

# A Community- Centered Road Map Towards an Equitable and Inclusive Creative Economy in Seattle

Community Engagement Findings  
and Recommendations



OFFICE OF ARTS & CULTURE  
SEATTLE

2019



Seattle Center Festál ethnic cultural festival  
representatives. Image provided by Vivian Huang.

# Executive Summary

In 2019, the City of Seattle released the study, **There's Something About Seattle: 2019 Creative Economy Report**. The goals of the report were threefold: 1) Define the creative economy; 2) Quantify the creative economy; 3) Inspire action.

The University of Washington, through the Evans School Student Consulting Lab, issued a subsequent report in the spring of 2019, **Assessing the Creative Economy of Seattle through a Race and Equity Lens**. Informed by the previous study, this report enhanced our state of knowledge about Seattle's creative economy through qualitative and quantitative data with a race and social justice lens. It identified key barriers that exist for accessing the creative economy for artists and creatives, especially for communities of color.

Each report offered direct insight into multiple levels of disparities that had particularly negative impacts on creatives of color. Our report, **A Community-Centered Road Map Towards an Equitable and Inclusive Creative Economy**, set out to engage directly with creatives, placing priority on creatives of color to explore the question: **How can the City grow, support and retain creatives while minimizing disparities and inequity within the creative economy?**

Through 15 intentionally selected focus groups and interviews that reached over **150 individuals** representing various creative occupations, gigs, and other artistic endeavors, the answers to our overarching question have led to a set of nine actionable and solution-oriented goals. They support the City's desire to find new pathways for growing, supporting, and retaining an equitable and inclusive creative community. They represent the realities creatives are facing in a city that is rapidly becoming unaffordable for many, compounded by the rapid growth of creative industries of which they are not a part. The goals are responsive to the needs of those who have found themselves either experiencing displacement or on the verge. These goals bridge findings of the two previous reports upon which it builds, and offer insight into new ways of aligning City investments that have both short- and long-term impacts. The goals included in this report are associated with recommended actions that suggest a **collaborative working relationship across City departments, in partnership with the Seattle Arts Commission and the Seattle Music Commission**.

## Summary of Goals

1. Improve Quality of Life for Artists and Creatives
2. Engage Harder to Reach Populations
3. Enhance Existing Initiatives and Create New Initiatives
4. Bridge Artists, Technology, and Creativity
5. Access to Artistic and Creative Work Space
6. Strategically Align the Work of the Commissions
7. Build More Strategic Collaborations Across City Departments
8. Stimulate Innovative Thinking
9. Integrate Existing Research and Data into Decision-making

Implementation of the recommended strategies and efficient use of resources will lead to the development of a Road Map to an Equitable and Inclusive Creative Economy for the City of Seattle.

# Acknowledgments

This report is a collaborative effort by the Office of Arts and Culture (ARTS) in partnership with the Office of Film and Music (OFM), the Office of Economic Development (OED), the Seattle Arts Commission and the Seattle Music Commission. The consultants, Vivian Phillips and Aline Moch Islas, are the main authors of this report and the individuals who conducted all the focus groups. Mytoan Nguyen-Akbar, PhD, contributed to the research, writing, and analysis as ARTS staff. Alex Rose contributed significant feedback on the report.

We wish to express our particular thanks to the hundreds of creatives involved in the focus group sessions, whose names are listed towards the end. This report would not have been possible without their contributions and openness to sharing their stories with us.

The process was guided by the Commission Co-Chairs Team, consisting of **Priya Frank, Vivian Hua, Tim Lennon, Amy Lillard, Reese Tanimura, and Sharon Williams**. We would like to thank everyone for their exemplary work, dedication, and patience in providing guidance for this report and community outreach process.

Special thanks to the focus group hosts Onyx Fine Arts Gallery, AFM Local 76-493, Wa Na Wari, CD Forum, LANGSTON, KEXP Youth Resonance Board, Youngstown Residents, SAM Equity Team, The Vera Project, 4Culture, Festál (Seattle Center), Creative Equity Fund (Seattle Foundation), Seattle City of Literature, and Seattle Latino Film Festival for sharing their meeting spaces and time.

Finally, special thanks should be addressed to the Internal Strategy Group comprised of **Randy Engstrom, Calandra Childers, Allie Lee, Erika Lindsay, Mytoan Nguyen-Akbar, and Alex Rose**, each of whom provided support and advice during all the stages of the community engagement process.

This report was designed by Milli.

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# Background

Since 2017, the City of Seattle has explored the many ways in which the whole of our creative community has been and continues to be impacted by the city's continuing growth. Various studies and activities have pointed to an **urgent need to implement new strategies that will serve to support and sustain creative workers** across sectors in order to recover the vitality that was the cornerstone of Seattle's internationally-renowned image.

# Introduction

Using the most recent studies, the *City of Seattle, There's Something About Seattle: 2019 Creative Economy Report (2019)*, and the *University of Washington Evans School of Policy and Governance, Assessing the Creative Economy of Seattle through a Race and Equity Lens Seattle (2019)*, as primary springboards, the Office of Arts & Culture (ARTS), together as partners with the Office of Film + Music (OFM), the Office of Economic Development (OED), the Seattle Arts Commission and the Seattle Music Commission, engaged in a community outreach strategy to invite members of the arts and creative community to participate in focus group conversations. Additionally, a series of Mixer events were held at various locations across the city, online surveys were made available for easy access to participation, and some in-depth interviews were conducted.

How can the City grow, support, and retain creatives while reducing disparities and inequities within the creative economy?

The overarching themes for the conversations were centered on the question of **how the City can grow, support, and retain creatives while reducing disparities and inequities within the creative economy.** With this overarching theme and the use of a racial equity lens, creatives of color were prioritized for participation in focus groups.

**One hundred fifty-one (151) creatives in the Seattle area participated in focus groups** (please refer to Appendix C: Who We Talked To). Our goal was to better understand how the City of Seattle could work more efficiently to meet the needs of Seattle's creative/artist community.

Overall, our year-long process of research and **community engagement has led to ARTS, OFM, and partners reaching over 850 individuals** through focus groups, surveys, and in-depth interviews to understand their stories of navigating the creative economy in Seattle. This report focuses on information gathered from focus groups and interviews (please refer to Appendix B: Methodology and Appendix D: Focus Group Questionnaire). The findings were then synthesized to offer a set of goals and action plans on **how the City can improve its work to better the conditions under which all creatives in Seattle, especially creatives of color, pursue their personal and professional careers.**

# About the Creative Economy

We understand that “creative economy” is an imperfect term that does not adequately speak to the community, cultural, and educational practices.

When we say ‘creatives,’ we are talking about those who do creative and cultural labor, both paid and unpaid, including artists, designers, authors, professionals, and creative entrepreneurs who freelance or “gig.”

