entire NYC DOT agency has played a key role in the program's success. All corners of the agency are involved in the implementation of the projects. Partner organizations often work across several agencies and have voiced frustration over dealing with disparities in legal agreements and permit requirements related to public art. In response, the program is looking to be as transparent as possible with requirements and developing a series of educational materials. Another key challenge area is the program's requirement to hold liability insurance. Although it's a city-wide requirement, it can be a barrier for smaller organizations. Partner organizations may have difficulty identifying artists for self-funded initiatives.

## Artist Perspective

We interviewed two artists who had participated in the NYC DOT Art program through the Arterventions initiative for this report.

Vanessa Álvarez Díaz is a Spanish artist and muralist living in New York City, and she produced a major asphalt art mural with Union Square Partnership in partnership with NYC DOT through the Arterventions initiative in 2023. In her interview, Álvarez said she admires the program's dedication to expanding equity through art. Her work centers around using art to improve public spaces and she typically works with community-based programs, so partnering with the Union Square Partnership through NYC DOT's Arterventions initiative was both a natural fit and huge opportunity for her. To Álvarez, one successful aspect of the program was the open call format. She prefers this approach to other types of applications because it provides a bigger opportunity for artists to send in their designs, and makes public art a more democratic process by engaging the community. She recommended use of the platform Submittable and recommended a two step process: step one would be a simple application of form materials, such as a CV, recommendation letter, and portfolio; step two would be offered to a shortlist of applicants and require submission of a site specific fee with some financial compensation. New York's transit agency MTA operates open calls in this manner and offers about \$1,000 compensation for the phase two sketch.



"Vivid Chroma Locomotion" by Queen Andrea in partnership with Projectivity Group, Community Commissions (2019)

Álvarez's experience installing an asphalt art mural with NYC DOT Art is an example of a partnership with a larger organization through the Arterventions initiative. NYC DOT Art Arterventions invites local community organizations to submit a joint application with an artist to present temporary artwork on NYC DOT property. Partner organizations are responsible for the funding, project management, site selection, maintenance, community engagement, and artist selection. Álvarez's asphalt art mural was in partnership with the Union Square Partnership (a business improvement district).

She particularly valued the strong project management support the Partnership provided. Álvarez has worked on prior public realm projects where she had to deal with the logistics herself, and she reflected that balancing logistics with the creative side often felt impossible and delayed her work. During the NYC DOT Art Arterventions project, she felt supported throughout the entire process.

Talisa Almonte was our second interviewee. Almonte is an Afro-Latina artist and illustrator and the owner of a small creative business called Almonte Studio based in Queens, NY. Although so far, Almonte has only participated in the Arterventions initiative through a partner commission, she said she

was drawn to the NYC DOT Art program because of its open call format and its mission to increase accessibility for artists. Additionally, Almonte echoed Álvarez in recommending that every project should have a team that includes a partner organization that handles logistics such as site prepping and permitting. Like Álvarez, Almonte was commissioned by Union Square Partnership to create a major asphalt art mural, and she reflected on several complications she encountered during the process. One issue was managing volunteers: while she appreciated their help, many volunteers were not experienced painters and often painted outside of the line. Quality control was difficult to conduct because of the large scale of the project. She learned that volunteers are useful but should only be allowed to paint early on in the project. Another lesson she learned was the necessity of buffer time. The completion of her mural was delayed by rain, and photo ops created a hard deadline to finish. As a result, some areas of the mural needed extra coats of paint or retouching but there was no extra time available. Álvarez also suggested a change to the NYC DOT Art open call application process: like Álvarez, she highly recommended having artists simply submit their portfolio with a general idea for their project at first, with a site specific sketch coming later. This approach would provide



"Flowing Together" by Talisa Almonte, in partnership with Union Square Partnership, Arterventions (2024)

an opportunity for the artist to work with community representatives to finalize the design. This strategy further incorporates community engagement into the process, thus increasing equity.

## Resources + Links

- <https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pedestrians/dotart.shtml>
- Policy Background: [https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/ss09\\_update\\_lowres.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/ss09_update_lowres.pdf)
- [https://www.nycstreetdesign.info/sites/default/files/2020-02/DOT\\_Art\\_Tracks\\_Diagram.pdf](https://www.nycstreetdesign.info/sites/default/files/2020-02/DOT_Art_Tracks_Diagram.pdf)

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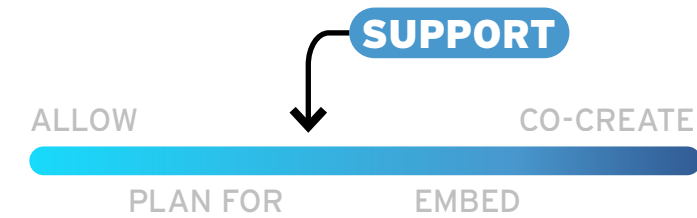
# GO HUMAN GRANT PROGRAM

**Place:** Southern California

**Agency:** Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)

**Interviewees:**

- Rachel Om, AICP
- Andrés Carrasquillo
- Additionally, we watched several recommended videos from grantees and project partners talking about their specific projects and what they achieved



Top/Right: Example project photos provided by SCAG

## Program Overview + Purpose

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Go Human program advances traffic safety by providing resources and technical assistance to local jurisdictions and community organizations. Its resources include safety advertisements, event programming to temporarily demonstrate redesigned streets and encourage walking and biking, quick builds, and community grant funding. Through the community grant program, *Go Human* provides funding to community-based organizations to implement traffic safety projects that target structural issues that affect the safety of people walking and biking, such as dangerous driving behavior, high vehicle speeds, street design and structural racism.

While funding levels change year to year, recent iterations of the program included awards of up to \$30,000 to implement community projects such as messaging, education, resource distribution, and community events. Funding is distributed to prioritize historically disadvantaged communities. Though not directly arts-based, the community grant program is an interesting model for CBO and regional government collaboration and provides broadly applicable lessons learned.

## Program Development

Go Human was developed as a result of a 2014 resolution adopted by the SCAG Regional Council to address the region's growing rate of bicycle/pedestrian deaths and injuries. The resolution enabled

SCAG to create a regional effort that promotes pedestrian and bicycle safety initiatives and decreases reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. In September 2015, SCAG officially launched Go Human with an advertising campaign that promoted cautious driving on radio, street signs, billboards, and more. In addition to safety messaging, there was a series of community outreach events across the region that allowed residents to temporarily experience potential street improvements. That initial year of programming became the template for several years of Go Human's subsequent projects.

After examining outcomes of the first few years of the program and brainstorming additional ways to incorporate partners, program staff arrived at a new strategy for working with community-based



organizations. In 2018, the program launched the Safe & Resilient Streets Mini-Grant Program to fund creative local engagement projects led by CBOs. This grant allowed Go Human to better target disadvantaged communities by awarding projects that prioritized the mobility needs of those most impacted by COVID-19. Then, in May 2021 SCAG released the Racial Equity Early Action Plan, which outlined strategies to advance racial equity through SCAG's policies, practices, and activities. The plan included language to encourage racial equity in local planning by providing more resources to CBOs, specifically citing Go Human's grant program as a key tool. Now called the Community Streets Grant Program, this grant explicitly supports projects that prioritize outcomes for low-income families and communities of color that are most harmed by traffic injuries and fatalities. SCAG has since written many of the Go Human strategies into its strategic plans to embed this approach into its regional vision.

## Program Operations + Resources

Go Human was initially funded by a \$2.3 million grant from the 2014 California Active Transportation Program (ATP). Subsequent years of programming have been funded by grants from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Future funding rounds will be supported by Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) funding. Due to the early success of the campaigns, Go Human has been able to build

a good relationship with OTS and leverage the grant to expand the program. With support from OTS, the program has implemented six rounds of its grant program for community-based organizations, distributing over \$1.25 million to CBOs across the region. The program has also received Clean Transportation Funding from the MSRC to support community projects.

Additionally, the program looks for other funding sources to supplement the OTS grant. To fund pop-up events and quick builds, for example, the program pulls from grants that SCAG receives for other initiatives, including the ATP grant and the federal Safe Streets and Roads for All grant. Events and ad campaigns have also been supported through collaborations with other state programs that have aligned initiatives, such as the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program. The program does not benefit from a dedicated/recurring funding source; SCAG must apply for funding from federal and state entities to operate the program.

Project proposals are evaluated using five selection criteria: impact, equity and justice, engagement, feasibility, and cost-effectiveness. SCAG encourages applicants to propose creative, strategic projects that center justice.

