

CULTURAL DYNAMICS



Nina Elizabeth "Lyrispect" Ball,
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GREATER PHILADELPHIA

CULTURAL
ALLIANCE



DREXEL UNIVERSITY
Antoinette Westphal
College of Media Arts & Design



Creative
Philadelphia

INTRODUCTION

Philadelphia's arts, culture, and humanities community serves as a bellwether for the future of civic life in America. What happens here — in our galleries, museums, historic places, schools, theaters, studios, and gatherings — signals what's possible nationwide. Despite the challenges ahead, Philadelphia stands poised for inspiring, transformational change.

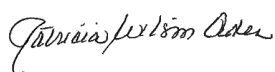
In 2024, the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, PA Humanities, and Drexel University's Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design came together to launch Cultural Dynamics, a collaborative research initiative designed to inform the City of Philadelphia's cultural planning and spur real change needed to strengthen the cultural ecosystem. Through listening sessions, research, and public dialogue with hundreds of artists, cultural workers, and other stakeholders, this project seeks to understand what Philadelphia's cultural ecosystem needs to thrive — and how we can move from conversation to equitable, sustainable, coordinated action.

Throughout our research, we heard that Philadelphia's creative energy runs deep, but the systems that support it do not. Cultural Dynamics aims to catalyze meaningful policy reform and ensure Philadelphia is a place that welcomes, nourishes, and celebrates those who create and experience culture. This work requires action from all of us: artists, cultural workers, educators, civic leaders, funders, policymakers, and neighbors. Together, we can align Philadelphia's creative spirit with structures that sustain it.

This report shares what we heard from Philadelphia's broader cultural community: the themes, challenges, and opportunities that emerged from months of conversation. It provides actions that stakeholders across the City can take to strengthen the cultural ecosystem and lifts up examples of innovation already happening in Philadelphia alongside examples from other places. Collectively, these ideas chart a path toward continued collaboration, policy dialogue, and innovation across the city.

The Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, PA Humanities, and Drexel University remain united in our commitment to influence transformative change in partnership with the arts, humanities, and culture community of Philadelphia. We extend our deep gratitude to everyone who shared their voices, experiences, and perspectives. Your candor and trust made this work possible.

What happens in Philadelphia matters. The unified vision presented in Cultural Dynamics, grounded in tested, actionable policies, positions us to engage elected officials, business and civic leaders, and other key stakeholders in building a stronger, more connected future for Philadelphia.



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“Connect Philly’s artists into the processes of City Hall. We need imaginative solutions to real problems and artists have both insight from the communities... in addition to out-of-the-box thinking that can help our city transform itself into a more sustainable society.”*

* Unless otherwise indicated, quotes throughout this report are drawn from research participants who took part in the *Cultural Dynamics* engagement process. These quotes are anonymized and reflect diverse perspectives.

ABOUT THE PROJECT & PARTNERS

“The Time is Always Now and it’s time for Community Power ... Art is most powerful when integrated into every facet of our lives For every neighbor, elder, child ...”

– FROM THE GOLDEN HOUR BY NINA ELIZABETH “LYRISPECT” BALL, INSPIRED BY THE NOVEMBER CULTURAL DYNAMICS CONVENING

In November 2024, the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance launched *Cultural Dynamics: Co-creating a Vision for Philadelphia* at Drexel University, bringing together civic, cultural, philanthropic, media, and community leaders both in person and via livestream. Participants envisioned how arts, humanities, and cultural policies can foster social impact, support a thriving cultural ecosystem, and fuel economic prosperity for all Philadelphians.

In partnership with **PA Humanities** and **Creative Philadelphia**, this groundbreaking kick-off event brought together more than a dozen national and local thought leaders on cultural policy and on-the-ground creative and cultural practitioners. The convening featured collaborative research on Philadelphia, a keynote by National Endowment for the Arts chair Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson, and panels exploring how to create vibrant communities, nurture a greener and healthier city, and sustain an energetic cultural ecosystem.

This foundational event initiated months of collaborative research led by **PA Humanities** and **Drexel University’s Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design**. Researchers gathered data, stories, insights, and reflections through four Community Conversations, an online survey, and a collective listening session where cultural community members and researchers interpreted findings together. These findings and recommendations are offered to complement Creative Philadelphia’s citywide engagement, neighborhood sessions, and thematic workstreams and inform Philadelphia’s first Cultural Plan. As the Community Conversations evolved, we found a strong desire for immediate action. This report not only informs the Cultural Plan but serves as a springboard for action by identifying tested strategies, tactics, and policies that can help translate the plan into meaningful, coordinated implementation.

PARTNERS

The Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance is committed to leading, strengthening, and amplifying the voices of Greater Philadelphia’s cultural community during this planning process. The Cultural Alliance is dedicated to being a thought leader, trusted resource, and powerful advocate for the Greater Philadelphia creative sector. We are committed to driving progress through research, thought leadership, and advocacy. The Cultural Alliance serves the entire cultural sector, encompassing performing arts, visual arts, history, science, horticulture, arts education, community art centers, and other cultural organizations.

PA Humanities puts participatory research at the forefront of all their work and believes in contributing their learnings to the larger national conversation about the role of arts, humanities, and culture in creating lasting change. PA Humanities is an independent nonprofit and official federal-state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. They champion the humanities – and our shared humanity – as a means to build community, educate, inspire, and make change.

Drexel University’s Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design is committed to unlocking the creativity of critical thinkers, researchers, makers, and creators who connect ideas and solve real-world problems, transforming careers and lives. Drexel’s reputation as a knowledge-intensive institution has assured the University a place in the top 100 research universities in the country, with the goal to generate new knowledge and impactful solutions by growing basic and applied research and fostering transdisciplinary collaborations, both within the University and with external partners.

Creative Philadelphia provides creative and economic opportunities for all Philadelphians to thrive through the arts. They advance public access to arts and culture, collaborate with local creative communities, and celebrate the city’s cultural assets, contributing to a safer, cleaner, and greener city.

Cultural Dynamics was made possible by the generous support of New Venture Fund, The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, The Pew Charitable Trusts, the William Penn Foundation, and PA Humanities.

SUMMARY & KEY INSIGHTS

Launched in November 2024 by the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, in partnership with PA Humanities, Drexel University's Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design, and Creative Philadelphia, *Cultural Dynamics* is a collaborative, community-driven effort to shape Philadelphia's first Cultural Plan. The process convened artists, cultural workers, institutions, funders, residents, and civic partners to understand what Philadelphia's cultural sector needs to thrive—and to mobilize the community toward collective action.

ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION (KEY STATS)

4

Community Conversations held across Philadelphia in partnership with

Ensemble Arts & Philadelphia Orchestra
(Center City)

FringeArts (South Philadelphia)

The Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection
in partnership with the Center for Anti-Racism at
Temple University
(North Philadelphia)

Institute of Contemporary Art of University of
Pennsylvania (West Philadelphia)

1

**Virtual Cultural Dynamics
Insight Session**

to validate and refine findings

114

Narrative Responses
to sector-wide online survey

500+

Total Participants

representing arts, culture, humanities,
education, civic sectors, and
neighborhoods citywide

6K+

Coded Statements

gathered from transcripts and surveys

CALL TO ACTION

Cultural Dynamics underscores that Philadelphia has the talent, assets, and community imagination to lead the nation in showing how culture strengthens civic life. To realize that potential, the city must:

- **Unify:** Strengthen connections across neighborhoods and disciplines, build shared infrastructure, and develop a coordinated sector voice.
- **Amplify:** Increase the visibility, recognition, and value of arts, culture, and humanities as core to Philadelphia's identity and future.
- **Invest:** Commit long-term, equitable resources to the people, spaces, and systems that sustain creative work.

RECOMMENDATION: The cultural community, legislators and policymakers, business and philanthropic sectors should analyze, take accountability, and act upon the specific policies and recommendations in the report.

WHAT WE HEARD

From our conversations, six core themes emerged to reflect the current needs and aspirations of Philadelphia's cultural community, highlighting opportunities to build a more connected, equitable, and sustainable cultural ecosystem. These themes point to clear priorities—such as improving access to space, advancing fair pay, expanding funding pathways, and strengthening collaboration and advocacy—and call on civic leaders, cultural organizations, funders, businesses, and residents to work together.

BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION: Amplify Philadelphia's Creative & Cultural Identity

Philadelphia's cultural assets are abundant but under-recognized. The city needs a coordinated marketing strategy that elevates local artists, highlights neighborhood-based experiences, celebrates diverse histories, and increases participation—positioning Philadelphia as a premier cultural destination.

RISING TOGETHER: Connect People, Places & Creative Possibility

Cultural vibrancy exists citywide, yet siloed systems and uneven access to resources limit connectivity. Strengthening Philadelphia's cultural infrastructure requires bridging geographic and disciplinary divides through shared platforms, coordinated promotion, and improved transit access.

SHARING SPACE: Increase Access To Space, Facilities, and Housing

Rising real estate costs threaten the affordability and availability of studios, rehearsal rooms, live-work spaces, and other creative and cultural facilities. Philadelphia must adopt stronger zoning tools, cultural districts, historic preservation incentives, and adaptive-reuse policies to secure long-term, community-rooted creative space.

SUPPORTING A THRIVING WORKFORCE: Advance Fair Pay, Livelihood, And Career Opportunities

Artists and cultural workers face low wages, unstable gig work, and escalating living costs, undermining both livelihoods and the city's broader creative economy. Equitable pay, benefits, and clear career pathways are essential to retaining talent and sustaining cultural vitality.

FIGHTING FOR ACCESS: Reduce Barriers To Funding

Funding opportunities remain inequitable and difficult to navigate, leaving many artists and small cultural organizations to self-fund their work. Strengthening the sector requires diversifying revenue streams, reducing grant barriers, supporting operations, and investing in historically underfunded communities.

CHAMPIONING THE COMMUNITY: Provide Advocacy And Visible Leadership

Verbal support from City leadership has not translated into structural investment or recognition. Philadelphia needs strong, permanent cultural advocacy—including dedicated governance, cultural representation in policymaking, and unified sector-wide advocacy—to drive lasting, equitable change.

METHODOLOGY:

Engaging Community Voice

“What if Philadelphia became a cultural treasure unto itself ... and made commitments to that?”

Our methodology and research process put people—their stories, values, assets, and perspectives—at the center of cultural planning in the city. We used a mixed-methods, emergent approach, and a rigorous design model that Drexel, PA Humanities, and the Cultural Alliance collaboratively developed within a three-year time span through engagement on PA Humanities’ *Discovery Project* and *PA Culture Check* research projects. In bringing together statistics, stories, and participatory community engagement, this approach generates rich, layered data from multiple perspectives, leading to actionable findings that can mobilize the sector for action and grow a movement for people-led change.

Cultural Dynamics engaged a broad cross-section of Philadelphia’s arts, culture, and humanities community throughout 2025. We fostered a welcoming space for authentic connection and rich dialogue, inviting participants to share insights to inform future cultural planning. Following the kick-off convening at Drexel University, the Community Conversations sessions engaged creative and cultural workers and allies in facilitated discussions held between March 1 and March 31 at the Kimmel Center, Temple University, FringeArts, and the Institute of Contemporary Art. Each session was presented in collaboration with trusted community partners representing diverse disciplines at locations across the city to encourage wide participation. Two sessions took place on weekday evenings and two on weekend afternoons, with events promoted via email distribution and across social media platforms.

During the Community Conversations sessions, participants shared stories, reflected in breakout groups, and collectively explored their aspirations and concerns for arts, humanities, and culture in Philadelphia.

During facilitated breakout sessions, participants responded to a number of queries, including:

- What aspects of being part of the Philly creative and humanities community strengthen your work?
- Who supports you? Who are your best collaborators? What networks do you rely on?
- What could we collectively do better to support your cultural activity and participation? What can we do together that we can’t do alone? What’s working in other places that we should bring to Philadelphia?
- What should Philly’s arts, culture, and humanities sector look like in ten years? Be specific – what’s different? What do we want to retain? What do you want to build? What do you see, hear, touch? How do you interact with your colleagues, communities, and civic leadership?
- If you could wave a magic wand, what’s one thing you would change to strengthen Philly’s arts and culture experience?

To gain input and insights from those unable to attend the Community Conversations in person, a survey with similar questions was distributed via email and on social media, garnering 114 responses. Avoiding multiple-choice, all questions posed to attendees and survey respondents asked for narrative, plain language comments. Comments were analyzed and coded by topic, leading to more than 6,000 categorized statements from participants.

The transcriptions from the Community Conversations breakout group discussions and the survey responses were reviewed and analyzed for common ideas, concerns, and recommendations. In August 2025, we shared preliminary findings at a virtual *Cultural Dynamics Insight Session* to confirm they reflected participants' intent and community perspectives, and to invite further feedback and reflection. Following this session, insights were analyzed and applied to the findings, resulting in the six themes and three calls to action that are included in this report.

These topics were selected for their frequency—raised by many participants—or their salience—issues that resonated deeply across discussions.

