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## ARTS, CULTURE & CREATIVITY

# The Role of the Arts and Culture in Planning Practice



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In this series of briefing papers, the American Planning Association — as part of a collaborative project with the RMC Research Corporation and with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation — illustrates how planners can work with partners in the arts and culture sector and use creative strategies to achieve economic, social, environmental, and community goals.

This overview paper provides planners and policy makers with comprehensive definitions, an overview of the arts and culture field, and a framework for how the field's strategies can enhance and inform planning practice. The subsequent briefing papers expand upon this introduction and explore how arts and culture contribute specifically to:

- strengthening cultural values and preserving heritage and history
- building community character and sense of place
- enhancing community engagement and participation
- enhancing economic vitality

These briefing papers support the work of countless people — policy makers, planners, and economic development and community development professionals, as well as professionals in architecture, landscape architecture, and arts and culture — in the creation and development of healthy communities.

## Defining Arts, Culture, and Creativity

The arts and culture field encompasses the performing, visual, and fine arts, as well as applied arts including architecture and graphic design; crafts; film, digital media and video; humanities and historic preservation; literature; folklife; and other creative activities. The arts alone can be classified into 13 categories: acting, announcing, architecture, fine art, directing, animation, dancing and choreography, design, entertainment and performance, music and singing, photography, production, and writing (Gaquin 2008). Culture can be defined as the arts as well as the intangible shared beliefs, values, and

practices of a community (Houston 2007). "Creativity" is sometimes used to describe the common elements of arts and culture, but this term encompasses other fields as well. We use the Bureau of Labor Statistics definition of creativity, which encompasses the development, design, or creation of "new applications, ideas, relationships, systems or products, including artistic contributions." As a whole, many forms of arts and culture naturally manifest as aspects of daily human activity (NACCCE 1999; Robinson 2007).

People pursue artistic and creative expression through a variety of outlets: formal theatrical performances, sculptures, paintings, and buildings; as well as the less formal arts, music and food festivals, celebrations and informal cultural gatherings, pickup bands, and crafts groups. Together, these formal and informal, tangible and intangible, professional and amateur artistic and cultural activities constitute a community's cultural assets. These activities — which encompass a diverse set of locations, spaces, levels of professionalism and participation, products, events, consumers, creators, and critics — are essential to a community's well-being, economic and cultural vitality, sense of identity, and heritage.

The formal, or professional, arts include people who are working as professional artists in arts-specific facilities, while the informal or vocational arts include a variety of community and individual activities. The locations and spaces where such activities are held include professional venues such as theaters, arenas, museums, and galleries and less formal settings such as local community and recreation centers, businesses, libraries, clubs, parks, schools, and other local gathering places. Of course, individual arts activities can occur anywhere and at any time; consider a choir singing in a church, a teenager listening to music, and an elder teaching a traditional craft to a grandchild.

People participate in arts and culture at varying levels of skill and engagement. Participants include creators (from the professional actor to a child actor in a school play), consumers (from the audience member for an opera performance to the parent of the child in the school play), and supporters and critics (whether foundations, parents and school fund-raisers, or journalists). Some create, while others listen to, watch, teach, critique, or learn a cultural activity, art form, or expression. Some are professional artists, designers, and inventors, while others engage informally in expressive activities or create innovative tools, relationships, or products. The field as a whole can be represented within a framework that has four main aspects: degree of professionalism, type of product or activity, locations and spaces, and level of participation and involvement. Table 1 outlines these dimensions.

Table 1. Dimensions of Arts and Culture

***Degree of Professionalism***

**Professional or Formal  $\longleftrightarrow$  Vocational or Informal**

Creator or producer is recognized as artist by peers, has received advanced training in the art form, makes at least a portion of his or her living through artwork, or is presented or exhibited by arts-specific venue

Creator or producer is engaged in project solely for purposes of expression (e.g., ethnic, religious, personal) and enjoyment

***Type of Product or Activity***

**Tangible  $\longleftrightarrow$  Intangible**

Painting, sculpture, monument, building, multimedia, or other permanent or temporary physical work of art

Event, performance, or gathering (temporary activity); oral history or cultural expressions passed on from generation to generation

***Locations and Spaces***

**Specific-purpose venues  $\longleftrightarrow$  Nonarts venues**

Museums, theaters, galleries, community art centers, music clubs, etc.

Schools, churches, parks, community centers, service organizations, libraries, public plazas, restaurants, bars, shops, businesses, homes, etc.

