

City of Berkeley **ARTS & CULTURE PLAN UPDATE 2016**



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW SUMMARY

As part of the City of Berkeley's Arts and Culture Plan Update (2016), MIG, Inc. conducted a series of group and individual interviews (for a total of 14 participants) to discuss art-related priorities, needs and opportunities. Two group interviews were held on September 29, 2016 and October 6, 2016, respectively. In addition, MIG conducted three phone interviews and one in-person interview.

Methodology

Each interview participant was asked a similar set of questions, designed to provide an opportunity to share their opinions and insights. Participants were informed their responses would be reported in aggregate with no comments attributed to any one participant. This approach was designed to encourage candid responses. The complete list of interview questions is available at the end of this summary document.

Interview Participants

Interviewees included leaders of non-profit arts organizations, elected officials, economic development representatives and other arts leaders from across the City. The list was not meant to be comprehensive, but rather, give the MIG Team some early insights from a variety of perspectives. Each participant was asked to introduce themselves and their organization, business, or agency, and describe what roles or responsibilities their organization has in relation to the arts ecosystem within Berkeley. The following individuals were interviewed:

Individual Interviews

- **Kim Anno**, Visual Artist; Civic Arts Commissioner
- **Tom Bates**, Mayor, City of Berkeley
- **Shannon Jackson**, Associate Vice Chancellor for the Arts and Design, UC Berkeley; Civic Arts Commissioner
- **Katrina Traywick**, Owner, Traywick Contemporary

Group Interview #1: September 29, 2016

- **Lisa Bullwinkel**, Executive Director, Another Bullwinkel Show; Former Chair of Berkeley Cultural Trust
- **John Caner**, CEO, Downtown Berkeley Association
- **Sharon Dolan**, Executive Director, Freight and Salvage
- **Archana Horsting**, Executive Director, Kala Art Institute



- **Nina Meehan**, Executive Director, Bay Area Children's Theatre
- **Patricia Reedy**, Director of Teaching and Learning, Luna Dance Institute
- **Larry Rinder**, Director, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA)

Group Interview #2: October 6, 2016

- **Stuart Baker**, Executive Director, Telegraph Business Improvement District
- **Rebecca Johnson**, Executive Director, Shawl Anderson Dance Center
- **Jill Randall**, Artistic Director, Shawl Anderson Dance Center

Key Findings

Key findings from the interviews are summarized below and organized by question.

Current Conditions

Interviewees were asked how they would describe the "arts ecosystem" in Berkeley, focusing on where they felt the arts community is most active and defined. The arts ecosystem was defined as including large and small arts organizations, arts patrons, City departments and staff, arts advocates and other related interests.

- Participants noted that the arts "touch every person in this community" and the arts are "integrated into our lives," including young children, UC Berkeley students, and the broader community.
- Participants described a rich arts community, with many arts and cultural organizations of different sizes. The organizations ranged from the "big players" such as BAMPFA, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Freight and Salvage, and Shotgun Players, to many smaller organizations.
 - Various types of arts organizations call Berkeley home, not just the well-known performing arts organizations.
 - Many of the larger, downtown arts organizations receive a lot of attention; however, there are many individual artists and small grassroots organizations scattered throughout the City that would benefit from greater support and promotion.
- Some participants described the arts ecosystem as complicated and complex in light of the number, diversity and multi-disciplinary nature of the arts organizations.
- Some artists are leaving the City due to the high costs of housing and studio space.
 - Participants suggested that a significant influx of resources and in-kind support are needed across the City to create "stability of home" and to help keep artists in Berkeley.
- Along with the strong participation from local audiences, Berkeley attracts audiences from throughout the region and increasingly from across the United States and internationally.

- Participants generally described the Berkeley audience and patrons as very engaged, well-educated and unafraid of expressing their opinions.
- Some participants believe a small, committed community of arts leaders who sacrifice their personal resources, money and time are the key force behind Berkeley's vibrant arts scene.
- Several participants highlighted the work of the Berkeley Cultural Trust as an umbrella organization that has become a resourceful network for arts organizations and a vocal advocate for increased arts funding.
- Several participants noted that the arts are an integral part of Berkeley's economic development strategy.

Best Features

Interviewees described what they believed were the best features or qualities of the arts community in Berkeley.