## Administration + Agreements

Community Streets Grant awardees are given three months to implement their projects. Selected applicants are given a deadline to provide two reports: an informal Mid-Project Update and a Final Report documenting activities performed, project outcomes, and documentation of final deliverables. The program provides a Final Report template to facilitate this requirement. Awards are made on a cost reimbursement basis: after awardees submit their invoice packages, Go Human evaluates actual allowable incurred costs and reimburses organizations on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. A list of expenses ineligible for funding is provided during the application process. Projects must be able to meet SCAG's insurance requirements, but organizations without insurance are considered on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, awardees are responsible for securing any necessary permits or permissions, which may be challenging given the short project period. Program staff perform regular check-in calls and provide support to CBOs.

## Community Engagement

Community engagement is at the core of every Go Human initiative. Through neighborhood-level strategies, the program centers the lives and experiences of the residents of Southern California and empowers local organizations to address their communities' needs. Many projects funded by the community grant program give residents the opportunity to inform street improvements in their neighborhoods. Every year, several awardees across the region organize community audits to identify infrastructure issues along bike and pedestrian routes that need to be addressed. Street charettes are also conducted to collect surveys on residents' opinions about proposed street projects. These audits and surveys are shared with local jurisdictions to inform policy decisions. Past community grant projects have also centered on educating the community through bike repair workshops, and creative strategies such as mural installations and film productions.

Bottom: Photo by Omar Ornelas



Source Photo by Omar Ornelas

## Program Evaluation

Data about each Community Streets Grant project, including the award amount and number of people reached, is collected through the final report submitted by each awardee at the end of the project. All reports are compiled into a Final Report, posted online for the public. Each year, program staff must reapply for funding and take it as an opportunity to reflect on the program's strategies and think about ways to improve.

## Equity + Belonging

Since its inception, this program has been intrinsically tied to advancing equity goals at both the regional and local levels. The Community Streets grant has funded hundreds of traffic safety projects in disadvantaged communities across Southern California and has served as an important tool in furthering SCAG's Racial Equity Early Action Plan. By supporting community-based organizations in implementing their own strategies, the program builds community leadership and enables residents to partake in the processes that make their neighborhoods better, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for creating safer streets.

## Key Challenges + Assets

The program's endurance can be attributed to its strong policy foundation, namely the 2014 resolution that implemented it and its unique role in SCAG's overall equity policy goals. The program is also grounded in SCAG's RTP/SCS, Connect SoCal.

The program's early success also allowed it to leverage its resources and further expand its operations. But despite its wide success, the program struggles with the lack of a dedicated funding stream. To continue the program's operations, SCAG must annually apply for grant funds, which are often intended to help implement new programs rather than sustain existing ones. Despite consistent support from the Office of Traffic Safety over the years, SCAG must continually work to secure funding year after year, and it is difficult for a program to plan long-term or innovate further when funding is not a certainty.



Source Photo by Omar Ornelas

## Awardee Perspective

Through case study videos, we learned about a number of projects funded through Go Human grant programs. These projects provide a flavor of what the program looks like on the ground and illustrates how SCAG is engaging in storytelling about project outcomes. In one series, SCAG produced a video project called Go Human Community Oral History, showcasing how Go Human CBO partners are trying to make a difference in street safety. Videos highlight several of the organizations that received grants, explaining their mission and sharing personal narratives of people around the community. SCAG produced Spanish language versions of each video, which connects to the program's aim of inclusivity.

One specific video focuses on the Bicycle Tree organization. Co-founder Paul Nagel speaks about the organization's programs and services, which aim to keep the community safer and encourage mobility justice. Bicycle Tree provides free help repairing bicycles, donates and sells bicycles for

cheap, and provides a safe space for trans and non-binary people. They also have an eight-week bicycle education program that teaches people how to fix bikes.

## Resources + Links

- The 2014 resolution that launched the program
- SCAG Racial Equity Early Action Plan
- <https://calcog.org/when-going-human-is-the-plan/>
- <https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/23-2821-gh-communityhub-guidelines-8.5x11-v1-jan-23-23.pdf?1680311149>
- [https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/1-18-24\\_application\\_webinar\\_slides.pdf?1706039739](https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/1-18-24_application_webinar_slides.pdf?1706039739)

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# ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

**Place:** National

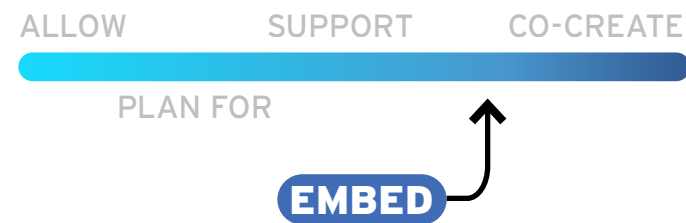
**Agency:** Bureau of Land Management

**Interviewees:**

- BLM Staff (Federal) - Greg Shine, National Interpretation Program Lead & National Artist-in-Residence Program Coordinator
- BLM Staff (Site) - Kathy Torrence, Black Rock Desert National Conservation Area
- Artists: Madeleine Grace Kelly; Lisa Rock; Courtney Sennish



Left: Lewis Williams paints Razorback Ridge, a prominent feature within the Black Rock Desert NCA | Right: Photo of artist Delbert Anderson event, provided by Greg Shine of BLM



## Program Overview + Purpose

The BLM's Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program facilitates about 15-20 residencies per year. The program provides an opportunity for artists working across a variety of disciplines to engage with their public lands through art and creative practice, with the goal of promoting a deeper understanding of, and dialogue about, the significance of natural, cultural, and historic resources on public lands managed by the BLM. The program is founded on a belief that artists have unique observational skills, which allow them to look closely at the way the world works, notice things others may have missed, challenge ideas, and experiment. The program encourages artists to use these observational skills to portray the

diverse cultural and natural resources on BLM lands, including geological features, plant and animal life, historic structures, artifacts, cultural landscapes, and more. Ultimately, the artists help translate the resources they experience into images, objects, and performances that bring people enjoyment and forge a deeper understanding of the nation's public lands. From this lens, the Artist in Residence program is strongly aligned with the BLM's broader efforts to engage a broader public and community audience.

## Program Development

The BLM's AIR program has been in operation for well over a decade, but it was enhanced significantly during a program overhaul in 2021. At that time, the program had suffered from a lack of staff capacity

due to a two year vacancy of a key staff position, as well as a change in institutional knowledge following a move of agency headquarters. In that context, an opportunity surfaced for the BLM to host a multi-site tour of Native American jazz trumpeter Delbert Anderson and his ensemble. This partnership served as a catalyst for the BLM to reinvigorate the program, with interviewee Greg Shines stepping into the role of Interpretation Lead to oversee the effort. Greg's efforts to rebuild the program centered on using the Jazz musician partnership as a case study and gathering advice from BLM's legal team, who helped identify the best structures and agreement mechanisms to use or adapt.

***BLM rangers took time to talk to me and show me around trails. They taught me a lot about the ecosystem and their insights helped me immerse myself in the landscape. Connections with the rangers helped me deepen my connections to the site and were a huge positive part of the experience.***

- Paraphrased takeaways from interview with Madeleine Grace Kelly, Artist

## Program Operations + Resources

At a national level, the BLM's AIR program falls within the Division of Recreation & Visitor Services. This division oversees the agency's Interpretation portfolio, of which the AIR Program is one part. There is no staff position dedicated exclusively to the AIR program - rather, it is part of a suite of programs and work streams that fall under the banner of Interpretation. Additionally, there is no funding line item for this program. The BLM's Interpretation Lead provides a basic framework and tools and works to make it easy and appealing for BLM field offices to engage with the program, but ultimately, all management, resource allocation, and interpretation happens at the local level. Each participating field office has the flexibility to create their AIR program based on their own needs and resources, so long as they remain within the broad program guidelines.

The AIR program structure centers on classifying Artists-in-Residence as Volunteers. This classification was identified as the most advantageous way to meet program goals while working within an existing legal framework that would allow the BLM to invite people to engage with and produce work on public lands. While the "Volunteer" designation has certain limits, it also has advantages - in the end, this classification has been a significant driver in shaping how the program operates.