Topics Mentioned with Great Frequency

- Access to Space and Facilities
- Reduce Barriers to Funding
- Leverage Existing Assets
- Unify the Cultural Community

Topics with Particular Salience

- Support a City of Neighborhoods
- Advocacy and Leadership
- Fair Pay, Quality of Work Life, and Career Opportunities

Throughout the *Cultural Dynamics* process, we sought to engage and hear from diverse voices across Philadelphia, but we recognize that not everyone in the creative community was able to participate. The appendix at the end of this report shows participant demographics.

FINDINGS

“We need a culture-based economy in the City of Philadelphia – one that centers around culture.”

The six themes that follow reflect the experiences, challenges, and aspirations shared across Philadelphia’s cultural community through the *Cultural Dynamics* process. They capture what we heard from artists, cultural workers, and neighbors, and highlight opportunities to build a more connected, equitable, and sustainable cultural ecosystem.

Together, these themes offer both reflection and direction—showing Philadelphia’s current cultural ecosystem and its potential. They are not presented in prioritized order in recognition that a successful Cultural Plan requires a comprehensive approach that includes and intentionally interweaves all of the themes. Our findings invite the City of Philadelphia, cultural organizations, funders, media, businesses, and supporters to see themselves in this work and participate in shaping real, tangible change.

We thank the many others whose studies and policy recommendations echo and amplify our findings, including recent reports such as the Arts and Culture Task Force Final Findings (2021), the Philadelphia Music Industry Task Force Report and Recommendations (2022), Histories Collaborative Philadelphia’s Interim Assessment of the Philadelphia Histories Industry Landscape (2025), Pennsylvania Council on the Arts’ Understanding Pennsylvania’s Creative Workforce (2025), and Councilmember Rue Landau’s 2024 Artist Survey, as well as the ongoing research and advocacy produced across Philadelphia’s cultural sector.

The Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, PA Humanities, and Drexel University’s Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design collaboratively developed the recommendations at the end of each theme, drawing directly from the priorities voiced through this research. These recommendations translate community insights into concrete, actionable ideas for policymakers and partners. To illustrate what’s possible, we include examples from Philadelphia—where innovation and collaboration are already advancing the arts, culture, and humanities in novel and exciting ways—alongside examples from other cities that show how successful models elsewhere can inform local action.

BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

Amplify Philadelphia's Creative & Cultural Identity

“Philadelphia has a deep cultural heritage and a strong arts scene, but there’s always room to strengthen access and participation—especially for grassroots and underserved communities.”

Philadelphia’s cultural assets are abundant but under-recognized, revealing a critical need for a coordinated marketing strategy that elevates local artists, spotlights neighborhood-based cultural experiences, celebrates history, and drives participation across the city. By making its creative strengths more visible—to residents, visitors, and the broader region—Philadelphia can unlock greater engagement, strengthen community identity, and position itself as a premier cultural destination.

Philadelphia has a rich, vibrant legacy and is recognized for its many historical and cultural assets that inspire local artists, engage city residents, and attract visitors. The city boasts world-class museums, award-winning theaters, uniquely diverse cultural experiences showcased in our neighborhoods, and a music history of international consequence. Our local tourism marketing agencies and chambers of commerce tout the city’s rich cultural vitality and deep historical roots to attract leisure tourists, book conventions, and encourage businesses to consider locating in our region. Yet, little has been invested by leading business interests in marketing Philadelphia’s creative assets to essential, revenue-generating audiences.

Findings suggested that Philadelphia’s vast and varied historical community distinguishes it from other American cities, yet participants often stated that not enough is done to recognize and uplift the city’s rich and distinctive histories, beyond its well-noted colonial past. Further, in our conversations, our cultural community elevated the city’s deep-rooted legacy of resistance, storytelling, and self-determination, especially among queer, BIPOC, and working-class communities. They also recognized the city’s “grit,” “blue-collar attitude,” and eagerness for collaboration and volunteerism as notable characteristics of Philadelphia’s creative community and the city at large. These qualities should be recognized as commodities worthy of promotion not only within the cultural community but also to audiences, visitors, and investors.

WHAT CAN PHILADELPHIA DO?

- **Develop a city-wide tourism marketing and communications strategy** targeting both locals and tourists that amplifies local artists and cultural experiences in neighborhoods across the city. Advertise the unique cultural experiences found in Philadelphia's neighborhoods at the Independence Visitors Center and welcoming centers, the airport, 30th Street Station, and other key locations.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **Visit Philadelphia** successfully launched multi-year campaigns to encourage overnight stays, attract LGBTQ visitors, and highlight Philadelphia's award-winning restaurants. Similar campaigns should be developed to market the city as an international cultural destination.
 - Build marketing strategies targeting residents, the region, and other visitors that showcase Philadelphia's cultural assets. Philadelphia's City Council recently passed a resolution to brand Philadelphia as a music destination by naming it "The Original Music City." Similar marketing strategies could be used to promote Philadelphia's many festivals and its award-winning theatre community.
 - **Philadelphia 250** was created to build an inclusive movement celebrating the city's history around the Declaration of Independence
- **Support cultural journalism** and expand coverage of cultural events (particularly those from smaller organizations and venues) in public broadcasting and local newspapers.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **The Lenfest Institute for Journalism's *Every Voice, Every Vote*** project built relationships with community partners to host civic engagement events
 - **Small independent outlets** like *Arblog*, *Broad Street Review*, and *Root Quarterly* show how locally rooted journalism can sustain visibility for diverse cultural voices.
- **Establish initiatives that encourage audience participation** (i.e., discounted tickets or the development of a Philly Cultural Passport/punch card).

Who Can We Learn From?

- During their 2024-2025 season, the **Philadelphia Opera** began offering the option to purchase any seat for \$11 / "Pick Your Price". This initiative led to a sold-out season and an influx of new attendees.
- **The Philadelphia Fringe Festival** offers a pay-what-you-can option for many of its shows.
- **The Citywide James Ijames Theater Pass** offers audience members an opportunity to see three James Ijames plays, one at each of the three participating theatres, at a discounted rate.

- **Art-Reach Programs:**

- **ACCESS** is a community initiative that offers \$2 admission to over 80 cultural sites throughout Greater Philadelphia and Delaware to individuals who receive public assistance for food or medical benefits.
- **The Students at Museums in Philly** (STAMP) initiative allows any Philadelphia high school student to visit 20 museums and cultural sites for free.
- In Seattle, Los Angeles, and Kansas City, **Teen Tix** offers discounted tickets to teenagers interested in attending cultural events.
- **The University of Pittsburgh's Cheap Seats program** is available to students, faculty, and staff with a valid Pitt ID. Each person can purchase up to four tickets for all shows (with a few noted exceptions), and can take non-Pitt people.