- Many participants spoke to the diversity and variety of arts organizations that celebrate literary arts, visual arts, digital arts, music, dance, and film as a key asset of the arts ecosystem.
- In addition, a number of participants highlighted UC Berkeley as an institution that brings creativity, resources and a diverse student and faculty population to Berkeley.
- One participant appreciated that Berkeley is home to "curious audiences" and Berkeley residents appreciate experimentation within the arts.
- A few participants noted that the Civic Arts Commission is currently comprised of well-versed arts leaders with "good energy," a spirit of collaboration and a forward-thinking policy agenda.
- One participant noted that with Shannon Jackson, Associate Vice Chancellor for the Arts and Design at UC Berkeley joining the Commission, a much needed connection between the City's arts leaders and the University is being cultivated.

Key Issues and Concerns

In contrast, interviewees were asked what issues and concerns are being discussed and explored among local artists and arts advocates.

- Across the interviews, participants highlighted the concern of housing affordability and artist working spaces in the City.
 - Participants noted that Berkeley is losing artists due to the high cost of living. Rising rents have forced an increasing number of artists to seek more affordable housing options and studio space outside of the City.
 - Some participants pointed out that even "teaching artists," that generally have a more stable income, are leaving Berkeley or changing industries because of the high cost of living.

- Supporting young artists who want to live in Berkeley was identified as a big challenge. A few participants thought that “new energy” is often focused on Oakland, where young artists can afford to live.
- The pending departure of the California College of the Arts in Oakland will have a negative impact on retaining the next generation of artists in the Bay Area.
- In spite of new funding sources such as the 1% for public art in private development program, several participants emphasized the need for more money dedicated to supporting the arts across the City.
- Many participants highlighted the need to provide financial support for cultural organizations and smaller arts organizations that are located outside of the downtown area.
 - Spreading resources equitably to organizations in South and West Berkeley and promoting arts organizations in those communities are significant issues voiced by many participants.
- A few participants noted the need to expand the role of arts in education, from grade school to the university level.
- Some participants expressed that the arts are “disappearing” from public education; students who attend public school have less exposure to the arts, which makes them less familiar and invested in the arts as adults.
 - One participant noted that Berkeley High School has the largest racial gap in achievement in the nation, and that the City could look at the role of arts in addressing that gap.
- Some participants expressed that the public art in the City’s key commercial districts is “disappointing.”
 - The challenging and lengthy permitting process, the cost and the limits on the type of public art are all barriers to infusing more creativity and vibrancy in the public art realm.
- One participant described the need for an expanded commercial gallery system for visual artists to provide more opportunities for visual arts to showcase their work in the City.

City’s Current Support for the Arts

Participants were asked to describe their perceptions of the City’s current support for the arts and to share ideas for how the City can enhance support for the arts.

- Some participants expressed that there is a perception that City of Berkeley places a high priority on the arts; however, at closer examination of the City budget for the arts, this perception may not be reality.
- Some participants suggested that through this planning process, the City should examine the amount of money dedicated to the arts from cities of comparable size to Berkeley.

- One participant noted that many arts organizations “scrape together” their budgets and additional funding from the City and partnerships with UC Berkeley would help more organizations thrive within the arts ecosystem.
- A participant suggested that the City match the funding from the UC Chancellor’s Fund to demonstrate a “real partnership” and investment in the arts.
- One participant noted that the performing arts community has been strengthened by recent financial investments received from the City; for example, the annual support that the City provides the Berkeley Repertory Theatre to help retire the debt on their new space allows them to focus on producing high quality productions.
- One participant thought that the grants administered through the Civic Arts Grant Program are very small, and that organizations have to go through a complex application process for a small amount of money.
- A participant highlighted that of the \$161 million in discretionary fund, the City devotes about \$800,000 into its budget for the arts, which is currently less than 1%.
 - Participants would like to see the City’s budget for the arts increase to 1%, similar to what the City is asking of private developers.
- A frequently cited concern is that the City only has one full-time staff person devoted to the arts, and the role has a lot of responsibilities including significant data collection and management.
 - Some participants recommended that the City expand staffing to support the arts infrastructure, including data management and administration of the Civic Arts Grant Program.
- A few participants noted that they thought Oakland is providing much greater support to artists and arts non-profits than Berkeley.
 - One participant shared that one of the Oakland-based dance organization has stated that they stay in Oakland because they have subsidized space, in addition to receiving City funding.
- One interviewee suggested the City could provide more gallery space to showcase the work of visual artists.
- Some participants suggested that while the City website provides useful information, it is not the best tool for promoting arts related events. Participants suggested a centralized website be developed to promote and publicize the arts citywide.