Source Photo by Greg Shine (BLM)



## Administration + Agreements

The federal OF-301a Volunteer Service Agreement serves as the primary legal document memorializing the artist and agency relationship for the program. Though payment for time or services is not possible for Volunteers, BLM Volunteer Artists-in-Residence are eligible to receive reimbursement for expenses, as any official volunteer would be. Eligible reimbursement categories include travel, lodging, meals, and supplies/equipment - all of which are valuable to resident working artists. Many local sites hosting AIR programs provide such reimbursements, and the artists interviewed for this study named those payments as a significant benefit. Additionally, the BLM has taken care to stipulate that the volunteer designation does not preclude artists from leveraging funding from other sources to cover their time participating in the residency. Indeed, about 5-10% of artists are estimated to be leveraging other funding to underwrite their time or other costs incurred during their residency.

Even so, it is important to state that funding is simply not the central resource offered by the BLM residency program. Rather, the program is in a phase of piloting what non-financial resources it can offer that are of true value to diverse types of artists. One item that has been identified as highly valuable is access to knowledgeable BLM staff, such as archaeologists or naturalists who can provide special tours and

answer artist questions to shape their work. Access to archives of cultural or naturalist-based resources has also proven beneficial. In some cases, local sites are able to hold special camp sites for artists to use, though the residential component is not central nor required for a local site to host an AIR.

One challenge in using the volunteer framework was that the original form included a check box requiring volunteers to acknowledge that they understood that anything created on public lands would be part of the public domain. This clause was problematic for artists and creatives, and an exception was created so that Artists-in-Residence were not required to check this box on the form. Instead, the BLM has developed a separate agreement to allow for limited licensing of the artist's work for promotional and public outreach purposes only, with the artist retaining rights to the work.

While there was an interest in allowing artists to sell the work they create to recoup costs for their time (for ex: sell prints or pieces at a trailhead visitors center), there were significant administrative hurdles associated with allowing artists to sell on public lands. To mitigate this, some host sites partner with galleries in nearby towns or cities to display and celebrate the pieces created through the residency. These types of events are seen as beneficial in terms of community engagement, in that they bring the art and dialogues it sparks into the community where people are, rather than relying only on the foot traffic of BLM land visitors.

## Community Engagement

At a high level, the BLM's AIR program involves artists as interpretation partners, enhancing community understanding and appreciation of BLM lands through their work. Like many agencies engaged in land management and stewardship, the BLM has many touch points with communities that are negative: people report problems, come to BLM with complaints about things that need to be fixed, etc. The AIR program provides a chance for the public to engage with the BLM in a more nuanced and potentially deeper way, with interactions centering on the beauty and complex layers of stories and histories that mark our nation's public lands.

At the level of the implementing field offices, the AIR programs provide a vehicle for a diverse range of community engagement pathways. One example comes from the work of the artist interviewee Madeleine

Grace Kelly. Madeleine Kelly is an artist and educator currently living in New Orleans, and she participated in the BLM residency at the King Range National Conservation Area in California. When Madline began her residency, she learned about a Labyrinth that had been constructed at her site with an Indigenous Community leader, but hadn't since been used for any official programming or interpretation. Madeline partnered with the Indigenous Community leader and hosted a workshop for community members at the site. The Workshop opened with a talk about the history of Indigenous peoples at that site. It then led into a walking meditation, a facilitated dialogue in which people shared experiences of the land. It ended with a session of intuitive and observational watercolor painting, using waters collected from various culturally and historically significant sites. In this way, the residency provided a chance for new collaborations and for community members to come together in a meaningful session that connected them deeply to the site and its histories.

Additionally, the BLM residency is a case where staff engagement is an important consideration. Artists we talked to found the staff they worked with for site orientations and tours to be immensely helpful and the partnerships to be very fulfilling. Staff at most field sites are focused on big operational issues like oil and gas leases or preservation of endangered plants or species. Interpretation and community engagement is often not central to their job, and the AIR program provides a framework for a new way of working. Local sites don't typically have staff or line items for community engagement, so an important role for the national program lead is to help brainstorm how a local AIR program could be part of the response to problems people are focused on in their day to day jobs. For example, one site that features large sand dunes was running into an issue around people creating bonfires from wooden pallets, which then resulted in nails left behind in the dunes. Local schools had volunteered to collect the nails with roller magnets. The collected nails, the team realized, could become a raw material for an Artist-in-Residence with welding experience - any resulting piece could serve to raise awareness of the stewardship challenges the bonfires had created. From this lens, there would be a strong case to be made for use of the local sites operations and maintenance funds to support the AIR volunteer.

Finally, the AIR provides a framework for local sites to partner with arts or friends-of groups, who in some

cases can offer resources, housing, or other assets to artists in residence that the BLM cannot provide to a volunteer as a federal agency. These partnerships with CBOs are viewed as an important aspect of the BLM's community engagement efforts at a local level as well.

## Program Evaluation

The BLM views the Artist-in-Residence program as an ongoing prototype, with the national program lead collecting and sharing best practices for local sites to adopt as they see fit. At this phase of the program, there is not a formalized set of metrics nor a framework for formalized program evaluation across the country. A primary focus and goal nationally is simply increasing awareness of and participation in the program within each state and BLM district. From there, the focus is on documenting and tracking what local sites are doing and what they are finding to be successful, so that best practices can be shared and operationalized.

## Equity + Belonging

Many of the BLM's sites are rural and in the Western part of the United States. In these areas, a primary focus is on engaging non-english speaking communities and in elevating stories of indigenous communities. By engaging artists as interpretive partners, there is a major opportunity to broaden connections to public lands across diverse communities. As with any federal agency, the framing and goals of the program are closely tied to the national election cycle and can change quickly.

## Key Challenges + Assets

From the standpoint of expanding the reach of the program nationally, the BLM has found that for some local host sites, the concept of the program can be intimidating. Based on the program title of "Artist in Residence," staff worry they need to provide housing for people or find new staff time or resources to devote to it. There is often concern that local staff don't have the time or expertise to run a selection process. A big role of national program staff, then, is to debunk misconceptions, make a case for the program, and provide tools and templates to make hosting an artist in residence easy and appealing.

A second challenge is resources. Simply put, the national agency isn't offering local sites any funding to run the program. So, a case has to be made for why it is a good use of existing staff or financial resources. A big part of this is helping local sites conceptualize how the AIR could help advance other goals they have, from site stewardship to advancing equity or community engagement.

Once a local site has decided to host an AIR, there are sometimes "hidden costs" staff had not anticipated, which can become stumbling blocks. This can occur in the application phase, in cases where local sites who choose to do an open vs invite-only call receive many applications and struggle to review and evaluate them. Other sites have found it hard to devote staff to tours or engagement of the artist when urgent field needs come up, despite initial intentions to do so. A final example would be that some sites have agreed to help artists with a final offsite show to reach more members of the public, but have then been challenged by how much time and coordination this type of event production requires.

There is also the category of artist needs. In some cases, artists who intended to participate in a program at a local site have had to pull out due to unexpected circumstances, and this can lead to frustration and disappointment for staff and community groups involved in program operations. Also, many artists are interested in selling their work at visitor centers on BLM lands. As discussed previously, this was deemed prohibitively complex at this stage in the program and regulatory landscape. The BLM has explored responses including partnering the artist with vendors or community groups who already sell items in an official visitors center and have a sales agreement with BLM.

Finally, as the section on program development evidenced, this program has struggled with continuity after loss of institutional knowledge. This challenge points to the need to document best practices and protocols so staff and leadership changes do not heavily impact program operations.

## Artists Perspective

Three artists were interviewed for this study, and all of them had a positive experience participating in the BLM residency. In contrast to some of the other



Photo by Allysia Angus

residency programs reviewed for this report (such as the LA County Creative Strategist Program) this residency term was short: a few weeks maximum. This is likely due to the fact that participating artists had to travel from other parts of the county to their project site and could not therefore be embedded in their site for a long period of time. Artists interviewed did not view this short time as a negative - rather, in all cases, there was a high value placed on the dedicated time the residency provided to explore a creative channel relevant to their site.

All artists interviewed underscored the value of the stipend for travel and materials, and the access to important lands and knowledgeable staff. Artists valued connections to others who may have done work on the site, such as the Indigenous Community Leader mentioned above, who had created a Labyrinth on a BLM site. Finally, the artists experienced a specific call for proposals as a good thing - noting that specific goals and parameters provided a welcome container within which they could develop an implementable proposal that connected their work to the program themes and goals. The artists

also valued the exhibition events which brought their work to a larger public audience, though documentation and promotion of those events was not always consistent.

Challenges mentioned included the low level of financial compensation and slow payment process, as well as inconsistency of communication - some artists found local staff and CBO partners to be very responsive and easy to coordinate with, while in other cases communication was spotty and led to logistical challenges around travel or timeline expectations.