“There’s no awareness that there’s all this talent here in Philadelphia because it’s just sort of underground and spread all over.”

RISING TOGETHER

Connect People, Places & Creative Possibility

“I often feel like the Northwest ... and the Northeast gets overlooked ... in terms of funding, in terms of steering visitors.”

Philadelphia’s cultural vibrancy spans every neighborhood, but siloed systems, limited visibility across communities, and uneven access to resources prevent the sector from functioning as a cohesive ecosystem. To strengthen the city’s cultural infrastructure, Philadelphia must bridge geographic and disciplinary divides by connecting people, organizations, and resources through shared platforms, coordinated promotion, and improved transit access.

Philadelphia is a “city of neighborhoods,” a name that points to the distinct communities and creative disciplines that spread across the city. The strength of these communities can and do help to amplify shared cultural identities and nurture feelings of belonging and connection. Yet these localized systems can also lead to disconnection, inequitable distribution of resources, and heightened competition. Arts and culture exist throughout Philadelphia, not just in Center City. The work being done in Philadelphia’s diverse and eclectic neighborhoods and cultural hubs is robust and vital, and must be appropriately recognized to truly understand the impact and value of the sector.

In our discussions, cultural community members expressed frustration regarding the siloed nature of cultural work. They also shared how neighborhoods feel cut off from one another, with community members and organizations often not knowing about, or supporting, the work done in other places. Participants described fields within the cultural sector (i.e., performing arts, visual arts, history, museums, etc.) as operating in an isolated manner, explaining how engagement and participation are more likely to occur within rather than between communities. They identified a lack of substantive partnerships and discussed how this can lead to wasted resources and missed opportunities for engagement.

Community Conversations participants noted that these various silos breed a culture in which members feel they must compete for resources, engagement, and recognition. They called for more communication and collaboration between creative and geographic communities. This is not the first time the community has voiced this need; in a report by Histories Collaborative of Philadelphia, the researchers noted that, while collaboration is a strength of Philadelphia’s historical community, fragmentation and a lack of coordination are weaknesses. Throughout these discussions, there was a clear desire for unified marketing and tourism strategies that inscribe intentional promotion of cultural activity, particularly in areas beyond Center City. Participants also noted that to achieve the desired connectivity, public transit must expand beyond the current hub-and-spoke model to Center City and better connect neighborhoods to one another.

WHAT CAN PHILADELPHIA DO?

- **Break down silos between communities** that have historically operated in isolation by creating an inclusive, informative, and interactive directory/database. This platform will showcase funding opportunities, trainings, and tools to activate and maintain creative spaces that facilitate cross-disciplinary conversations.
- To avoid conflicting events, dissuade competition, and encourage cross-promotion, **create a shared calendar** / public digest where organizations can view upcoming cultural events/programming and submit their own.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **Visit Philadelphia, Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia Magazine, Avenue of the Arts, and Axios** successfully market and promote weekly and weekend calendars of Philadelphia happenings.
 - **Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles** have each created a master calendar of cultural events.
 - **The Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council** is testing an AI-driven cultural calendar that will be worth watching for its accuracy, efficacy and long-term success.
- **Develop stronger and more affordable public transportation connections** between neighborhoods across the City to create access, raise visibility, and build collaboration across networks.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **Philadelphia's Zero Fare Transit Access Program** is a City-funded transit benefit offered to a targeted number of Philadelphians living at or below the poverty level.
- **Foster connections between major cultural institutions** in Center City and smaller organizations and individual culture makers in neighborhoods throughout the city.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **Tour d'Art:** In Queen Village, art galleries partner with local restaurants and bars to bring people together for a night of art, food, and fun.
- **Philadelphia Open Studio Tours:** This festival, hosted by the Center for Emerging Visual Artists, offers a behind-the-scenes look at the city's creative community. Participants explore artists' workspaces through self-guided tours, learn through live demonstrations and artists' talks, and take part in hands-on workshops.
- **Mural Arts:** This notable Philadelphia organization regularly partners with communities, artists, educators, government, and other nonprofits to create public art that lifts up local voices and stories.
- **Histories Collaborative of Philadelphia** created a report outlining key challenges and

recommendations for the city’s historical community. In addition, a coalition of the city’s music interests drafted the “The Original Music City” report highlighted model policies and proposed specific tactics to promote Philadelphia as a “music city” similar to Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, and other well-recognized music destinations.

- **Promote and support organizations that facilitate connections** between artists and other creative makers and provide much-needed tools, resources, and marketing.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **NextFab’s** North Philly makerspace provides access to machinery, classes, membership, community, space, and professional services for anything creatives want to fabricate.
- **CraftNOW** unites, celebrates, and supports the people, businesses, and institutions of the craft community of Philadelphia to continue the city’s vibrant history as a capital of craft.

- **Recognize the long history of local arts education, mentorship, and relationship-building** that exists locally in the City, fully fund it, and embed this unique asset into public life—from schools and libraries to parks to transit.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **Mural Arts, Fleisher Art Memorial, Musicopia, Philadanco, the Mann Center, BalletX, the Barnes,** and many other organizations offer a variety of affordable art-making experiences and classes for children and families.
- **Integrate the arts into public schools,** as is being done by the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) program.
- **Encourage public-private partnerships** that nurture arts, technology, and education, as is happening in Cleveland’s Idea Center.

“We should invest more in the future of the different neighborhoods that are in Philadelphia, and how arts and culture is not just in Center City, but you can go to South Philly, West Philly, and there’s so many different cultural things just in the neighborhood – and arts and culture in those neighborhoods that not many people know about that should be known about.”

SHARING SPACE:

Increase Access To Space, Facilities, and Housing

“When thinking about affordable spaces, how do we leverage our existing assets and work within the community?”

Philadelphia’s cultural community urgently needs more affordable, accessible creative spaces and virtual platforms as rising real estate and other costs threaten studios, rehearsal rooms, and live-work environments. To protect and expand these spaces, the city must adopt stronger zoning tools, cultural districts, historic preservation incentives, and adaptive-reuse policies that prioritize long-term affordability and keep creative spaces rooted in their communities.

Philadelphia is often heralded as more affordable than other big cities, but commercial developers, rising real estate costs, and competitive markets are challenging favorable perceptions and experiences, especially for members of the creative sector. The disposition of the UArts properties offers a compelling illustration of the precarious future of creative spaces when there are no tools or incentives to ensure their continued service to the creative community. Although Hamilton Hall will remain a maker space due to the creative vision of private developer Scout, the ArtsBank will likely be developed as market-rate residential and commercial uses despite investment offers from the Lantern Theater and other cultural interests. This concern is echoed by Councilmember Rue Landau’s 2024 Artist Survey, where Philadelphia artists also voiced their concern over a lack of affordable studio space, rehearsal space, housing, and accessible tools. During our Community Conversations, creative workers expressed a need to protect the accessibility and affordability of housing, studio and gallery spaces, and performance venues. While the changing landscape presents some challenges and concerns, it also offers the opportunity to create tools and policies that encourage art-friendly redevelopment and innovative art-related spaces as an essential public benefit.