We define the creative economy as a rapidly growing economic force that has creativity as the main driver; the definition is evolving and is open to debate.

Terminology matters: some in our focus groups responded more favorably to the term “creative ecosystem” or “arts and cultural workers” instead.

# What We Heard



Through our focus groups, creatives we talked with confirmed the following recurring themes<sup>1</sup> of what the creative economy currently looks like for them in this

city. These themes help us understand and acknowledge what disparities creatives of color experience in Seattle and how the City can grow and support the creative economy.

# Recurring Themes

**Affordability and Wages:** Many creatives across age groups mentioned the struggle to live in Seattle and participate fully in the local creative economy. Having to juggle multiple gigs to make a living wage. Lack of assistance in relocation and navigating soaring median incomes, a situation for many that makes it hard to live in Seattle.

**Structural Barriers:** Creatives mentioned the structural inequities that many people in Seattle face. Racism, displacement, and access to housing, among others, are larger barriers to entry and sustainable participation.

**Underrepresentation:** Leadership at major arts institutions is predominantly White, and the lack of visibility for the art sector as a whole inhibits participation in the creative economy, especially for people of color.

**Employment, Gig Economy, and Social Safety Nets:** At almost all of our focus groups, individuals affirmed the need to hold multiple jobs to make ends meet. An added stressor to this was the lack of benefits and the inability to access health insurance and other social safety net supports. One idea that emerged suggested the possibility of including artists in City employee insurance plans. "The first thing to do is realize that artists of all disciplines, it is a profession! They need to be treated the same way as any other profession," said one focus group participant.

**Lack of Opportunity, Resources, and Mentorship:** Most acknowledged the availability of grant funding for projects; however, there was concern that the conventional makeup of grants does not serve their needs for

basic support beyond project development. In at least half of the focus groups, the need for access to equipment, resources, and innovative technologies was mentioned (for example, the creation of a free software library that provides access to Adobe Creative Cloud, web design, and programming platforms). There were also multiple mentions of a lack of access to professional networks that extend directly into disenfranchised communities and the need for more mentorship programs.

**Need for Platforms and Physical Spaces:** In addition to the disadvantages presented by White-led institutions in undervaluing work created by creatives of color, there is a noticeable absence of physical spaces and platforms for creatives of color to showcase their work. Spaces that are available are burdened with trying to meet the needs of entire communities while also feeling the squeeze of temporary spaces and regular rent increases. Those who are running such spaces never achieve a sense of having the ability to become institutionalized and established in ways that White-led spaces have become, further delivering a sense of minimal value.

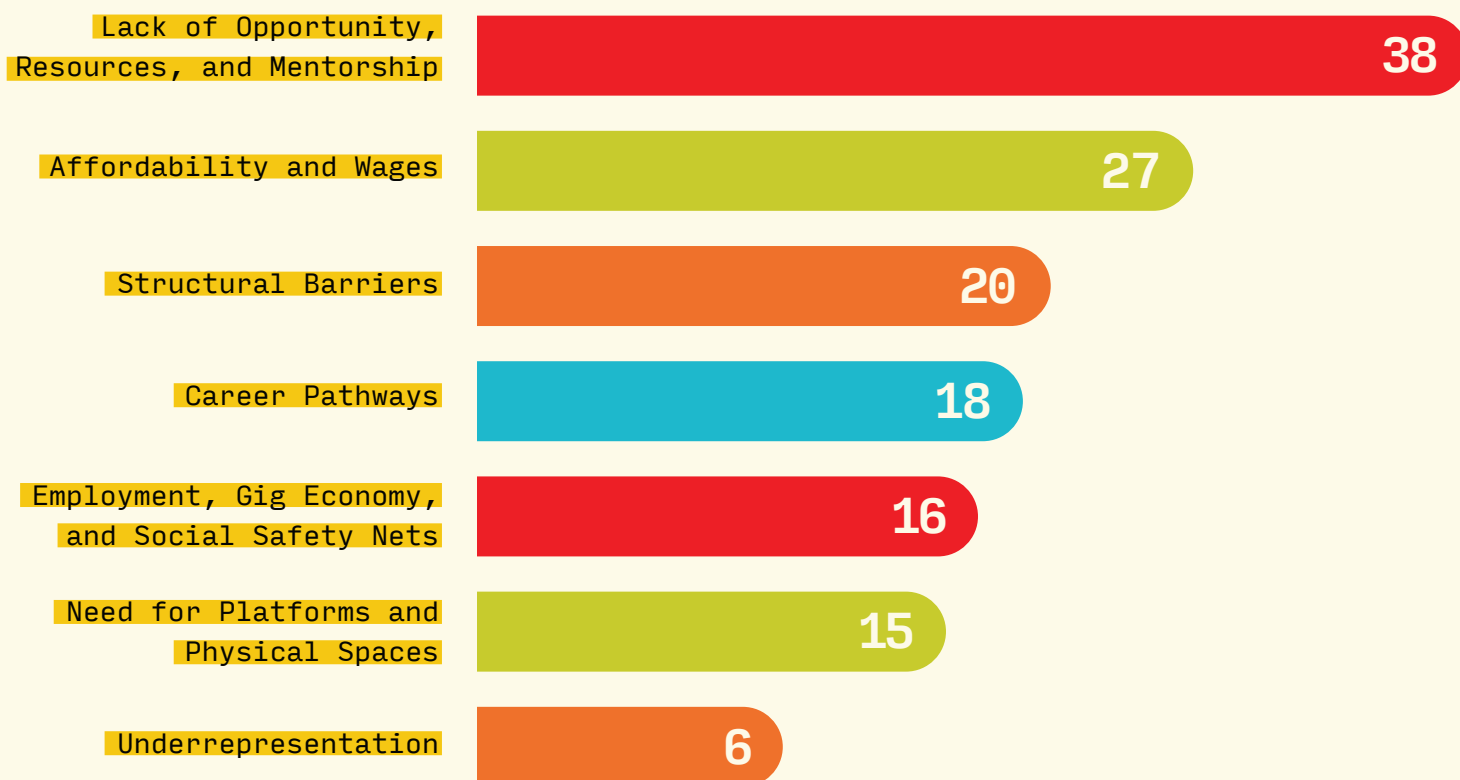
**Career Pathways:** Participation in many parts of the creative economy is often not considered a viable career option. This is compounded by the low visibility most feel the City offers for the arts and cultural communities, as compared to sports, for instance. A potential remedy is a full embrace of arts education, paid internships, and adequate cultural value placed upon arts careers.

"The first thing to do is realize that artists of all disciplines, it is a profession! They need to be treated the same way as any other profession."