External Resources

In addition to the City’s support, interviewees were asked to describe key external resources that enable them do their work.

- Some of those interviewed identified partnerships with UC Berkeley as key external resources.
 - Other participants noted that while UC Berkeley could be a key partner, organizations do not always know who to connect with at the University.
- One participant noted that online crowdfunding sites have been important to funding art projects.

- A participant highlighted that the close proximity of art suppliers within Berkeley city limits makes it a hub for highly skilled artists and organizations.

Future Vision

Interviewees were asked to describe their vision for the City's arts community in the short term (3-5 years) and in the long term (10-20 years).

Short-term vision (3-5 years)

- Through this planning process, one participant hoped that the City could make the argument for how the arts are a key economic engine of Berkeley, and all residents are affected by the arts community.
- One participant specified that in the short term, the City of Berkeley should provide more resources and support to the arts community outside of the downtown area.
- Participants overall felt that Berkeley should make larger financial investments to support arts organizations and artists.
 - A few interviewees mentioned the need for funding equity between smaller and larger organizations and across all artistic mediums.
- One participant noted that the strength and connection between the University and the City is incredibly important. Key short-term outcomes of this planning process include the City matching the Chancellor's Grant funding and the Chancellor's Office creating a community liaison position.
- Many participants expressed a vision for more artist co-ops, such as the Sawtooth Building, the Emeryville Co-op and Arto in San Francisco – where artists can reside and work.
- A few interviewees suggested that older buildings in downtown Berkeley (e.g., the Veteran's Building, the Post Office) could be retrofitted and converted to function as art centers.
 - One participant highlighted Town Hall in Seattle and the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis as good examples.
- A few participants conversed about how Berkeley can redefine and deepen its arts reputation. In particular, one participant asked, "How can more people visiting and living in Berkeley identify as art goers or art participants?"
- Participants highlighted the need for cross-promotional marketing of events and cross-audience development to bolster the arts ecosystem in the short-term.
- One participant expressed a vision that Berkeley is at the forefront of a regional movement of innovative cultural planning that embraces best practices from across the country.
- One participant expressed the opportunity to "get people involved in their civic living rooms" through public art. Potential public art projects through the new BART plaza and the Adeline Corridor planning process are key opportunities.
- A few participants would like to see another performance space built to allow for art that is made in Berkeley to be seen in Berkeley.

- Some participants highlighted the need for land use and zoning changes to create more opportunities for allowable uses tailored towards the arts.

Long-term vision (10-20 years)

- One participant articulated a long-term vision of arts organizations coming together to express a unified voice around arts and cultural needs, including space, financial resources and in-kind contributions.
- One participant stressed that in the long term, arts can be used to address the achievement gap and to create dialogue on the racial divide in Berkeley.
- The opportunity for artists to “age in place” by creating artists co-ops that keep rents below market rate was frequently mentioned as a short-term and long-term goal.
- A participant emphasized that Berkeley should take the lead on answering critical, long-range questions such as “what is the role of creativity in equitably advancing the future of our cities?”
- A few interviewees expressed a long-term vision for subsidized housing for artists with housing funds earmarked for working and retired artists.
- To create more performance spaces in Berkeley, one participant thought the City should consider building a City-run theater like in Salt Lake City, Utah or Boulder, Colorado.

Engagement Process

To create a robust engagement process, interviewees were asked how this planning process may best reach out to the residents, businesses and other stakeholders across the City.

- A number of interviewees stressed that the process should engage a breadth of artists across different art mediums – from authors, to singers, painters and others.
- One participant was interested in the City having a series of events (similar to the Book Festival) that extends beyond the public engagement for this Plan Update and establishes a long-term channel for keeping people involved in the arts.
- Participants suggested involving UC Berkeley students in the planning process as a primary constituency for the City.