# CULTURAL STRATEGISTS-IN-GOVERNMENT

**Place:** Oakland, CA

**Agency:** Economic and Workforce Development Department - Cultural Affairs Division, City of Oakland

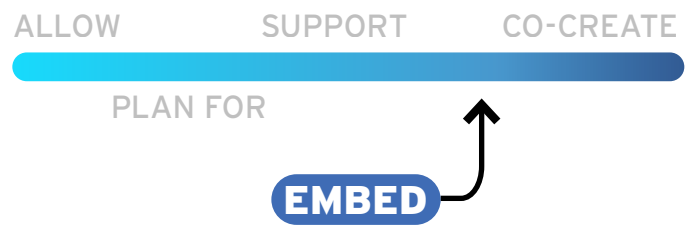
**Interviewees:**

- Vanessa Whang, Senior Program Consultant



@azhiablackgrl

Sample program photos, provided by Vanessa Whang



## Program Overview + Purpose

The City of Oakland’s Cultural Strategist-In-Government Program is designed to embed Cultural Strategists (CSIGs) in government departments to advance the city’s equity agenda. The program’s goal is to advance transformational change in City government through a cultural equity lens and build a more fair and just city for all Oaklanders. The Cultural Strategists come from communities most impacted by inequities and work collaboratively with staff to bring a new lens to shift the cultural conditions and practices of Oakland’s government. Cultural Strategists play a role different from typical artists-in-residence: they are not necessarily expected

to create an artistic product, rather, they serve as thought partners with the city, who use their skills and perspectives, including but not limited to art, to foster equity and belonging in the policy-making process.

## Program Development

The CSIG Program was one of two pilot initiatives launched as the first implementation steps of the city’s cultural development plan “Belonging in Oakland”, adopted by the City Council in 2018. The plan leveraged culture to advance the city’s equity mandate and included a specific recommendation to “Expand support to individual artists and cultural

practitioners through an opportunity to embed creative fellows into a variety of departments to foster cultural equity across the work of the City.” In accordance with the plan, the city’s Cultural Affairs Division (CAD) created and implemented the program in 2019 with city funding.

The program sought to highlight the role of culture in all city government policy-making, and the need for embedding diverse ways of seeing and being in order to “operationalize belonging” in government practices.

*“... my project was set up for success because my City partners gave me a lot of trust and transparency from the beginning.”*

- Cycle 2 Strategist

## Program Operations + Resources

In the pilot iteration of the program, six CSIGs were embedded into five city entities, and the funding was provided by a one-time appropriation by the Oakland City Council in the FY 2018-19 Budget. In the program's second phase, CAD partnered with The Oakland Fund for Public Innovation to secure a \$900,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This grant allowed the program to place cultural strategists in 11 different city offices and offer a more robust fee. For the third cycle of the program, launched in 2024, the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation secured a new grant of \$500,000 through the Bay Area Creative Corps funding program to place six Cultural Strategists in city offices.

Much of the start-up staffing and support for the project was provided by interviewee Vanessa Whang, who also helped the City develop the Belonging in Oakland Cultural Development Plan.

A key part of the program's design is that Cultural Strategists are people already rooted and trusted in their communities. Both Cultural Strategists and city staff continue to encourage this qualification.

## Administration + Agreements

The scope of each project is determined in collaboration with the cultural strategist and their partner city agency. It is emphasized that the Cultural Strategist role is NOT full-time. The reason for not offering full time employment was two-fold: 1) there were not adequate resources to do so, and 2)



Sample program photos, provided by Vanessa Whang

it became clear that a full-time commitment would require CSIGs to drop all their other commitments (ex: teaching roles, studio time, etc.) to be able to participate, and this did not provide a benefit since the program was not offering ongoing employment. Additionally, management of full-time strategist's depanded a level of capacity that City partners lacked at the outset of the program. Program leaders wanted to discourage city staff from viewing CSIGs as fee-for-service producers or commissioned artists. Rather, Cultural Strategists are thought partners who co-create their projects with city staff. This was meant to create a clear space for CSIGs to experiment and innovate with cultural strategies that help foster belonging and equity within city offices. Cultural Strategists are embedded in government offices for 12-18 months and are expected to work around 400 hours on their project, depending on the timeframe and scope. CSIGs and City Staff are required to attend periodic check-ins with the program consultant to discuss project progress.

Compensation varies each year depending on the resources available. In the pilot phase, CSIGs received \$10,000 in fees and a small stipend for expenses. During the second cycle, they received \$40,000 and up to \$8,000 for materials. In the current round with funding from the Bay Area Creative Corps, CSIGs will receive \$50,000

## Community Engagement

The cultural development plan from which the program originated included suggestions, such that Cultural Strategists "could assist in rethinking engagement protocols to reach communities whose voices are not typically heard in civic processes." Perhaps as a consequence, most Cultural Strategist projects centered around expanding civic engagement and building trust between residents and government. Many CSIGs play an important role in facilitating community engagement during city-hosted public gatherings. For example, one Cultural Strategist used a community-based inquiry process to uncover experiences of BIPOC vendors at Lake Merritt who felt that their voices weren't included in regular channels of participation. Through her work, she strengthened BIPOC vendor representation in decision-making processes around vending.



Sample program photos, provided by Vanessa Whang

## Program Evaluation

The program has no formal ongoing evaluation framework, but relies principally on qualitative documentation. An internal formative program evaluation was done on the pilot phase. There is one published research report on the program's second cycle that summarizes key themes across all projects and discusses program outcomes, challenges, and suggestions for future partnerships. The report also analyzes how the Cultural Strategists contributed to more equitable and culturally resonant government practices. Data for the report was collected through surveys and interviews with Cultural Strategists, government staff, and residents who participated in the program. The report includes a disclaimer stating that it is deliberately not a programmatic impact report and does not include impact data or recommendations for program improvements. As the program grows, the staff hopes to conduct impact evaluation.

## Equity + Belonging

The aim of the Cultural Strategists-In-Government Program is to create new ways of fulfilling Oakland's equity goals. The program focuses on the intentional engagement of under-served communities. All Cultural Strategists have deep roots and networks within historically marginalized communities in Oakland, and a number of their projects focus on the neighborhoods most impacted by inequity. By embedding Cultural Strategists in city offices, the program enhances the city's understanding of community perspectives and strives to promote greater equity in the government's practices toward communities.

## Key Challenges + Assets

Over the last two cycles, the program has benefited from financial management support from the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation. The pilot cycle of the program initially received funding through a very small city grant. Through this partnership, the program has successfully secured significantly larger private grants that have allowed it to expand. However, an issue articulated during our research interview was a need for more staffing to support this expansion. At the time, interviewee Vanessa Whang was the only program manager and worked in a part-time role, and she indicated these staffing resources were inadequate to offer the support needed to both CSIGs and participating city staffers, as individuals and as cohorts.

Whang suggested that a full-time person and a part-time assistant would be needed to manage the program at desired levels. Another challenge the program faces is simply that changing the culture of a government is a long-term project requiring sustained funding. The program is still in its relatively early stages, and consistency will be key to seeing widespread impact.

## Resources + Links

- Belonging in Oakland Cultural Development Plan
- City of Oakland Continues Innovative Cultural Strategists-in-Government Program for Third Cycle
- Oakland Fund for Public Innovation background
- City of Oakland CSIG program page
- CSIG Cycle 2 Report

# CREATIVE STRATEGIST PROGRAM

**Place:** Los Angeles County, CA

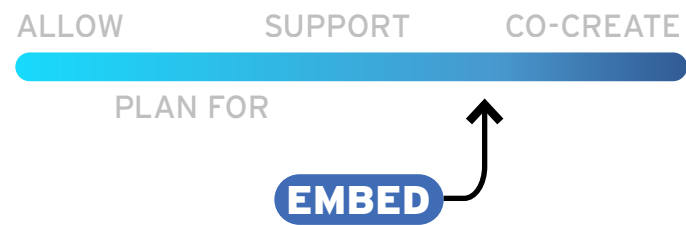
**Agency:** Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture

**Interviewees:**

- Kim Glann, Sr. Manager, Cross Sector Initiatives
- Clement Hanami, Japanese-American artist and program participant



Top: Photo by Monica Almeida | Right: Sandra de la Loza's Creating Connections, via lacountyarts Flickr



## Program Overview + Purpose

The LA County Creative Strategist Program is designed to bring artists and other creative professionals into County Departments to “work alongside staff, project partners, and community stakeholders in a collaborative process to develop, strategize, promote, and implement artist-driven solutions to complex social challenges.” Within the confines of a particular host agency, the collaboration with a Creative Strategist is intended to build on and help implement the host department’s equity work. The County decided to use the term “Creative Strategist” (vs “Artist”) because this term creates a broader and more inclusive definition of who can participate in the program, including culture bearers and creatives from a wide range of backgrounds.