- Focus Group Participant

## Creative Economy Themes By Frequency

The following chart shows the frequency of occurrence of each theme during the focus group sessions. As we can observe, the themes “Lack of Opportunity, Resources and Mentorship” and “Affordability and Wages” are the most mentioned by the participants in our conversations.



# Previously Unexplored Themes

Because our intentional recruitment for **focus group participants reached beyond those who are regularly in conversation with arts leaders and administrators, additional themes emerged** to daylight issues and concerns that can negatively impact the future of Seattle's vision for an inclusive and equitable creative sector. Participants also provided solutions that add to our awareness of what the issues and challenges are to full participation in the creative economy.

#### **Specific Space Needs for Arts and Cultural Workers:**

Arts administrators are finding themselves working in spaces that were created for needs that are 10 years or more in the rearview mirror. As institutions are becoming more inclined toward inviting new audiences into their spaces, new positions are being created to support initiatives that did not have precedence 5 or 10 years ago. An office space squeeze presents an opportunity for development of new ones; in half of the focus groups participants expressed an interest in participating in **shared arts co-working hubs** that can accommodate interns

and space for workers from different institutions and disciplines who can work alongside each other, **increase cross-institution collaboration, and reduce silos in creative sectors.**

**Venue Operations and Affordability:** One of the consequences of **increased housing costs and gentrification is the imminent closure of venues and spaces available** for emerging and local creatives like musicians and actors to perform in. At four focus groups, we heard a concern for the growing disconnect between venue owners and local creatives. Fair and equitable business contracting, along with social and civic responsibility to the communities they serve was at issue. Operations transparency was proposed as a means to help strengthen the collaboration between venue owners and musicians in order to create greater stability for venues. Specific recommended actions from one focus group participant included subsidizing rent of government-owned facilities to reclaim spaces for venues and a "1% for public venues" initiative.



City of Literature focus group session at Seattle Public Library. Photo credit: Aline Moch Islas.

**Youth Advocacy and Opportunities:** In addition to career pathways through “traditional” mentorship programs and paid internships, we also identified the **need to create pipelines** through business apprenticeships, youth advocacy, civic engagement, and cultural volunteer opportunities. Initiatives should be designed expressly to increase equitable access to information, reducing cost barriers, expanding marketing reach, and meeting young individuals in their communities. Both youth focus groups we conducted requested the creation of **youth-led events** where their voices are encouraged, centered, supported, and incentivized.

**Reframing the Narrative of Creatives as Both Artists and Workers:** We must reframe the narrative on artists as both creatives who make art for art’s sake and who are economic drivers (i.e., **income generators who are part of the workforce, and who contribute to the vibrancy and attractiveness of Seattle as a place to live, work, and visit**). One of the problems mentioned in a third of the focus groups is the lack of recognition of both the intrinsic value of the arts as well as the “indirect or multiplier effects” of creative work to the overall community economic development. Systemic approaches to closing disparities must come with the removal or reduction of barriers for creative small and micro businesses, most notably tax burdens and navigation of the permitting processes. The community of creatives has developed an acute awareness of short-term band-aid level fixes and resource infusions, as opposed to what they perceive as more systematic changes that address and reflect new economic realities. There is also a demand for systems that enforce industry fair wages, support for labor organizations, and adequate benefits/compensation for creatives (e.g., health insurance, Orca bus/transit cards).

**Celebrate Arts & Culture Media and Journalism:** The City has lost many platforms intended to support, market, and celebrate the arts and culture of the city. These losses have left large gaps in the ability for artists to be profiled and elevated as critical members of our community.<sup>2</sup> There is demand for a **sustainable ecosystem that encourages conversation about arts and culture**, heritage, creative industries, and places that hold space for historical knowledge and cultural legacies.<sup>3</sup> For example, “we don’t have any place that helps us look at the history of people like Jacob Lawrence and Octavia Butler, who made their mark here in Seattle,” said one of the focus group participants.

**Deepen Collaboration between the Arts and Technology Sectors:** In almost every session there was an emphatic request to prioritize the relationship across these industries and **bridge the gap between the tech sector and the creative community**. Despite the majority mentioning the need to open funding and sponsorship from the big corporations to individual artists and venues, other voices focused on the need to understand and engage with tech employees, encouraging participation in community arts and cultural events that mean so much for creatives, as places to connect and share.

**Commute and Public Transportation Costs:** As a consequence of unaffordable space in the city, many creative workers identified additional barriers if they were to move outside of Seattle city limits. The **budget and time creatives allocate for commute and parking have increased exponentially** in the last few years. In at least a third of the focus groups, the increasing costs of commuting, lack of public transportation at night and off hours, road tolls, and unavailable or expensive parking spaces around downtown were all identified as

“We don’t have any place that helps us look at the history of people like Jacob Lawrence and Octavia Butler, who made their mark here in Seattle.”

– Focus Group Participant

issues that directly affect creative workers and widen the gap between high- and low-income creatives.

**Late Night/Non-Standard Hours Worker Safety:** Public transportation and **nightlife work has become increasingly dangerous for creatives**, especially underrepresented communities, further eroding a sense of safety and negatively impacting their quality of life. Many creatives we talked with recognize that most of their gigs occur at odd hours, late night, and are paid in cash, exposing themselves for robbery and assaults after every gig. These concerns specifically relate to events, shows, and gallery exhibitions in Pioneer Square and Capitol Hill. For example, individuals who work in the music industry as well as culinary services have expressed their fear in utilizing public transportation and exposing themselves at odd hours.

**Need for Community Building:** During five of the focus group sessions, debates emerged regarding the importance of fostering community between artists and the rest of the community. The participants mentioned the need to develop ongoing community conversations which can favor not just the **networking between artists, but also the involvement with their community**. This theme was mentioned around two specific conversations: festivals and venues. Organizers of cultural festivals identified increasing difficulty in encouraging community (volunteers) to actively participate. As fewer volunteers have motivation to participate, the strain on financial resources and staff capacity increases. The second reference was related to the relationships between the artistic community and venue owners. While participants appreciated the opportunity for social and professional networking inherent in some forms of traditional artistic events, most eventually conceded that many of these efforts are limited by the lack of strategic follow-up to furthering successful community building. One participant mentioned that this lack of follow through can be a rising problem that contributes to growing silos: “Construction of community and networking takes a lot of time (persistence and consistency) and destruction is very easy.”

**Rebrand Seattle’s Image as a Creative City:** More than three focus groups mentioned that Seattle is not a place known for having a creative reputation outside the state of Washington. This is despite the cultural diversity and the rich creative history in the city.