***Level of Participation and Involvement***

**Creator  $\longleftrightarrow$  Consumer**

Creator (responsible for the creation of the artistic, cultural, or creative expression)

Audience member, supporter, or critic (indirectly involved or associated with the artistic or cultural activity)

The arts and culture sector is continually developing and changing. Further, the ways in which arts and culture activity is defined, manifested, and valued vary somewhat by locality and community. For example, in one locale a folklife or traditional activity such as sail making or boat building may be recognized as a craft or art form, whereas the same activity elsewhere may be thought of simply as work. Since the arts and culture sector is intertwined with all forms of human activity and daily life, conceptualizing it requires a discriminative understanding of the roles played by different players and constituents. Of course, those roles are not necessarily fixed. A policy maker or planner may also be a creator or audience member; an arts nonprofit organization can also be a community partner; and a municipality may be an arts funder, a partner with cultural organizations, and an employer of arts-based strategies to meet other goals.

## Arts and Culture and Planning Practice

Historically, planners utilized art and culture as a community revitalization tool; more recently, however, planners are realizing the potential contributions of art and culture to other social, economic, and environmental aspects of community life. Arts and culture provide a medium to:

- preserve, celebrate, challenge, and invent community identity;
- engage participation in civic life;
- inform, educate, and learn from diverse audiences; and
- communicate across demographic and socioeconomic lines.

Artistic and cultural activities can be used to engage the public more fully in planning practices, such as:

- long-range community visioning and goal setting
- plan making
- reviewing development and infrastructure projects
- supporting economic development
- improving the built environment
- promoting stewardship of place
- augmenting public safety
- preserving cultural heritage and transmitting cultural values and history
- bridging cultural, ethnic, and racial differences
- creating group memory and identity (Jackson and Herranz 2002)

Table 2 offers examples for understanding where and how the arts, culture, and creativity can be integrated into the field of planning.

Table 2. Connections of Planning Goals to Arts, Culture, and Creativity

### SOCIAL

Planning Goals	Sample Activities	Actors
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve the historic and cultural heritage of a place</li> <li>• Provide a better understanding and an appreciation for a community's cultural diversity</li> <li>• Facilitate connections among or reduce barriers between diverse groups (e.g., age cohorts, ethnic groups, socioeconomic classes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage community residents in a PhotoVoice or storytelling exercise to identify shared needs and values</li> <li>• Create and unveil a community mural or other form of public artwork to validate or celebrate the past</li> <li>• Organize a community festival to celebrate local cultural diversity</li> <li>• Provide arts and cultural education programs, such as workshops, interactive classes, and performances, to encourage an understanding and awareness of a community's historical and cultural context</li> <li>• Use cultural and noncultural venues to facilitate participation from different parts of the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planners</li> <li>• Nonprofit organizations</li> <li>• Neighborhood groups</li> <li>• Artists</li> <li>• Individuals</li> <li>• Funders</li> <li>• Policy makers</li> </ul>
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**ECONOMIC**

Planning Goals	Sample Activities	Actors
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and expand upon local economic opportunities for members of the community</li> <li>• Ensure quality affordable housing for all members of the community</li> <li>• Attract businesses, new residents, and visitors</li> <li>• Provide or facilitate public transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and provide maps, signs, and other products to educate consumers about locally owned and operated community businesses</li> <li>• Use public art within streetscape improvements to increase traffic to underutilized corridors</li> <li>• Provide cultural assets in new affordable-housing developments</li> <li>• Encourage use of public transit, including ensuring safety</li> <li>• Create live/work spaces</li> <li>• Create incubator spaces for individual entrepreneurs, including artists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planners</li> <li>• Nonprofit organizations</li> <li>• Local businesses</li> <li>• Neighborhood groups</li> <li>• Artists</li> <li>• Individuals</li> </ul>
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**ENVIRONMENTAL**

Planning Goals	Sample Activities	Actors
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve and enhance a place's local identity and character</li> <li>• Preserve and protect the community's parks and open space</li> <li>• Restore, protect, and preserve the community's waterways</li> <li>• Implement sustainable practices</li> <li>• Encourage healthy practices, including bike/ped-friendly travel, outdoor activities, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage community residents in a PhotoVoice or storytelling exercise to identify shared needs and values</li> <li>• Create and unveil a community mural or other form of public artwork to validate or celebrate the past</li> <li>• Organize a community festival to celebrate local cultural diversity</li> <li>• Provide arts and cultural education programs, such as workshops, interactive classes, and performances, to encourage an understanding and awareness of a community's historical and cultural context</li> <li>• Use cultural and noncultural venues to facilitate participation from different parts of the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planners</li> <li>• Nonprofit organizations</li> <li>• Design professionals</li> <li>• Artists</li> <li>• Environmental planners</li> <li>• Developers and builders</li> <li>• Policy makers</li> </ul>
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**COMMUNITY**