## Program Development

The Creative Strategist Program was developed on a strong policy foundation, which has provided an implementation mandate and bedrock of resources. The program initially grew out of the LA County Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII). The CEII report included the following as a specific recommendation:

“Place artists, arts administrators or other creative workers who are representative of diverse constituencies in LA County departments in paid positions as creative strategists to develop innovative solutions to social challenges.”

In June 2017, thanks to elected official leadership, the LA County Board of Supervisors approved a motion

to implement this very specific CEII recommendation. The motion included language regarding initial financial resources to be allocated to the program, beginning with funding for two creative strategists in the 2017–2018 fiscal year and growing incrementally over time. The motion further mandated that staff report back in 30 days regarding which departments were most suitable to host Creative Strategies and also instructed the Executive Director of the County Arts Commission to develop criteria for measurement of success of this program. This motion set the program in motion.

Then, in June 2020, the Countywide Cultural Policy was passed. This policy provided an additional mandate for the program to continue and grow as part of the overall commitment of Los Angeles

*“...most of the creative strategists spent a significant amount of time early in the residency expanding the view of their how departments form thinking about art products to thinking about art as a process that could help them achieve their mission.”*

- LA County Department of Arts and Culture

County and its Departments to ensure that every resident of the County has meaningful access to arts and culture. Importantly, the policy acknowledged that this commitment extended to County staff, who directly benefit from the opportunity to collaborate with Creative Strategists in their workplace.

Finally, in July 2020, the County's Board of Supervisors passed a motion that created the County's Anti-Racism, Diversity, & Inclusion Initiative. This motion articulated a clear anti-racist agenda which the Creative Strategist program could be a tool to advance.

Taking stock of these policy and planning milestones, the Creative Strategist Program clearly benefits from many layers of policy and elected official support. The key has been articulating the value that the program can have as a tool to implement cross organizational policy goals. For specific examples of key policy language, please see the Appendix.

## Program Operations + Resources

As mentioned, the 2017 Board of Supervisors motion that catalyzed the program included specific funding targets to for the first three years: \$235,000 to be identified during the FY 2017-18 to be allocated to facilitate two paid Creative Strategist positions; ongoing funding for three placements in the FY 2018-19; and funding for four placements in the FY 2019-20. A small dedication for this program is now included as a line item in the County budget, and Departments also bring resources to the table to leverage the program as a way to implement their own equity policy goals. Current staffing for the program consists of one person who provides overall program management at a 50% FTE commitment balanced with other duties, and one part time staff person in a support role.

The approach to selection for Creative Strategists has changed over time. Evaluation reports for the program have included recommendations such as: prioritizing those with experience with social practice and civic practice art and searching more intentionally for artists who already have at least some expertise in the work of the departments where they will be placed.

## Administration + Agreements

The scope and agreement with Creative Strategists has evolved based on lessons learned and, most recently, the need to comply with CA Assembly Bill 5, which regulates when and how independent contractors must be reclassified as employees. The goal was NOT to make Creative Strategists full time government employees. This could, in theory, reduce the level to which they are free to propose or advocate for creative approaches. Additionally, the County acknowledged that full time employment within the residency term was not appealing to many independent creative professionals because they often balance limited-term residencies with important ongoing roles in teaching, robust studio practices, etc. Therefore, Creative Strategists are viewed as consultants to the County and engaged at about a half-time commitment. In this arrangement, the Creative Strategist comes and goes as they please. They are compensated with \$50,000 for their time, and they have a budget of up to \$25,000 for materials. At the start of each residency, the Creative Strategist crafts a scope document with their host agency to provide focus to their efforts.

## Community Engagement

The community engagement process varies greatly based on the project scope. However, in almost all cases, the Creative Strategist's project is built on deep and intentional community work. One example comes from the project of the artist interviewed for this case study, Clement Hanami. Clement Hanami was the Creative Strategist in residence with the Department of Public Health's PLACE (Policies for Livable Active Communities and Environments) Division and worked on the Vision Zero Initiative.

Hanami collaborated with staff and community stakeholders to raise awareness of traffic safety issues. His work included a series of workshops on high collision corridors with seniors and youth and their families. From these workshops he developed temporary and permanent artworks including a bike rack, billboards, and bus shelter posters. The art pieces gave voice to the perspectives of community members impacted by unsafe streets and culminated with a community artwork viewing at a local library.



Image via [www.lacountyarts.org](http://www.lacountyarts.org)

## Program Evaluation

The 2017 motion that launched the Creative Strategist program called for an initial evaluation framework to be developed, and this framework has been improved over time. After a few initial years, a Fellow placed at the County from the ACLS (American Council of Learned Societies) decided to take on evaluation of this program as a special project. The Fellow developed a framework for analysis that staff could carry forward and add to each year. Through this framework, the County has produced detailed reports to share program performance outcomes and recommendations for improvement. The Fellow's work also resulted in a Theory of Change graphic, which program staff cited as a key visual to help host agencies and partners define what the program is and is not meant to do, which helps them write stronger scope agreements. Over time, the evaluation reports have become a tool to market the program to host agencies and elected officials who, seeing the outcomes, now find resources to host additional Creative Strategists to help them navigate specific projects or challenges.

## Equity + Belonging

As stated previously, this program has been intricately connected to equity policy goals at both the countywide and host agency level. Most notably, the program was implemented as a recommendation of the CEII and has been an important tool in advancing the County's Anti-Racism, Diversity, & Inclusion Initiative. By placing Creative Strategists

within host Departments, the program increases staff connection to the arts and can play a key role in supporting systems change, and strengthening relationships between government and communities.

## Key Challenges + Assets

Without a doubt, this program benefits from a strong policy and resource foundation, skilled staff, and consistent support from elected officials. Even with these assets, the evaluation reports for the program point to challenges and growing pains over time.

One challenge area comes around expectations: the original program vision included bold goals around transformational change. However, creating transformational change in a huge government organization within 1 year is not easy, especially for a Creative Strategist entering a bureaucracy for potentially the first time. After the first few years, it became clear that a heavy investment was needed upstream to set everyone up for success. Key preparations for program staff included meeting with host agencies to clearly define their goals; devoting thoughtful time to "matchmaking" between agencies and Creative Strategist applicants; and finally, helping both parties agree on a focused and time bound project. During the start-up of any particular placement, much support was needed for both parties to hone the scope, create a shared vision, and bridge gaps in knowledge and working culture. To facilitate this, program staff developed a scoping process that included a timeline. The timeline helps create benchmarks for when Creative Strategists should move from researching and trying to understand their host department (which could easily take the entire year!) to create their project.

Another key challenge area articulated by staff is continuity: after the Cultural Strategist placement ends, it is up to host agencies to carry process changes or other outcomes of the collaboration forward, and host agency ability to do this is varied. Follow-through and scaling up of the best practices were identified by staff as the area they most wanted to see additional resources applied.

## Artist Perspective

When interviewed, artist Clement Hanami said he was drawn to the program because of the opportunity it provided for him to have a greater



Image Source: cover of 12/21 Creative Strategist Program Evaluation Report

positive impact on society through his artwork. Additionally, the challenge of being an embedded creative person in a very large, very bureaucratic organization was appealing. Since his work typically centers on authentic first person voices, the equity alignment with the program was a natural fit. Clement participated in an early year of the project and his experience echoes a lesson learned in the Evaluation reports around the need to carefully scope a project at the outset. An initial challenge Clement recalled running into at the outset was just the sheer scale of the agency and how difficult it was to understand what he and the host agency really had power/ jurisdiction over. Additionally, he found the ways of implementing large scale street safety projects – driven largely by grants or available funding sources – moved at a totally different scale than intimate community dialogue, where locally generated ideas for street improvements might emerge. At first, it was hard to even know how to work, and lacking clear direction was frustrating. Clement’s perspective was that once the project finally found focus on something tangible within the given timeframe, the experience was interesting and valuable.