Other Stakeholders

Participants were asked to recommend certain people, associations or organizations that should be engaged through the planning process. Participant ideas included the following:

- Consumers of the arts
- People who are not served by the current arts landscape
- Cultural organizations such as La Pena and Ashkenaz
- City Council candidates in South and West Berkeley

- Berkeley Chamber of Commerce
- Neighborhood associations
- UC Berkeley's Global Urban Humanities Initiative
- UC Berkeley students
 - Studio classes at the UC Berkeley's College of Environmental Design
- Berkeley Books Festival
- Berkeleyside
- Teaching Artist Guild
- California Arts Council
- Berkeley Unified School District presidents
- Parent Teacher Associations

Other Suggestions

To close the interview, participants were asked to suggest any other ideas or recommendations to inform this planning effort.

- A few participants discussed the importance of defining Berkeley's role in the region and nation as a leading provider and supporter of cultural arts.
- As one participant suggested that Berkeley should think critically about its position in the regional arts conversation and recognize that the City offers different artistic strengths than cities such as Oakland.
- Participants cautioned that they want Berkeley to learn from San Francisco's experience and help artists have a stable and moderate lifestyle to prevent them from leaving for more affordable cities.
- A few participants shared the importance of developing strategies and partnerships to keep the arts affordable for a wide variety of patrons.
- One participant noted that they would like to see the City be more involved in the arts conversation nationally, sending City staff to national conferences to promote information sharing among cities of similar size and population to Berkeley.
- One of the participants suggested an arts mentoring program that pairs high school students with mid-career artists. The participant indicated that by mixing "new talent" with "wisdom," there can be important connections.
- One participant suggested that the City develop a low-interest loan program for arts organizations to "help make projects happen."
- A participant expressed the need to explore future ideas on how social media will support the promotion of arts and culture.

Conclusion

The stakeholder interviews yielded rich and well-rounded input on art-related priorities and opportunities in Berkeley. Many participants expressed appreciation at being invited to share their ideas early in the planning process. Frequently mentioned assets and positive features of the arts ecosystem include a diverse mix of arts organizations across mediums, knowledgeable and committed Civic Arts Commissioners, engaged and open-minded art patrons, and partnership opportunities with UC Berkeley.

The interviews also provided critical insights into several key issues facing the arts ecosystem including affordable housing for artists, the high cost of living, the need for more financial investment and funding support from the City, and the need to resource and promote arts organizations outside of the downtown area.

In addition, the stakeholder interviews highlighted the need for more information and increased awareness regarding the full range of programs, funding activities, and services provided by the City. This was brought to our attention by the number of suggested improvements that are already being implemented by the City. For example, some participants stated that the City should match the UC Berkeley's Chancellor's Grant when in fact the City's Civic Arts Program has provided matching funds for UC Berkeley Chancellor's Grants for 2016 and again for 2017.

This is just one of several comments that support the finding that all parties would benefit from a deeper understanding of the funding programs and other services provided by the City. Targeted communications and improved information sharing between the City and local arts leaders can help address this issue.

The input and ideas shared during the interviews will be used to inform the Current Conditions Assessment, the agenda and activities for the Commission's Visioning Retreat and other stakeholder engagement activities.

Stakeholder Interviews: Guiding Questions

Introduction

1. Please tell us about yourself and your organization / business / agency. What roles or responsibilities related to the arts does your organization have?

Current Conditions

2. How would you describe the arts eco-system (i.e., large and small arts organizations, arts patrons, City departments and staff, and arts advocates) in Berkeley?
3. What are the key issues or concerns that we are likely to hear about from artists and the community?
4. What do you feel are the best features or qualities of the Berkeley arts community or eco-system that should be supported or enhanced through this process?
5. What is your perception of the City's current support for the arts?
6. What external resources enable you to do your work?

Desired Outcomes

7. What is your vision for the City's arts community for the next three to five years? What about the longer term of 10-20 years?
8. What ideas do you have for how the City of Berkeley could enhance support for the arts?

Outreach Strategies

9. How can this planning process best reach out to the residents, businesses and other stakeholders across the City?
10. Are there certain people, associations or organizations that you recommend we should contact as part of this process? How can we best reach them?
11. In general, do you have any other suggestions, ideas or recommendations that would help us with this planning effort?