**To build a city brand and elevate the image of Seattle that attracts tourists, the city and its partners should stimulate inward investment and boost cultural exports.**

Across a spectrum of cultural and event organizers, performers and even Mayor’s Arts Award recipients mentioned that they felt there was a lack of support that would allow them to continue their work locally. One participant shared his experience: “All the countries I’ve been traveling [through] know about Amazon and the other big corporations that are settled here, but I need to explain what else is Seattle. I need to explain the values of the Pacific Northwest. Most of the countries and partners (international creative organizations and individuals) associate this city as not creative-friendly.”

**The Work of Local Arts Agencies:** There is a lack of access to information and resources of the scope of work of the City Offices – namely, ARTS, OFM, and OED – and what their respective commissions do. Add to this the work of nonprofits and agencies such as Artist Trust, ArtsFund, and 4Culture. In more than three conversations, creatives who have been actively engaged in the creative economy expressed an interest in learning more about the work of the Arts and Music Commissions, as well as their capacity and role in City efforts. Participants expressed the need to have **open, transparent, and systematic communication platforms** with regards not just to artistic events and festivals, job opportunities, artists rosters, studio spaces, existing workshop and professional development events, but also to the art and creative organizations themselves, their programs and capacities.

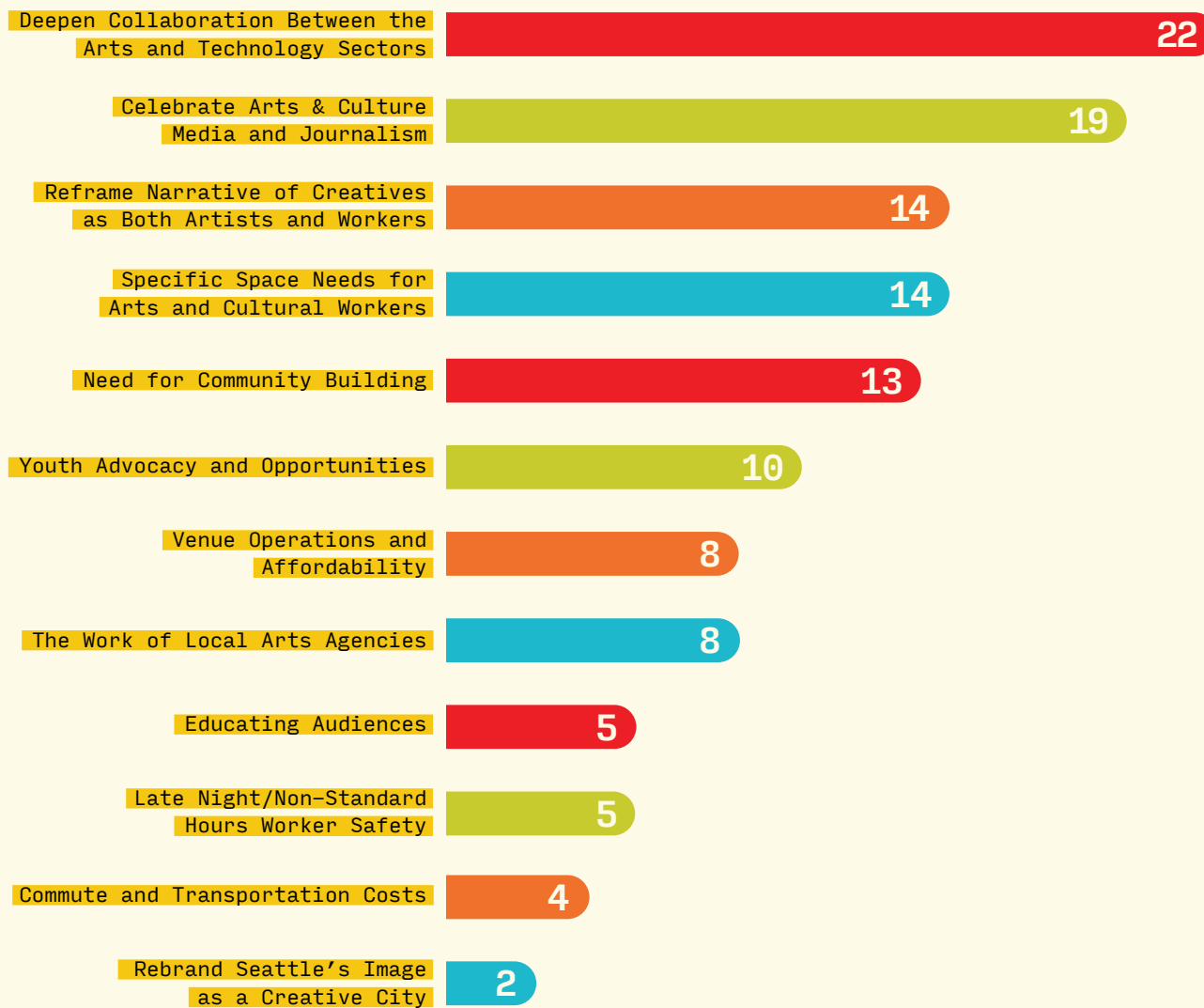
**Educating Audiences – Connecting More Deeply with Patrons:** Moving away from assumptions about audience demographics and levels of participation, people talked about **the need to be more intentional around audience education**. Considering a new generation of patrons is coming of age, there is a desire to acknowledge Seattle’s creative history and those who made it possible, particularly highlighting creatives of color. To restore a sense of cultural dignity, new audiences need to have a reference point for acknowledging that current innovations were preceded by generations of creatives, many from within underrepresented communities. The City should be the first to lead and carry on such celebrations.