## Resources and Links

- <https://www.lacountyarts.org/about/cultural-equity-inclusion-initiative/cultural-equity-inclusion-initiative>
- <https://www.lacountyarts.org/CEIICulturalPolicy>
- [https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/cultural\\_policy\\_final.pdf](https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/cultural_policy_final.pdf)
- <https://www.lacountyarts.org/creative-strategist-program-evaluation>

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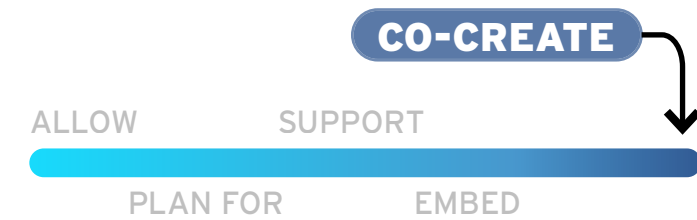
# PARKS AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

**Place:** Twin Cities metropolitan region, MN

**Agency:** The Metropolitan Council

**Interviewees:**

- Amanda Lovelee, Parks Ambassador at the Metropolitan Council
- Witt Siasoco, Artist



Top/Right: Images of Tree Hugger project for Met Council by Witt Siasoco in collaboration with Amanda Lovelee. Left image by Mae Hanzlik, Smart Growth America; Right image by Witt Siasoco - <https://wittsiasoco.com/Tree-Hugger>



*"A recommendation is to focus on meaningful engagement. The art should be designed in collaboration between the artists and the residents."*

- Amanda Lovelee

## Program Overview + Purpose

The Metropolitan Council's Parks Ambassador Program's stated goal is to ensure that all residents know about and feel welcome and comfortable using the region's world-class parks and trails system. To do this, the Met Council created a dedicated position for a Parks Ambassador: a senior-level outreach coordinator who would focus on advancing equity and access in regional parks and trails. The role required a diverse range of efforts - from leading projects, building relationships, facilitating conversations, hosting engagement activities and shaping policy - all in the name of increasing awareness and a sense of belonging in regional parks and trails.

## Program Development

The Parks Ambassador Program was born out of the effort to create a long-range plan for the Twin Cities region, which Met Council is required to do every 10 years under state law. The 2040 plan, named Thrive MSP 2040, set a long-range policy foundation through four building blocks: a Transportation Policy Plan; a Water Resources Policy Plan; a Housing Policy Plan; and finally, a Regional Parks Policy Plan. The process of developing that fourth component, the Regional Parks Policy Plan, is where the idea of creating the Parks Ambassador Program was born. During plan development, Met Council received feedback that a key barrier to regional park use was lack of awareness. The regional Parks Ambassador Program is a direct effort to address this issue.

## Program Operations + Resources

Recognizing the role that art can play in expanding access and belonging, the Met Council chose to hire a visual artist with a specific skill set to fill the Parks Ambassador position. Still in the role today after over six years, Amanda Lovelee is an artist who has participated extensively in government and civic engagement projects, including serving as the City Artist for the City of Saint Paul. When interviewed for this study, Amanda called out that the Parks Ambassador position was not advertised as a position for an artist. Rather, the job posting indicated a desire for a planning/architecture background as desirable qualifications. Why did Amanda apply,

then? In addition to her interest in the scope of the role, there was another factor. Simply put, in her own words: health insurance. She was at a point in her life where a steady paycheck and benefits was desirable. When she asked the Met Council if they were really ready to have an artist in this equity and engagement role, she recalls being told: "Isn't it clear that what we've been doing isn't working?" Thus, a unique example of having an artist embedded in a regional government equity program was born.

In her role as Parks Ambassador today, Amanda leads collaborative projects that meet the broad goal of ensuring that all residents know about and feel welcome and comfortable using the region's world-class parks and trails system. Given her artistic background, is it no surprise that some of the

significant outcomes have involved deep partnerships between artists, communities, and partner agencies. Examples include:

**Nature Connector:** Undertaken in 2019, this partnership centered on a collaboration with area-transit agency Metro Transit to develop artistic bus wraps, dubbed Nature Connectors. The wrap design featured a painting by Minneapolis-based muralist Greta McLain. The wraps adorned buses that traveled on routes that lead to some of the region's most popular regional parks to highlight the connection between transit and parks. Temporary sidewalk clings were also deployed to mark the paths between each park and select bus stops.

**Art Shanty:** During the Winter of 2020, the Ambassador Program deployed an art shanty, where visitors wrote love letters to their favorite regional park/s. For every five love letters written, Met Council planted a tree, in partnership with local nonprofit Mississippi Park Connection. Visitors wrote 4,600 love letters, and the Met Council planted 830 trees.

Photo by Free Truth Media



**Tree Hugs:** During the Pandemic, the Ambassador Program deployed “tree hug” signs on trees in select parks. The signs were designed by local artist Witt Siasoco and featured mental health and safety messages, as well as content to spark a bit of joy and encourage park visitors.

For nearly all projects, the Parks Ambassador must work closely through partnerships with the 10 regional park implementing agencies that fall within the Met Council's region. For example, the Tree Hug signs represented a partnership between the Met Council and the agencies that operate the regional parks where the signs appeared.

For many projects, community organizations focused on access to the outdoors for black, indigenous and people of color populations are major partners, more so than arts and culture organizations.

Funding for individual projects has varied greatly, depending on the scope and focus. In most cases, the role of the Parks Ambassador is to help identify funding that could be applied to equity and access work, usually leveraging funds through communications, public art, programming, or planning line items.

## Administration + Agreements

Each project requires a unique partnership between the artist, Met Council and implementing agency. The format and details of the contracting and agreement structure are tailored to each unique project with consideration for the artist's scope and role as well as the permit requirements of the host public space agency.

For all projects, a high value is placed on celebrating and recognizing the artists contribution and role. For example, care is taken to stipulate how public credit will be provided and what types of permissions for use of images by agencies are allowed.

## Community Engagement

The Parks Ambassador Program itself is a direct response to community feedback about the need to increase awareness of and access to the region's parks. As such, Met Council has included references to the program in documents reporting back to stakeholders regarding progress on the commitments named in the equity outcome section of Thrive MSP 2040. For example, a 2022 memo identified this program as a specific, ongoing effort to meet the planning and policy goal of “strengthening equitable

usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as across race, ethnicity, income, and ability.”

Individual projects are specifically developed with local stakeholders and CBOs. Engagement tactics include, but are not limited to facilitated dialogues, workshops, focus groups, and site-specific engagement activities in the field.

## Program Evaluation

At a high level, the existence of the program itself is seen as an example of incremental implementation of Thrive MPS 2040 plan goals. At the time of this report, no published resources existed evaluating program-specific outcomes, and this item was not able to be covered during our interview. It is possible that very program-specific evaluation is not publicly available because the Parks Ambassador Program takes so many shapes - from spearheading unique art and community engagement projects to slowly building relationships and helping shape policy. Reporting out on measurable outcomes across so many channels may be difficult. Further, while the program is viewed as an effort to implement a specific MPS 2040 Goal - that of “strengthening equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as across race, ethnicity, income, and ability” - it is admittedly one of many efforts to advance a broad goal. The absence of public-facing evaluation content related to this program does not appear to impact its success internally, as public postings can be found for additional staff positions supporting Lovelee as the Parks Ambassador. The landscape of program evaluation for the Met Council Parks Ambassador offers a contrast to the LA County case study, which has involved a very robust program evaluation effort completed by a research fellow. The contrast can be seen to illustrate that a range of evaluation approaches are acceptable, and extremely specific program-focused evaluation may be difficult to achieve in the first few years of a program's lifespan, depending on resources.

## Equity + Belonging

The Parks Ambassador Program focuses very intentionally on engaging underrepresented communities. The aim is to build authentic relationships and trust to encourage use of the regional parks system and build support for its future. This is done on



Image: Nature Connector bus wrap designed by Greta McLain (GoodSpace Murals), sourced via <https://metrocouncil.org/>

a project by project basis with the local regional partner, selected artists, and community groups.

Across all projects, this program uniquely brings multiple artists into the effort to implement the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, both in the hiring of Lovelee for the full time position, and also through project-specific artist engagements. One key role of the Parks Ambassador is to mitigate barriers that typically make it hard or unappealing for artists to engage with public agencies. For example, rather than bringing artists in later in the process to “decorate” something already conceptualized, the projects undertaken through this program engage artists as thought partners from outset. Additionally, the Parks Ambassador works to be an “inside agent” who can be the point of contact for the artist and also shield them from bureaucratic permitting and procurement processes that might otherwise make working with governments prohibitively time consuming or frustrating.

## Key Challenges + Assets

A major goal of the program is building trust and, simply put, building trust takes time! One challenge of the program is that it was impossible to see results right away. As time and trust accumulate, more resources have been devoted to Parks Ambassador efforts, but it must be acknowledged that patience with program outcomes and growth is required, even when working with established artists like Amanda, who already had many contacts in the region in arts and equity spaces.