Planning Goals	Sample Activities	Actors
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage the public in transparent planning processes to assess the current and future needs of the community</li> <li>Promote community pride and stewardship of place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate public art in transportation, parks and open space, water, and sewer infrastructure</li> <li>Engage the community in a multidisciplinary exploration of environmental degradation and preservation through community performances and festivals</li> <li>Inventory, assess, and map a community's artistic and cultural characteristics</li> <li>Encourage zero-waste practices at festivals, public venues, restaurants, hotels, etc.</li> <li>Locate or develop performance spaces and public gathering places on public transportation routes</li> <li>Include sustainable practices incentives in site-review regulations</li> <li>Creatively reuse and preserve historic structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planners</li> <li>Nonprofit organizations</li> <li>Neighborhood groups</li> <li>Artists</li> <li>Individuals</li> <li>Funders</li> <li>Policy makers</li> </ul>
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## The Briefing Papers

Using a variety of case studies and examples from the planning and arts and culture fields, these briefing papers provide a comprehensive overview of how arts and culture contribute to:

- Community heritage and culture
- Community character and sense of place
- Community engagement
- Economic vitality

### COMMUNITY HERITAGE AND CULTURE

A sign of a healthy community is its simultaneous ability to preserve and invent its culture — that is, to conserve its history and heritage and at the same time develop new expressions for current times. Arts and cultural activity and the leadership of artists, historians, folklorists, anthropologists, planners, and other community leaders play important roles in preserving the history and heritage of a place, as well as easing tensions and encouraging respect for the changing cultural landscape. Despite the importance of history and heritage, preservation is rarely seen as a potential basis for innovation and advancement. As a result, too often sufficient resources are not dedicated to preserving significant meaningful spaces and objects, documenting stories from elders, and recording a community's contemporary cultural practices.

### COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND SENSE OF PLACE

Artistic, cultural, and creative strategies help to reveal and enhance the identity — the unique meaning, value, and character — that underlies the physical and social form of a community. As part of an overall strategy to explore community context, embrace and nurture community diversity and uniqueness, and build upon and celebrate community character, planners can utilize artistic and cultural inventories, community visioning processes, design guidelines, arts and culture programming, master plans, and public financial investments in urban design and placemaking. All of these elements require the consideration of all community interests in key decision-making processes; the integration of arts and cultural resources in a contextual civic framework; and the recognition and balancing of the inherent, conflicting nature of past, present, and future social values.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is a process of relationship building that encourages both learning and action, as well as the expression of opinions about a placebased issue or program. A higher level of community engagement in planning offers vibrancy and innovation by strengthening the level of public commitment and making more perspectives available to decision makers. Both planners and community leaders already promote community engagement through a variety of traditional tools, including public opinion surveys, visioning workshops, asset-based planning, town halls, meetings, and public hearings. However, creative tools are now also being used more and more to promote community engagement with planning activities and goals. The use of creative tools — such as visual-art techniques, storytelling, festivals, exhibits, dance, spoken word, PhotoVoice, music, performances, web-based applications and community gatherings — emphasizes receptiveness to input, genuine acknowledgment of feedback, easy participation, and the development of relationships.

## ECONOMIC VITALITY

People are increasingly recognizing the connection between the activity of the arts and culture sector and the economic vitality in a neighborhood or community. High concentrations of creative enterprises and workers in a geographic area may provide a competitive edge by elevating a community's quality of life, improving its ability to attract economic activity, and creating a climate for innovation to flower. Communities in which arts and culture activities of all types flourish are important for the recruitment and retention of a skilled and educated workforce in a city or region. The presence of arts and culture in a specific neighborhood or community location can increase attention and foot traffic, bringing in visitors and attracting more development. Furthermore, formal and informal training in the arts can abet the development of skills valued in the global economy — such as strong oral and written communication skills, precise and high-quality work performance, ease in working in teams and ensembles, comfort in new and innovative situations, and the ability to work well with people from diverse cultures.

*This briefing paper was written by Kimberley Hodgson, AICP (manager, Planning and Community Health Research Center, American Planning Association), and Kelly Ann Beavers (PhD candidate, Virginia Tech, and American Planning Association arts and culture intern), and edited by M. Christine Dwyer, senior vice president, RMC Research Corporation.*

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## Arts and Culture Briefing Papers

This is one in a series of briefing papers on how planners can work with partners in the arts and culture sector and use creative strategies to achieve economic, social, environmental, and community goals.

Prepared by the American Planning Association, as part of a collaborative project with the RMC Research Corporation and with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation.



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