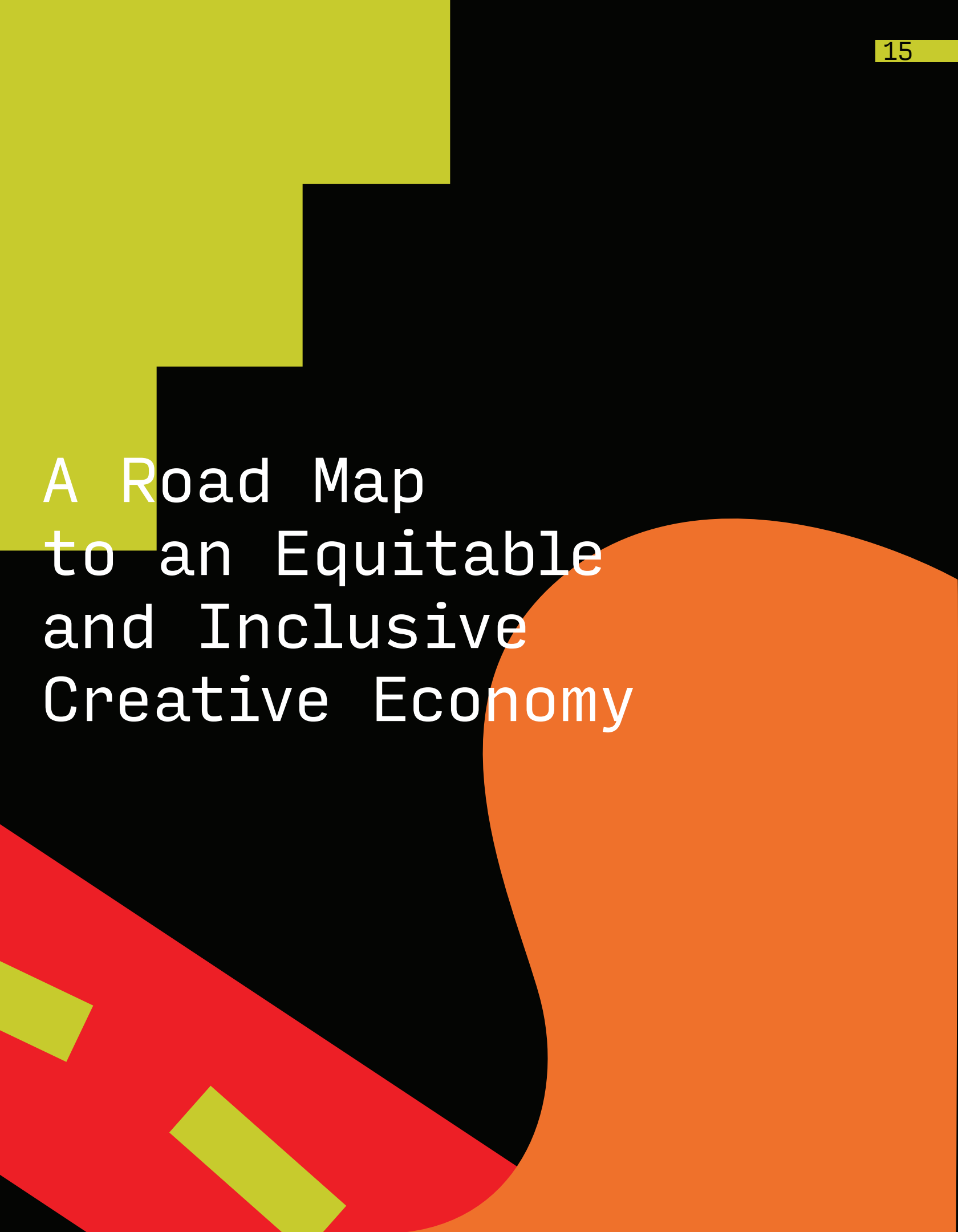
<sup>2</sup>See Leah Baltus report on arts media in Seattle, 2019.

<sup>3</sup>This could be an opportunity to increase the relationships and incentives with media, publicity, and marketing companies. A holistic campaign that promotes an awareness of the arts in general is imperative for a vibrant creative economy. Some examples are the need to amplify coverage of events like the Mayor’s Arts Awards (on TV, radio, streaming, and bus advertisements).

## Creative Economy Unexplored Themes By Frequency

Below we present a bar chart with the previously unexplored themes that emerged from the focus group conversations. The themes most frequently mentioned that stand out are “Collaboration Between the Arts and Technology Sectors”, “Celebrate Arts and Journalism”, and the importance of “Reframing the Narrative of Creatives as Artists and Workers”.



The background features a black field with several abstract shapes: a yellow stepped shape in the top left, a large orange rounded shape on the right, and a red shape at the bottom left containing two yellow diagonal bars.

# A Road Map to an Equitable and Inclusive Creative Economy



Participants in the Focus Group hosted by Wa Na Wari in Seattle's Central Area. Photo credit: Vivian Phillips.

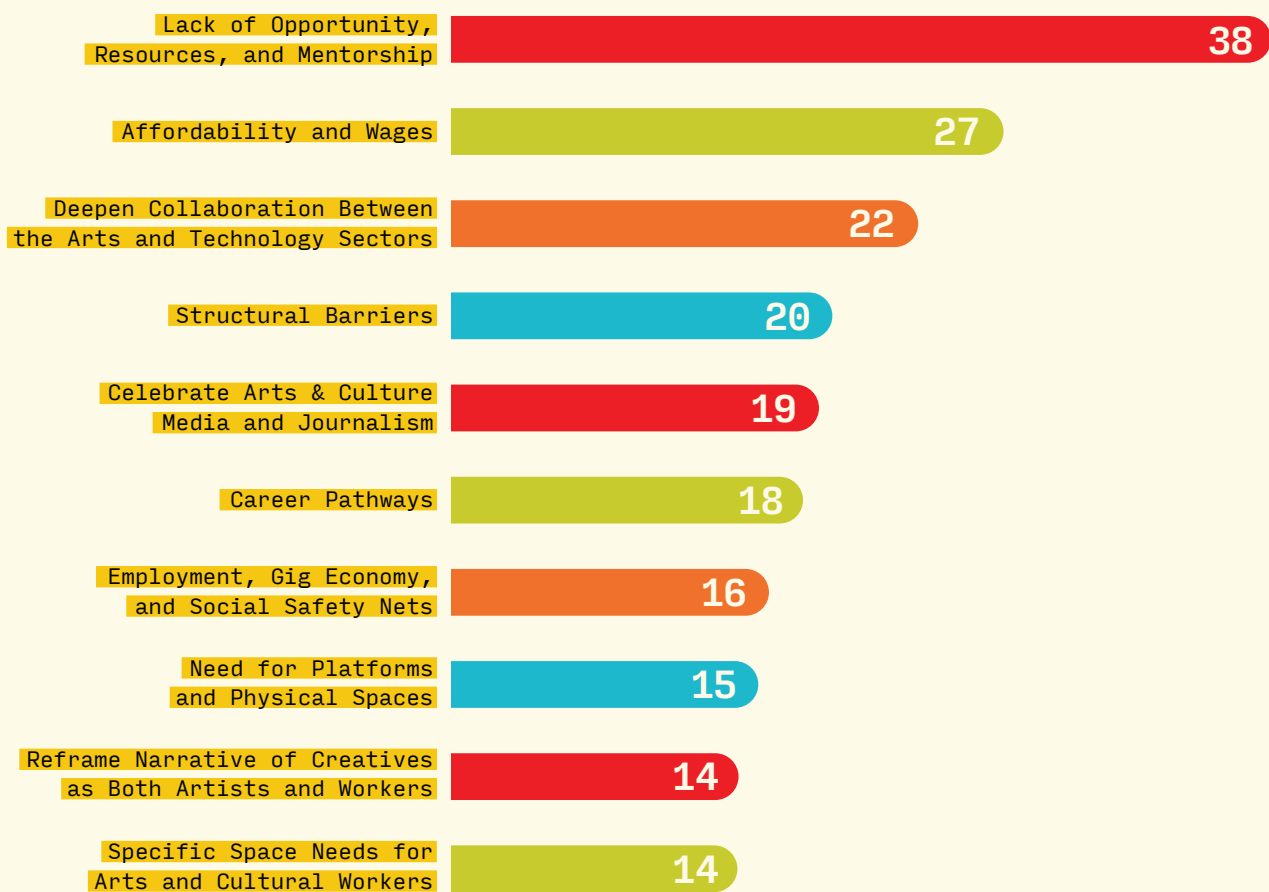


Participants did mention the **many resources that do exist** (see for instance, Appendix E: Impactful Assets That Currently Serve Creatives of Color). Thus, we recognize that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. We reviewed these assets, previous reports, and creative economy data, and compared these to our initial findings to develop the following road map that will help the City advance an inclusive and diverse creative workforce.