Tree Hugger project for Met Council by Witt Siasoco in collaboration with Amanda Lovelee. Image by Witt Siasoco – <https://wittsiasoco.com/Tree-Hugger>

## Artist Perspective

We interviewed two artists who had participated in the NYC DOT Art program for this report.

Alvarez said she admires the program’s dedication to expanding equity through art. Her work centers around using art to improve public spaces and she typically works with community-based programs, so partnering with NYC DOT Art was both a natural fit and huge opportunity for her. To Alvarez, one successful aspect of the program was the open call format. She prefers this approach to other types of applications because it provides a bigger opportunity for artists to send in their designs, and makes public art a more democratic process by engaging the community. She recommended use of the platform Submittable and recommended a two step process: step one would be a simple application of form materials, such as a CV, recommendation letter, and portfolio; step two would be offered to a shortlist of applicants and require submission of a site specific fee with some financial compensation. New York’s transit agency MTA operates open calls in this manner and offers about \$1,000 compensation for the phase two sketch.

## Resources and Links

- Program Page: <https://metro council.org/Parks/About/Parks-Ambassador-Program.aspx>

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# ATLANTA BELTLINE PUBLIC ARTS PROGRAM

**Place:** Atlanta, GA

**Agency:** Atlanta Beltline, Inc. (City of Atlanta's implementation agency); and Atlanta BeltLine Partnership (nonprofit organization)

**Interviewees:**

- Atlanta BeltLine staff were unavailable for interview - online resources were consulted.
- We interviewed Miranda Kyle, Former Chief Curator, Arts & Culture Program Manager, ABI
- We were also able to interview past residency participant Nedra Deadwyler, Scholar in Residence 2020



**Program Overview + Purpose**

Since its inception in 2010, the Art on the BeltLine program has grown into a multi-faceted public arts and residence program. The purpose of the program is to make sure the BeltLine trail system enriches and reflects the communities it serves. The program is a joint effort between the Atlanta BeltLine Partnerships (ABP) and Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. (ABI). ABP is the nonprofit organization that helps keep the Atlanta BeltLine vision on track by enabling



Top: aerial dance performance, image via instagram.com/atlantabeltline | Right: photo by Nicole Gustin, BiteLines Atlanta Food Tours.

fundraising; engaging the public through tours, programs, and events; and helping area residents connect to affordable housing and other benefits. ABI's roles include managing land acquisition, design, and construction for infrastructure, engaging community members, supporting affordable housing and small business development, enabling arts and culture programming, and securing public funding. Together, the two BeltLine partners view the art program as a way to create a legacy of inclusion by (1) providing opportunities for artists from historically underrepresented communities, and (2) expanding community access to arts and culture. Indeed, a key tenant of the program is "bringing the gallery and the museum to the people" - art pieces and programs along the trail are always free and accessible to all.



*"You need to engage in succession planning and train multiple staff. The best practice is to support staff and have people involved so they can step in if needed. Too often you wind up with one curator or administrator and if they leave, you lose all institutional knowledge and community relationships."*

- Miranda Kyle, former Chief Curator, Arts & Culture Program Manager, ABI

Spanning 13 miles of permanent of unpaved trails, Art on the BeltLine is now considered to be the largest temporary public art exhibit and linear gallery in the United States. Exhibition components are organized according to a series of categories:

BELTLINE WALLS invites Muralists from Atlanta and beyond to paint select locations around the trail corridor.

BELTLINE FLOW is the performance component of the exhibition, which comprises pop-up style events, immersive interactions, and activations.

BELTLINE SPACES is the sculpture element of the exhibition, featuring works that are on display for two years.

The CONTINUING COLLECTION features works of

art that carry over beyond the temporary exhibition period to have a longer stay. Typically, these pieces include murals and sculptures that have a lifespan that can survive an outdoor environment.

In addition to these temporary pieces, the public art program includes the FOUNDATIONAL COLLECTION. This collection consists of permanent and rotating sculptures from philanthropic funding sources that remain on site year-round. These pieces are often monumental in size, and are curated to reflect the character and history of the Atlanta Beltline as a former railroad corridor.

As a complement to the public art program, Atlanta Beltline also has a multi-track residence program:

SCHOLARS-IN-RESIDENCE focus on creating a

body of relevant research work. Deliverables typically include a peer-reviewed academic white paper and a public presentation of findings. Scholars' scopes focus on analysis of topics focused around equity, access, and inclusion in connection with ABI's mission.

CURATORS-IN-RESIDENCE support the Art on the Atlanta BeltLine annual temporary art exhibition. In a given year, the Curator-in-Residence works with the Beltline's Arts & Culture, Community Engagement, and Communications teams to engage and publicize the work scheduled for exhibition on the trail.

ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE develop a portfolio of work, culminating in a solo exhibition along the Atlanta BeltLine corridor. The Atlanta Beltline then retains the rights to at least one piece for its long-term foundational collection.

Importantly, the BeltLine's arts program has taken a careful approach in celebration of unsanctioned art spaces that already existed along the trail corridor. Krog Street Tunnel is one example. Built in 1913, the tunnel links several major neighborhoods and is part of the Eastside Trail of the BeltLine for bicyclists and pedestrians to cross Hulsey Yard. Renowned for its colorful street art, murals, tags, and stickers, Krog Street Tunnel is legendary as a hub for visual artistic expression in Atlanta. Rather than try to change or control this already-existing art space in the trail corridor, the BeltLine has celebrated it and aims to protect its role as a communal space.

## Program Development

The Art on the Atlanta BeltLine program began almost 15 years ago as a way to encourage people to explore the Atlanta BeltLine trail in an emerging and interim state – after rails were removed, but before concrete was poured. Public art was identified as the best way to spark curiosity and invite people to discover what was, at the time, a series of unpaved trails. The vision was to create enough density of art that people would have the experience of the public art pieces as visual beacons encouraging them to move along the trail: as they'd get close to one piece, they'd see another a little further down the trail and travel to it, then see another, and so on. The art trail provided a positive experience and left people wanting to come back again for leisure, exercise, or even a commute. The art program also created a framework for ABI to support arts and culture in the region as the trail developed.

## Program Operations + Resources

The Art on the Atlanta BeltLine program is but one part of the overall Atlanta BeltLine project. This project is a major undertaking which seeks to sustainably redevelop the railroad corridor that formerly encircled the city of Atlanta. When complete, the project will ultimately connect 45 of Atlanta's neighborhoods via a 22-mile loop with multi-use trails, a modern streetcar, housing, and parks. A project of the scope and scale of the Atlanta BeltLine of course requires numerous and diverse sources of funding, which include:

- funds raised through the Atlanta BeltLine Tax Allocation District (TAD), which comprises the majority of funding for the Atlanta BeltLine according to annual report financials
- funding from the City of Atlanta
- private investment
- philanthropic contributions
- grants from county, regional, state and federal sources
- public private partnerships

Funding for the public art program specifically has also included many sources, indicating that the program benefits from a robust and well-resourced fundraising effort. Examples of funding sources that are publicly listed for the art program include:

- Major/repeat grants from the City of Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs from the Municipal Support for the Arts program;



Dance performance by Nadya Zeitlin, beltline.org



Scholar in residency Nedra Deadwyler hosted activations where she explained to the public her process and shared methods for preserving family and community history. Photo: The Sintoses. via <https://beltline.org/blog>

- Funding from other partner agencies including Georgia Council for the Arts, Fulton County, and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) via Grants for Arts; and
- Sponsorships from major institutions and corporations, ranging from a local hospital to Delta Airlines.

In July 2024, ABI announced the launch of a new pilot accelerator program for artists. Dubbed BeltLine Business Ventures: Artist Edition, the 9-week pilot program aims to equip creative professionals with the skills needed to land sculptural public art projects around the world and grow as entrepreneurs and artists. The program is undertaken through a partnership with TILA studios, an agency dedicated to creating and advancing career pathways for black women artists.

From a staffing standpoint, the program has been led by a dedicated Arts and Culture Program Manager. This staff person is supported by other staff across the ABP and ABI organization in key areas, such as fundraising and executive leadership. At key junctures such as art/artist selection, the program also engages a panel of art experts, the Beltline Public Art Advisory Council, and executive team members.

## Administration and Agreements

Most art on the Atlanta BeltLine is temporary. The temporary nature of the art is embraced as part of the nature and beauty of public art. Specific agreements and administrative processes vary by program element, with examples described below.