WHAT CAN PHILADELPHIA DO?

- **Re-imagine libraries, recreation centers, schools, warehouses, and other neighborhood-based spaces as multi-use cultural hubs** by adding rehearsal space, recording and editing suites, and storytelling labs where people can freely access resources.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **The Denver Public Library** makes creative spaces and tools available in its libraries, such as ideaLAB and recording studios.

- **The Brooklyn Public Library** houses the Info Commons offers amateur recording studios for library cardholders working on audio or video projects.
 - **The Bok Building:** In South Philadelphia, Scout, an urban design firm, transformed an old school into a workspace for Philadelphia makers, businesses, nonprofits, and artists. This redevelopment is a commendable example of successful adaptive reuse.
 - **Crane Arts:** In Northern Liberties, Crane Arts turned an old bath fixtures warehouse into affordable studios and gallery spaces.
 - **Avenue of the Arts:** In the early 1990s, Mayor Ed Rendell advocated for the transformation of an old office corridor on South Broad Street into a hub for the performing arts in Philadelphia.
- **Expand partnerships and collaborations among cultural organizations and leaders** to unify communities and promote the sharing of rehearsal and storage space, studios, and venues.
 - **Art Forward:** Allen's Lane Art Center is partnering with Just Act and the Mount Airy neighborhood on an innovative, neighbor-led, arts and community-based engagement project aimed to energize local residents around the development of a collective vision for arts education and cultural programs in greater Northwest Philadelphia.
 - **The New Freedom District:** An effort in West Philly to amplify local leaders, encourage community organizing, confront challenges such as displacement and poverty, and preserve spaces of meaning (which include youth expression, active corridors, heritage trails, faith and spirituality, and small businesses preservation).
 - **Asian Arts Initiative's** multi-tenant arts facility has long served as a resource for the broader cultural community, with studios as well as organizational and program space — including room for meetings, exhibitions, and a black-box-style theater.
 - **Promote affordable housing for artists** by facilitating access to public subsidies or by stipulating set-asides for private housing developments receiving tax abatements or credits, zoning variance, and other forms of public support.
 - **Artspace.com** funds the development of artist housing in Minneapolis and Silver Spring by accessing public funding sources, including those available for the creation of affordable housing, workforce housing, economic development, historic preservation, and cultural facility development.
 - **Encourage the retention of creative uses** when spaces held by large institutions, such as UArts, Atwater Kent, and PAFA, enter the commercial marketplace by providing a portfolio of publicly supported abatements, incentives, and other tools to private developers.

Who Can We Learn From?

- When UArts closed, **Scout** purchased the Hamilton and Furness halls with the intention of preserving them as a haven for local artists. The design firm transformed them into workspaces.

- **Opera Philadelphia's** pop-up performance series in the Wanamaker building have enlivened the historic space, drawing standing room only crowds.
- **New York's Lower Manhattan Cultural Council** is expanding the adaptive reuse of unused buildings to offer free and discounted studio spaces for artists in New York City with their residency program *Workspace*.

• **Support arts and culture groups in transforming retail vacancies into permanent lease-backs**, rather than just pop-ups.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **Austin's Creative Space Assistance Program** offers grants to creative commercial spaces that are facing temporary or permanent displacement due to rising costs. The grant was designed to help cover the cost of revenue-generating space improvements and other space-related needs, rent payments, general liability insurance, and property tax reimbursements.

“I want to build a shared cultural commons where intergenerational and cross-sector relationships fuel systems change. I want a city where ... archives, studios, and healing spaces are stewarded collectively. I see multi-use cultural spaces in every zip code, open late, busy with workshops, residencies, and shared meals. I hear multiple languages—spoken, signed, and sung—across murals, performances, and classrooms.”

SUPPORTING A THRIVING WORKFORCE

Advance Fair Pay, Livelihood, And Career Opportunities

“I am barely getting by, and it’s incredibly draining.”

Philadelphia’s creative economy depends on a stable, fairly compensated workforce, yet low wages, unstable gig work, and rising living costs are pushing artists and cultural workers out of the city and, often, out of the sector. Ensuring equitable pay, benefits, and real career pathways is essential to retaining talent and sustaining the city’s cultural vitality.

Philadelphia’s creative industry clearly drives the city’s economic vitality, yet creative workers constantly fight for recognition and security. A recent study by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts on the state’s creative industry reports that one in three people in urban centers like Philadelphia are considering leaving the state for higher wages. Cultural community members have voiced strong concerns about low wages, unrecognized volunteerism, unstable gig work, and the rising cost of housing and healthcare, and other basic needs that make it difficult to build a sustainable career in the sector. Participants noted that certain groups experience greater barriers to accessing opportunities and expressed a desire for greater inclusivity, expressing a strong demand for accessible databases that elevate opportunities.

WHAT CAN PHILADELPHIA DO?

- **Drive income equality** by exploring, advocating for, and implementing guaranteed income programs for creative makers and establishing funds for volunteer-run organizations.
- **Provide security to creative workers through a guaranteed income program**, such as the SF Guaranteed Income Pilot for Artists in San Francisco and the Guaranteed Income for Artists initiative in New York City.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **PHLHousing+**: a guaranteed income pilot program run by the City of Philadelphia and Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation for renter households on the waitlists for Philadelphia Housing Authority’s Housing Choice Voucher and public housing.
- **Guaranteed Resources Optimize Wellbeing (GROW)**: a year-long pilot study that took place in 2023 to understand how additional financial resources can improve economic mobility for people who receive Extended-TANF (E-TANF) in Philadelphia.
- **Philly Joy Bank**: a pilot program that provides 250 pregnant Philadelphians with \$1,000 per month from the second trimester of pregnancy through one year after birth.