The road map is based on what we learned from the 151 individuals we talked to over the course of three

months. Again, our findings confirm what previous reports on the creative economy have been exploring and shed light on previously unexplored themes. The most frequently mentioned were Lack of Opportunity, Resources, and Mentorship; Affordability and Wages; Collaboration with the Tech Sector; Structural Barriers; and Celebrate Arts & Culture Media. Below we present a chart with the top ten themes by frequency.

## The Top 10 Most Mentioned Themes



This **Community-Driven Road Map** is an evolving document that is intended to be revisited as new insights get incorporated, priorities transform, and new strategic actions are required. We recommend each action be followed by an annual review.

Finally, the **nine Goals and Actions** will be explored by the Seattle Arts Commission and Seattle Music Commission, along with City staff to determine short- and long-term strategies.

## Improve Quality of Life for Artists and Creatives

At a recent town hall<sup>4</sup>, Seattle Arts Commissioner and creative Sharon Williams posed the question, “Can the city get as excited about its creative community as it does to announce that a new tech company is moving to town?” The **City must take the lead in creating a culture of reverence and respect** for the vast creative community.

### Action 1.1

Enforcement of fair wages and support for basic benefits are essential elements for supporting the network of creatives who find themselves on the outside of a thriving landscape.

### Action 1.2

Incorporate mental health into resource and professional development offerings. Likewise, create a comprehensive and holistic plan that includes artists in City insurance and healthcare plans.

### Action 1.3

Develop strategies that help to mitigate the rising costs of transportation for creatives, perhaps through subsidized Orca cards.

<sup>4</sup>Seattle City Council Cultural Sector Forum at Town Hall, organized by Inspire Washington and KNKX, moderated by Florangela Davila (KNKX News Director), October 7, 2019.

## Engage Harder to Reach Populations

The community engagement and mixer events reached over 850 individuals this past year who are ready and willing to participate in strategies that work toward building the future they all want to see. This is a **multi-ethnic, multi-generational and multi-arts genre group of creatives** who want to use their skills and experiences to inform the work of our city government.

### Action 2.1

We encourage the creation of a “share back” event as a culmination of community outreach efforts developed by ARTS in 2019. This type of event should be annual with a report of the action and strategies implemented to increase trust and accountability to these communities.

### Action 2.2

Continue the work of The Mixer and networking events, as well as evidence-based programs, online resources, and learning opportunities for City staff and creatives to share resources.

### Action 2.3

Invest in “relationship hubs” where individuals of underrepresented communities already activate long-lasting relationships with their communities (comprised of both individuals and organizations). These hubs are spaces already valuable to the community that should continue being a welcoming and safe environment for artists. Some examples mentioned in the focus groups are King Street Station, Youngstown, Onyx Gallery, the Wing Luke Museum, Studio Lazo, Wa Na Wari, LANGSTON, and The Vera Project.



## Enhance Existing Initiatives and Create New Initiatives

Further explore the following actions for **incorporation into existing, new or expanded opportunities**. Specific opportunities and existing models for increased support are included in Appendix E.

### Action 3.1

We encourage the implementation of recommendations proposed by the UW report starting with the Gig-Focused Job Bank, Creative Support Workshops, ARTS-Funded Internships, Dedicated POC Art Grant Program, and Creative Residencies with the City of Seattle.

### Action 3.2

Create the following resources: physical and digital hub to function as Information Kiosks/Centers (to disseminate info about shows, studio spaces, etc.), promotion of events through an app using a similar model to the "Space Finder" platform but for cultural and artistic events, and a Software Library making software more accessible to artists and creative workers without the barrier of costly licensing fees.

### Action 3.3

In alignment with The Creative Advantage work, the City can provide the resources (capacity and space) for the creation of a series of youth-led events. Allocate resources to sponsor and support the subsequent proposals that will come from these youth meetings. The events should be developed in partnership with existing youth organizations and programs that serve underrepresented youth populations.

# Goal 4

## Bridge Artists, Technology, and Creativity

To develop and execute comprehensive and sustainable activities to retain and promote a creative economy within the city there must be an **effective understanding of the diversity among artists and their relationship with technology and creativity.**

### Action 4.1

Partner with the Mayor's Innovation Advisory Council to address recommendations and develop pathways for greater collaboration with the robust local tech industry.

### Action 4.2

Increase collaboration and support through provision of bundled membership for tech employees to spend time in the community exploring arts activities and offerings, or provide incentives to hire local artists for TV series, video games, commercial films, and advertising.

### Action 4.3

Increase the space, grants, and resources available to creatives whose work lies at the intersection of art and technology: video game creators, immersive media makers (virtual/augmented/mixed reality, 360 video, etc.), digital media artists, streaming content producers (e.g. YouTube, Twitch), and podcasters. Recognize their work through media awareness campaigns, publication and presence in conventions.

## Access to Artistic and Creative Work Space

To actively develop and implement innovative approaches to **improve housing affordability, venues, and work spaces for creatives**, continue implementing the CAP Report best practices.

### Action 5.1

There is a need to increase the value placed on spaces that support cultural administrators. Consideration should be given to the creation of space specifically for this purpose. Incorporate these efforts into the vision for a new Arts and Cultural Space Public Development Authority.

### Action 5.2

The City should place greater emphasis on the role it can play as a liaison between venues and artists.

### Action 5.3

Develop creative incubation space more broadly across the city.

### Action 5.4

Explore ways to build affordable housing utilizing the Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association at Youngstown model as a benchmark.



Group discussion at Youngstown. Image provided by Erika Bell.

## Strategically Align the Work of the Commissions

We recognize the **Arts and Music Commissions and their members are key stakeholders** in the upcoming work of the creative economy in the city. Although they are independent bodies working with the City, they should be activated to further develop policy actions.

### Action 6.1

Incorporate findings and actions into the Commissions' strategic planning and work plan development processes.