The residence program is designed to offer artists and scholars access to the unique opportunity of working in the public realm. Doing so pushes residence participants to confront challenges including the infrastructure context, the inherent responsibilities to multiple audiences, the need for community placekeeping, and the many components of the civic system including permitting, ordinances, and governmental offices. Resident creatives receive the following benefits:

- Workspace to use at will;
- \$20,000 stipend for a 12-month residency term;
- Access to archives and other relevant information; and
- Key people connections, including time with staff on the Atlanta BeltLine team, as well as civic and community leaders.

For artists in residence who create a physical object, Atlanta Beltline retains the rights to at least one piece for its long-term foundational collection.

## Community Engagement

The development of the art exhibitions themselves is viewed as a critical element of community engagement, because intentional efforts are made to engage artists and CBO partners who represent Atlanta's diverse communities.

Major events along the BeltLine Trail – including BeltLine After Dark and the annual Lantern Parade – also serve to engage huge numbers of people in celebrating and using the trail together.

Additionally, the Arts and Culture team at Atlanta BeltLine engages neighbors in smaller-scale events to provide opportunities for creative expression of their own through family paint days and other neighborhood-based creative partnerships.

## Program Evaluation

With inclusivity as its driving force, one of the main focuses of evaluation efforts is to track how the program is enriching and reflecting the diverse communities the BeltLine serves. As such, one key metric is simply the type and volume of partnerships. For example, the program considers a recent highlight to be partnerships with the National Black Arts Festival and the Asian American Advocacy Fund, and new initiatives like the Indigenous Walls Project.

Another key metric is the tracking of types of art and artists selected for exhibition. For example, Art on the Atlanta BeltLine is unique in the number of women artists – more than 75% – who were selected for the 2023–24 season. The 2023 season featured murals and sculptures with a focus on art and artists that were reflective of Atlanta’s rich historical past. Examples included installations like Jeff Edwards’s 100-foot-long *Done Been Here*, a piece that celebrates the Cherokee language.

Metrics for the art program are summarized at a high level in the publicly available Annual Report produced for the overall Atlanta BeltLine project.

Bottom: Photo By John Becker



## Equity + Belonging

Equity goals are embedded in the overarching mission of the Atlanta BeltLine project, which is articulated as: “building a more equitable and inclusive Atlanta and engaging partners by delivering transformative public infrastructure that enhances mobility, fosters culture, and improves connections to economic opportunity.”

Within the context of this mission statement, the Atlanta BeltLine focuses on equity in all programmatic elements, including its art program. Specifically, the Art on the BeltLine program is committed to: democratizing access to art through free exhibitions and events; providing a platform for artists from under-represented communities; and creating good arts and culture jobs, including paying artists a living wage.

From a curatorial perspective, the program seeks to ensure that the art pieces and programming deployed on the BeltLine corridor reflect the culture and history of Atlanta’s diverse neighborhoods and elevate the stories of communities that have historically been marginalized.

Finally, there is a strong focus on geographic equity: art installations and programs are presented on corridors throughout the city, including established and interim trail segments.

As art and other attractions have drawn more people to the BeltLine, it has unlocked opportunities for even more robust economic development initiatives. Launched in 2022, the BeltLine MarketPlace program is a small business incubator program that offers affordable commercial spaces directly on the Atlanta BeltLine corridor. Businesses operate out of customized containers and business services, and they gain access to more than 2 million people who visit the trail each year.

## Key Challenges + Assets

There are many features that have contributed to the success and growth of the Art on the BeltLine program, and the program’s success admittedly makes it an almost intimidating case study to point to! Taking stock of this, it is clear that the program has benefitted from a number of foundational assets, with the following standing out as key highlights:

- An overarching mission that provides a mandate to advance equity



Mural by Drew Borders, *The Fates*

- A cross-organizational recognition in the power of art as a primary tool to advance equity goals
- A layered organizational structure that includes the flexibility of an independent non-profit arm
- A dedicated funding stream for project development, created through the TAD
  - A TAD is a redevelopment tool that uses the increased property taxes generated by new development in a designated redevelopment area as a financing tool.
- Staff dedicated to communications and fundraising
- A vibrant local art scene
- A willingness to get started on public art early, which contributed to the creation of momentum and notoriety of the trail as an art space over time

For a program at this scale of success, it stands to reason that one challenge may be continuing to center the goals of supporting underrepresented artists as the trail’s notoriety as a public art site continues. For example, as annual calls get more and more competitive, it would be interesting to understand how the Beltline organization is engaging early-stage and emerging artists, scholars, and curators.

## Artists Perspectives

Participants interviewed acknowledged the immense opportunity that their residency with the BeltLine provided and were grateful for the opportunity, connection, and exposure, as well as technical assistance and stipend.

Areas where the program could potentially grow included considering scholar or residence durations of more than one year, depending on project complexity. For example, projects involving scholarship and deep community engagement were difficult to complete in one year, when you account for the time needed to build relationships and trust and produce a work product worthy of publication in a peer-reviewed journal or similar. An additional reflection was that it could be valuable to have regular convenings of program participants and alumni, so that the benefits of cohort-type connections could span years as the program continues to grow.

## Resources and Links

- <https://beltline.org/art/>
- <https://beltline.org/blog/now-available-atlanta-beltline-inc-s-2024-annual-report/>

**KEY**

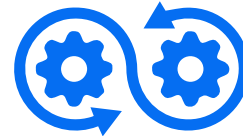
**TAKEN AWAYS**

# KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM PROGRAMS



## OVERVIEW + PURPOSE

- Range of program types: unofficial art; residence program, public art program, incubator programs (sometimes multiple)
- Common goals are to:
  - Advance equity
  - Improve government approaches
  - Expand access to arts and culture
  - Improve or deepen community engagement
  - Catalyze new partnerships
  - Support artists and CBOs



## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- In 6 of the 9 case studies reviewed, the program studied was the outgrowth of a planning or policy exercise that provided a mandate (or at least, a cover)
- Catalyst policies and plans typically center on equity, access to arts, culture and open space
- Champions are critical: staff-level, executive leadership level, elected officials, and community groups



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Typically project- and site-specific
- Outreach is often embedded into art via events and programs, performances, etc.



## PROGRAM OPERATIONS + RESOURCES

- Common Funding Sources
  - Grants
  - Pulling from complementary programs and line items
  - Operating funds / general funds via key line items
- Staffing Approaches vary
  - Dedicated staffing and/or staff who oversee program as part of larger portfolio
  - Committees/Boards help with
    - Art/Artist/Grantee selection
    - Outreach and vetting

# KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM PROGRAMS CONT.



## ADMINISTRATION + AGREEMENTS

- Project durations: a few weeks, a few months, a year
  - There's no "right" amount of time - all approaches have benefits
  - It is critical, however, to right-size expectations and resources to the time available
- Intellectual Property
  - Artists' work is typically retained as theirs (unless one is gifted to program, as seen in ATL)
  - Some rights typically allowed for agency to use to reproduce and publicize program
- Permitting/Stewardship
  - Across all programs, the goal is: how can we take this off the artist or CBO?
  - Maintenance of physical objects can be hard for artists or CBOs to take on. Thinking carefully about how long an item should really be out there is key. Are there maintenance partners who can help?



## PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Wide range of approaches, depending on resources
- Sometimes, existence of a program itself is a metric for implementation of a larger plan or policy
- Common baseline: tracking program outcomes/scale of partnerships

### Pro tips:

- Use final reports from grantees to roll up into program-wide Annual Report or use open source platforms for key data, in lieu of Annual Reports



## EQUITY + BELONGING

- Increasing access to art/democratizing art
- Deepening community engagement
- Providing direct financial resources to CBOs, artists, underrepresented groups
- Elevating stories of underrepresented groups
- Reflecting and celebrating hyper-local culture
- Geographic equity, ensuring benefits are presented to many communities
- Making communities and government more legible to each other
- Interrogating public policies and practices through a cultural equity lens



## COMMON CHALLENGES + HIGH IMPACT ASSETS

### High Impact Assets

- Jurisdictional control
- Strong and layered policy foundation
- Dedicated/reliable funding
- Support across all sectors of the organization: leadership, program and implementation staff
- Support of elected officials
- Vibrant local art scene

### Common Challenges

- Finding common language across divergent ways of working between artists and government agencies
- Securing ongoing/reliable funding
- Resourcing enough staff with the right tools and support to succeed
- Succession/continuity after staff turnover or leadership change
- Scaling and institutionalizing best practices
- Grappling with impacts of gentrification, which often follow art/artists