- **Develop support systems that ensure artists are compensated fairly and on time**, and have access to benefits such as healthcare. This could include a freelance artists' union, exemptions of creative work from the business income tax, and asking foundations and other funders to encourage/require applicants to adhere to fair wage practices for artists.
- **Expand workforce development opportunities** by providing resources for under-resourced, independent artists and smaller, grassroots cultural organizations, developing more creative career track opportunities for high school students, and offering more fellowships and artist development programs for emerging artists.
- **Support creative employment** through the development of comprehensive job boards, transparent and accessible application and hiring systems, and the reduction of reliance on unpaid labor and short-term contracts.
- **Build on research done by Pennsylvania Creative Industries, Histories Collaborative, PA Humanities, the Cultural Alliance, and Drexel University** to fully understand and champion the arts, cultural, and humanities industry. Reframe the community as an industry that includes paid and unpaid work and define its scope and impact.
- **Recognize artists as small businesses** and provide them with the necessary support, and expand financial assistance opportunities for creative workers.

Who Can We Learn From?

- Support local creatives and makers, grow the market for locally-made goods, and encourage investment in the city's economy, as Baltimore is doing with their **"Made in Baltimore" initiative**.
- Expand funding and business development services for creative entrepreneurs by matching the Pennsylvania Creative Industries Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator grant program with private and corporate funding.
- **Encourage that City and State contracts/RFPs recruit local creatives and sole proprietors.**
 - **Encourage the inclusion of creative entrepreneurs in the City of Philadelphia's new contracting strategy** that prioritizes local small businesses and vendors.
- **Consider broadening Philadelphia's 1% for Art Program** to support individual artists in addition to its present focus on public art. Possible strategies include contributions to the Illuminate the Arts grant program administered by Creative Philadelphia and contributing to a Dedicated Arts Fund.

"I love the arts. I also love my home and paying my bills... Philadelphia is far behind the rest of the Northeast Corridor in terms of pay."

FIGHTING FOR ACCESS

Reduce Barriers To Funding

“[S]ome kind of dedicated revenue stream for the arts in our city has been conspicuously missing for a really long time. ... I always hear, like, there’s no money and there’s no money.

Here’s the truth. There is always money. It’s about political and social realness. It’s the right thing on behalf of the cultural sector.”

Philadelphia’s cultural sector faces inequitable and hard-to-access funding, leaving many artists and small organizations to self-fund their work and rely on volunteers. To build a thriving and inclusive ecosystem, we must collectively diversify revenue streams, lower barriers to grants, support operations, and invest consistently in community-rooted and historically underfunded creators and cultural organizations.

Philadelphia’s cultural community shares disparities in both the availability and accessibility of public and private funding. Additionally, members called for changes to funding structures that encourage an equitable distribution of funding and encourage positive change.

Participants suggested tapping into diversifying funding streams such as private donors and the corporate sector and through tax incentives from the City of Philadelphia. Given the political climate, some participants expressed concern about relying too heavily on government funds, while others showed interest in reimagining how funds not explicitly designated for arts and culture can be leveraged, especially since the sector often intersects with human, social, and educational services. Several creative artists shared that their work is entirely or partially self-funded, and that grants/fundraising and professional development workshops could be beneficial.

Yet, we heard frustration around the idea that, for arts and culture to be worth investing in, there needs to be a large audience/participant group or a proven economic impact. Additionally, it’s important to note that creative professionals are just one part of the sector. Philadelphia’s vast cultural community includes volunteers and hobbyists, and funding opportunities should be offered to those audiences. There was also a desire for greater promotion of the existing funding opportunities, as well as application assistance.

Studies abound confirming the efficacy and transformational impact of dedicated arts funds. Many Community Conversation participants called for establishing a dedicated arts fund in Philadelphia to ensure reliable, equitable funding for the cultural sector.

WHAT CAN PHILADELPHIA DO?

- **Make intentional, sustained investments in community-rooted cultural work** led by and for creative people who are part of the LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and disability communities.

Who Can We Learn From?

- Partner with trusted community hubs like **Village of Arts & Humanities**, as funders did in the pandemic, to serve and support their communities with needed resources.
- Build upon strategies to address funding disparities of BIPOC-led and serving arts organizations recommended in *“Reflecting Forward: Philadelphia-based Black Nonprofit Leaders’ Recommendations for Regional Funders.”*

- **Develop less onerous reporting requirements, clearer expectations, and greater transparency (public scoring criteria) around grant applications** and offer more support for first-time grant seekers, individuals, and small organizations/businesses.
- **Build the capacity and fully fund arts service organizations** such as the CultureWorks, ArtReach, Philadelphia Volunteers for the Arts, CraftNow, and others to serve and support Philadelphia’s cultural ecosystem.
- **Offer multi-year general operating support** to individual artists and grassroots collectives (rather than just project grants), provide low-barrier, fast-turn-around funding for small projects and pop-up performances, and establish emergency quick grants to complete projects and bridge unexpected gaps for individuals and organizations.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **Art Works:** a joint \$3 million grant program designed to support Philadelphia arts and cultural organizations and artists working in partnership with BIPOC and other underserved communities.
- **Illuminate the Arts Grant:** a \$1.5 million grant program designed to strengthen and financially uplift Philadelphia’s creative sector, especially individual artists, small and mid-size arts organizations, and small creative enterprises in Philadelphia who are rooted in communities that have been historically underfunded or excluded from traditional sources of arts support.
- **Black Music City:** a collaboration between WXPB-FM, WRTI-FM, and REC Philly, this grant was designed to encourage artistic expression and heighten recognition for new artistic works by Philadelphia-area Black creatives that honor Philadelphia’s rich Black music heritage.
- **The Field Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation** are partnering in Chicago to offer unrestricted, general operating grants to small and mid-sized arts and culture organizations.
- **Build upon local efforts by the Philadelphia Cultural Fund and William Penn Foundation** to codesign funding priorities with their grantees to center the cultural community in philanthropic decision making.

- **Encourage local corporations to invest in arts and culture** not only as philanthropy, but as a strategic investment in workforce, quality of life and economic vitality
- **Establish a dedicated arts fund** to provide a guaranteed funding stream for the city's arts and culture sector.

Who Can We Learn From?

- In 2021, **Philadelphia's Arts and Culture Task Force** sought to increase local government support for a stable, reliable funding source by presenting its recommendation to Philadelphia's City Council.
- **Allegheny County's Regional Asset District (RAD)** distributes one penny from every taxable dollar spent to support the region's quality of life. RAD funds provide unrestricted operational support to arts and culture organizations, along with program and capital grants.
- **Establish tax advantages and a dedicated fund for creative and cultural workers.** Require that institutions that receive city funding meet certain labor requirements.

“I’m never gonna get paid for what I do. This is a volunteer thing, and I think there’s a pretty wide swath of volunteerism throughout Philadelphia that ... shouldn’t get kind of washed away, but we still need money [to operate].”

CHAMPIONING THE COMMUNITY

Provide Advocacy And Visible Leadership

“[A] Department of Arts and Culture that can’t go away depending who the mayor is... that kind of permanence would be absolutely valuable.”