### Action 6.2

Create innovative, inclusive, open, and systemic communication platforms about the City departments' programs, capacities, and specifically, the Commissions' advocacy work and Commission members. Meet communities in their own locations through specific events to share general information about department services, programs, and resources. Additionally, the City should review and assure that information is found in digital platforms, recorded, transcribed, and translated into Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese, Amharic, Tigrinya, Somali, as well as other languages if possible, and uploaded to the ARTS website in an online resource hub to ensure accessibility.

### Action 6.3

Connect more deeply with patrons to restore a sense of cultural dignity across new and existing audiences. Just as event programs usually carry messages of welcome from the Artistic or Managing Director, there could also be a message from Seattle's Mayor and/or Commissions, that speaks to the value of all creatives who make the performance, the exhibit, or the film possible.

# Goal 7

## Build More Strategic Collaboration Across City Departments

As the Office of Arts & Culture, Office of Film + Music, Office of Economic Development, Seattle Arts Commission and Seattle Music Commission continue to develop their collaborative and inclusive creative economy strategy, all of the independent bodies of work should be used to further develop final policy actions. **Prioritize strategies to address the most frequently mentioned themes.**

### Action 7.1

In order to achieve the highest degree of collaboration and efficiency we recommend that key stakeholders from ARTS, OED, and OFM combine efforts to create a strategy using the plethora of data gathered in 2019.

### Action 7.2

Better coordinate across entities to help artists navigate available financial, technological, and professional development resources. Create a one-stop-shop for resources available within King County, including via 4Culture, ARTS, etc.

### Action 7.3

Re-create Seattle's brand identity as one that is more aligned with celebration of arts and culture. There were multiple mentions of Seattle not feeling like an arts and culturally rich city that fully supports its creative community. Embarking upon a brand campaign that puts arts and culture at the center is suggested as a way to reinvigorate a sense of cultural vibrancy and celebrate creatives. The campaign would incorporate awareness through advertising and offer Ambassadorships and Cultural Liaison opportunities supported by grant funds. It could also be an effort in collaboration with Visit Seattle (Seattle and King County tourism agency) to align internal marketing efforts.

### Action 7.4

Share these findings and data with City departments such as Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Police Department, and Seattle Fire Department. Create a collaborative strategy that brings together King County Metro and SDOT to explore ways to address commute and safety concerns, specifically addressing barriers to participation for underrepresented communities.



## Goal 8

### Stimulate Innovative Thinking

Following the UW research team work, we believe in the importance of grounding any action plan in criteria to strengthen the analysis and stimulate innovative thinking in the ARTS office.

#### Action 8.1

Analyze the strategies and actions using the primary and secondary criteria developed by the UW research team. Any strategies should have an analysis of the cost-effectiveness, feasibility, ease of implementation and, most importantly, centering of racial equity – a transformational shift for existing institutions.

#### Action 8.2

Develop key indicators to help track the changes of the creative economy in the city over time. The indicators or metrics should be developed by integrating research with an in-depth analysis of the quantitative data and the individuals' narratives. A racial equity assessment and monitoring practices must be established.

### Integrate Existing Research and Data into Decision-making

We recommend that the sum of all relevant studies be interlaced with the findings outlined in this report to create an overall strategy.

#### Action 9.1

Compare the findings and recommendations with the UW Evans School report, *Assessing the Creative Economy of Seattle through a Race and Equity Lens*, and the quantitative data of the City of Seattle's *There's Something About Seattle: 2019 Creative Economy Report*.

#### Action 9.2

Over the summer of 2019, four mixer events were developed to address the following topics: creativity and tech, surviving and thriving in the creative gig economy, space affordability, and advancing equity in the arts. The goals included in this report should evolve with the findings from OFM's The Mixer events to help identify priorities and potential goals within each area and define the corresponding strategies.

#### Action 9.3

In addition to this community engagement process, three additional bodies of work were taking place concurrently. There has to be an interface of the recommendations of the findings outlined in the following reports:

- The Ostara Group. *Seattle Film Industry Engagement Findings and Priorities Report*. Karen Hirsch. Seattle, 2019
- Fife Consulting. *City of Seattle Special Events and Strategy 2020-2025*. Andy Fife et al. Seattle, 2019.
- Leah Baltus. *Arts Media Landscape Analysis and Recommendations*. Seattle, 2019.

The celebration and recognition of arts and culture is an urgent need in the city, and it was mentioned in 80% of our focus groups. The participants mentioned the need for media coverage of the local communities as well as the need to increase promotion of the arts in TV, newspapers, magazines and even public transportation billboards and advertisements. We recommend developing a short-term strategy that combines the findings from this report and those of the Baltus report.

## Goal 9

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# Focus Group Takeaways and Lessons Learned

# Takeaways from our Focus Group Process

- Increased **collaboration** between ARTS, OFM, and Arts and Music Commissions with the general public
- Opened a **safe space and conversation for underrepresented communities** to express their experiences and opinions
- Participant **appreciation** for being invited to share their experiences - relationship building with City agencies
- Built **networking opportunities** while fostering relationships and collaboration among participants
- **Community buy-in** as the City moves forward with the creative economy planning and initiative implementation
- **Appreciative and welcoming environment** from focus group participants in local spaces and with community leaders who were thankful for having Vivian Phillips, someone with a trusted and experienced background working in the arts and with creatives of color, as their main point of contact

ONYX Fine Arts Collective. Image provided by Lola E. Peters.  
Photo credit: Jay Taylor Photography.