Philadelphia’s cultural community needs strong, permanent advocacy within City government, as verbal support has not translated into meaningful investment or structural recognition. Strengthening cultural leadership—through dedicated governance, artist representation in policymaking, coalition building for community advocates, and a unified sector-wide advocacy effort—is essential to securing the lasting, equitable change required for a thriving creative ecosystem.

Though the City of Philadelphia verbally supports the arts, Philadelphia’s cultural community feels that this verbal support is missing the tangible investments, indicating the value of the sector. “The Philadelphia cultural community has expressed that a major limitation is that the City of Philadelphia does not have a functional, permanent department advocating for the health and equity of the arts and culture sector.” This quote highlights that arts and culture are often seen as non-essential, a ‘nice to have’ when the economy is doing well. During our discussions, participants expressed a desire for artists and other cultural workers to be recognized as viable and integral members of our community and economy and called for those in leadership positions to expand their public advocacy for and promotion of the entirety of the sector.

Participants also expressed that the cultural sector can do more to advocate for itself. To do this effectively, the sector must understand its economic and social impact, unite around shared goals (which should include both short-term, quick fixes, as well as longer-term strategic tasks), and be prepared to exercise power to be taken seriously.

WHAT CAN PHILADELPHIA DO?

- **Embed artists in local government** by developing residency programs for artists, creating full-time salaried positions for creatives in different departments, and consulting working cultural workers when shaping policy, development, and community narratives.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **St. Paul’s City Artist program and Los Angeles’ Creative Strategist Program** embed artist residencies within municipal departments

- **Create a city-funded arts commission** to advise the city council in all arts-related matters and facilitate communication between arts organizations, as is being done in Austin.
- **Nurture partnerships between artists and City Departments**, as the San Francisco Arts Commission is doing with their StreetSmARTS program.
- **Empower Creative Philadelphia as the City’s champion for arts and culture** in local government (by making a Cabinet-level Department of Arts and Culture led by a Chief Cultural Officer).

Who Can We Learn From?

- **Seattle’s “Cultural Space Agency”** works with community members to steward affordable space for culture, counteract displacement, and keep arts spaces in community hands
- **Build advocacy skills within the arts, humanities, and cultural community** to secure a place at the table, speak their truth and lobby for themselves.

Who Can We Learn From?

- **CreativeOhio Advocacy Leadership Institute** is the first national model that supports and galvanizes leaders from the arts, culture, and creative sector to build a statewide network shaping public policy through real-world impact.
- **Ensure that culture is included throughout the City’s Philadelphia2035 multi-year, comprehensive planning process**, including the strategic District Plans for each of Philadelphia’s 18 Planning Districts.
 - Support the work of Philadelphia’s cultural community by fully integrating the arts into the city’s identity and planning, providing sustainable support for local artists, and making clear public investments in the cultural economy. Ideas include paid residencies, city-commissioned content, cultural ambassadors, and publicly supported media.

“We’re advocates, but we’re not significant players. And unless we’re prepared to exercise power, we’re not going to be taken seriously by the people who do. ... And that means defining how we have power. Figuring out how to motivate the people who actually own that power. To act in unison. And to take the game to the people who make the decisions, which in Philadelphia, it really is only elected officials.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unify, Amplify, Invest

“The Binding element is that there’s an industry here. And if you compare this industry to the other industries that operate in Philadelphia as communities, whether it’s the business community or the labor community, they are in the game in a way that the cultural, arts, and history community is not.”

Cultural Dynamics is a shared roadmap for Philadelphia’s cultural community, civic partners, and policymakers to work together to strengthen the sector, expand creative opportunity, and deepen the impact of arts and culture across the city. It identifies the sector’s most pressing challenges and offers practical, forward-looking solutions. All of the ideas within this report were generated by Philadelphians, drawing from the experiences, assets, and imagination that already exist. The recommendations developed by the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, PA Humanities, and Drexel University’s Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design build on this local insight, pairing examples from Philadelphia’s own successes with lessons from other cities to illustrate what’s possible.

Philadelphia can lead a national movement where arts, culture and the humanities advance social well-being and a healthy democracy. But realizing this vision requires us to **unify** the cultural community, **amplify** its reach and impact, and **invest** in the systems and people that sustain it.

UNIFY

Philadelphia’s cultural community thrives on creative collaboration, but too often we work apart when we could be stronger together. Across the city, people voiced a clear desire to connect existing efforts, share resources, and work toward common goals. Unifying the sector means building on the creativity and leadership already here to strengthen the networks, spaces, and systems that support collaboration and uplift every voice.

“This kind of infrastructure would ensure that art is accessible to everyone in Philly—not just in galleries, but in schools, community centers, public spaces, and beyond. It would empower artists to take risks, experiment, and build long-term, impactful work, all while strengthening Philly’s cultural fabric.”

AMPLIFY

Philadelphia is a creative powerhouse, but that incredible energy often goes unseen and undervalued. Our sector called for greater visibility and celebration of the artists, organizations, historical identity, and cultural spaces that already make this city extraordinary. Amplifying the sector means telling a more complete story of who we are, one that reflects every neighborhood, honors local talent, and ensures culture is visible and valued across the city.

“I was inspired by the aspect of really branding the city, kind of like Nashville. That to me was something that I see as a doing action could take some funding, but it’s a branding exercise of getting the uh message out of what we are and what we have to offer as a city.”

INVEST

Philadelphia’s cultural community knows that lasting impact requires lasting investment. Participants called for stable, equitable funding and stronger systems that allow artists, culture workers, and organizations to thrive, not just survive. Investing in the sector means committing to the people and ideas that fuel our city’s creativity and historic character, ensuring the resources that sustain them are accessible, fair, and long-term.

“If I could wave a magic wand, I would create a universal, city-wide arts fund that supports artists, community-driven projects, and cultural organizations with accessible, long-term funding. ... This kind of infrastructure would empower [us] to take risks, experiment, and build long-term, impactful work.”

The findings and ideas in this report demonstrate that the talents, assets, and imagination to lead transformation already exist here. Together, we can strengthen Philadelphia’s creative and cultural community and position the city as a national model for how culture drives civic life. By unifying our efforts, amplifying our reach, and investing in people, we can build a sustainable, equitable, and connected future.

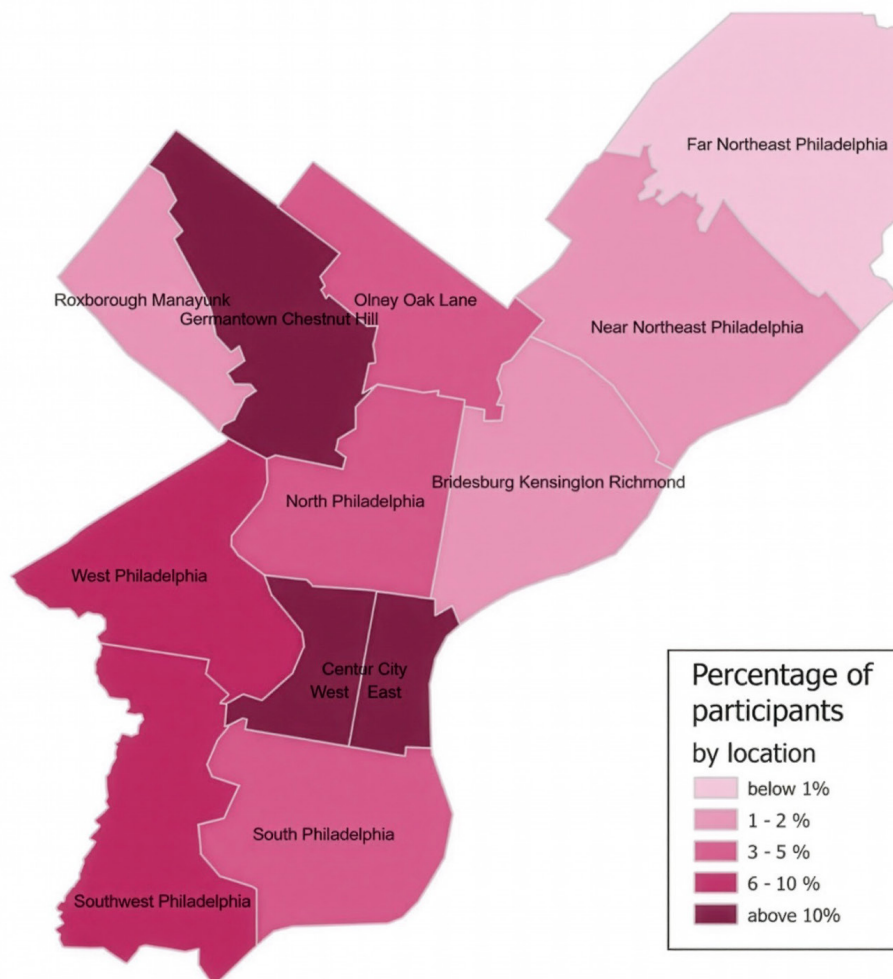
There are many challenges ahead, but as Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson reminded us, what happens here is consequential for the country. The task now before us is to roll up our sleeves and do the work.

APPENDIX

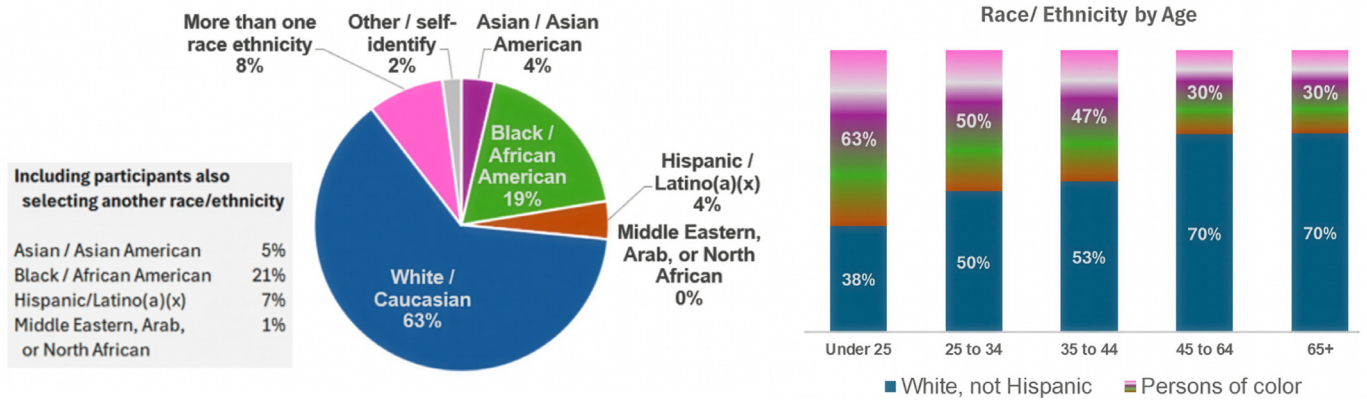
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The data presented in this appendix represent the 247 unique participants who took part in the process and had the opportunity to answer demographics questions. Members of the cultural community were welcome to participate in more than one event or participate in events and take the survey. For the findings below, we present characteristics of the participants without double-counting if they participated more than once.

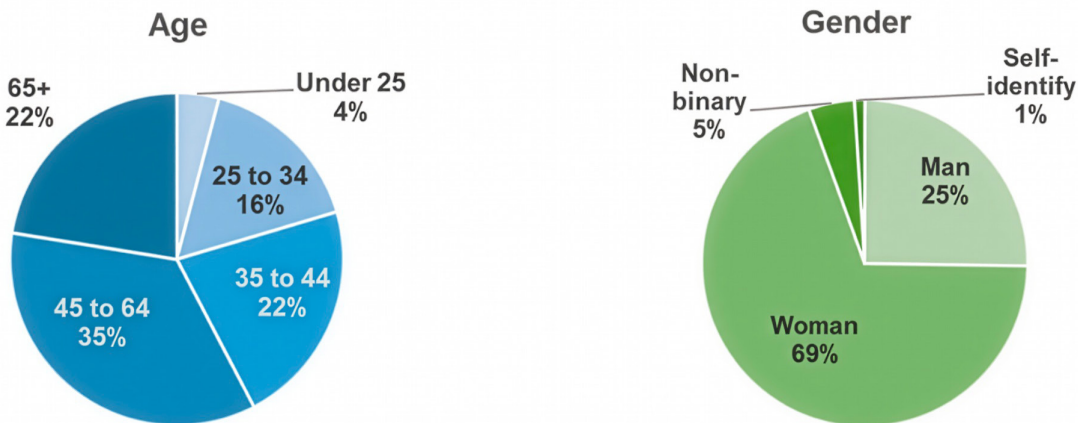
Location of Participants



Race and Ethnicity



Age and Gender



Disability Community

Nine percent (9%) of respondents identified as being a person with a disability. Persons responding via the survey were more likely to identify as a member of the disability community (16% compared to 4% at in-person events).

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University

“City of Philadelphia’s brand is embedded in history, whether it’s Benjamin Franklin or the Liberty Bell, or whatever it is. History is on the front pages of the newspaper, because there are people who are trying to erase it.”