# Lessons Learned and Outreach Limitations

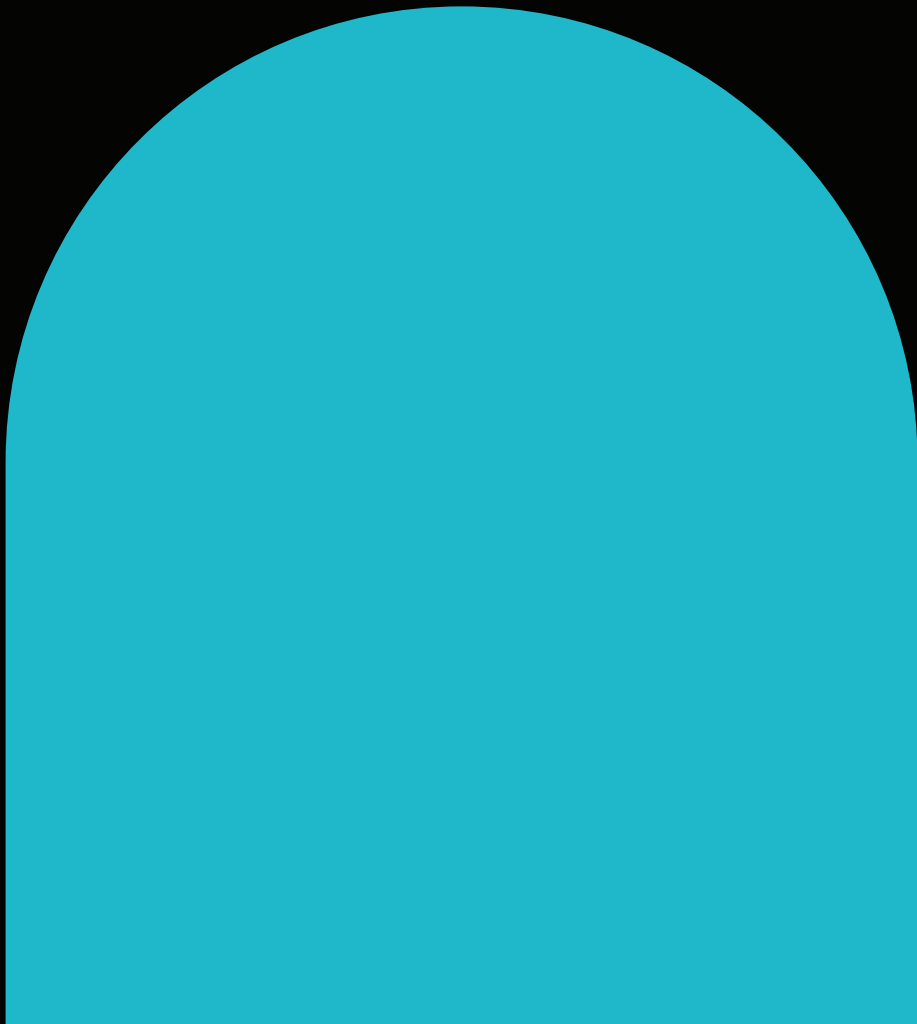
The participation of the Commission Co-chairs as community “connectors” was fundamental to recruitment for focus groups. They were key people to understanding community and helped us reach otherwise marginalized groups within the creative economy that are experiencing firsthand some of the barriers they found unique to their experience as creatives of color.

We recognize there are still a number of communities that we didn’t have the capacity to fully incorporate into our process, including but not limited to, Indigenous creatives, Pacific Islander communities, refugees and immigrant populations, and transgender artists.

Compensating participants and meeting in communities’ own spaces was a favorable outcome as we recognize there is a limited capacity to participate, especially for those who experience structural barriers of racism and lower wages. In this sense, creating a welcoming environment by providing food and a space to socialize went a long way to develop trust with creatives.

Lastly, we recognize the coding process was constrained due to time limitations as well as the number of members in the research team. However, these themes can be “triangulated” with previous study findings.

# Conclusion



# Conclusion

Our community outreach revealed several essential themes that helped create the road map for advancing the city's creative economy by elevating the voices of marginalized groups. We recognize there is no quick solution or singular strategy that will improve the diversity and inclusion problems in the city's creative economy. Instead, the City and its stakeholders must truly commit to change through a **holistic approach** to address the problem by following these actions.

We encourage the development of an evaluation strategy that incorporates the process, findings, as well as key indicators to **measure the efficacy of the road map** in the short- and long-term creative economy of Seattle. This evaluation would be designed to help inform future public involvement efforts in relation to the sum of reports completed by the City of Seattle Office of Arts & Culture and its partners.

We look with optimism toward the initiatives and upcoming work of the City to achieve equitable growth, support, and retention of creatives in Seattle's creative economy and arts ecosystem.



# Appendices



# A. Artists' Stories

"When I met this artist, 6 years ago, I met him at a party and he was painting. He said, 'yes I'm an artist,' and I said 'that is great' and we became Facebook friends. He posted one of his pieces of art on Facebook, and I said 'Oh, that is really beautiful!' I reached out to him and said, 'I might have someone that would like to buy that,' and his response to me was 'Oh, they can't, I already stripped it and painted over it.' And I said, 'you did what?!' And said, 'why did you do that?' And he said, '**I can't afford another canvas.**' But if I show you right now this person's work you would be blown away. I connected this person to ONYX (Fine Arts Collective) and they said to the artist, 'Here is how you are going to get the canvas and you are never going to do that again.' Now he is all over the place as a well-known painter."

- Attendee at ONYX Focus Group

"The clubs/venues are totally unorganized and are a totally unregulated business model. We hear a lot of concerns from musicians about standards in the clubs. A conversation I had with a friend yesterday who said, 'the last time I was in so and so place, they stopped me with that admissions tax,' which is prohibited what you are not supposed to do, and I've read about that thing. It says that you are not supposed to stick the tax to your employees or customers. They charged the band a surcharge to pay the tax. Which is not legal. And you could get so many businesses, which makes me think that education is realistically the place to start. Also, the good responsible venue owner that is transparent, that makes the space available to make the state and civic need, is rewarded by the customers and the workers."

- Attendee at AFM Local 76-493 Focus Group

"All the places that I've lived in, the building has been sold, for redevelopment or whatever. And that unfortunately when I think of space is one of my biggest issues right now. Of course, I can work in a place where I can be in a rehearsal studio, that has helped with where to perform. But where to live? I'm now in a two-month temporary sublet, and then look for where to live for the remainder of the year. And it is so hard, it is so very hard. Especially for my medium income that is affordable enough so it can't get me out of the range and that is affordable enough so that I don't need to gig all the time just to pay the rent or that I don't need to spend more than 2/3 of my income on the rent. We can't afford to live here and live in buildings that might be sold. I come from L.A., and L.A. has its own issues, but here there is a lack of relo-

cation assistance. Because in L.A. that is a big thing, but that is one thing they can't move someone without relocation assistance. So, that has been a big problem and been weighing on me. So, more assistance in relocation for the income bracket that I'm in and the honest ability to meet those financial needs and still work. The new developments are very confusing, navigating what are the income requirements and the cost of the unit is incredible! How people know that new buildings are affordable is a missing element. Also, a lot of families need to find a space, and we creatives are up against this with families (single mothers with children) and we are all fighting for the same studio."

- Attendee at Wa Na Wari Focus Group who identifies as a POC Dancer & Arts Teacher

"I've been homeless since I was 15. All I want is an affordable place to live and make my art. I don't think that's too much to ask. The city is building all these new apartments and I wish I could live there."

- Youth Attendee at Washington Hall Focus Group

"I feel like every month is the last time I can do it, the basic things (pay rent, groceries, transportation, etc). Every month I ask myself if this is my last month, and then I pull it off. And I don't know how... but I always feel I should get something (work) 'stable.' Instead of 50 million gigs... This was the first year I was able to pay an employee, because it was a huge thing, I got here where I can afford to employ other people, but still, how am I going to make it? And be able to continue to employ other people and support myself?"

"My biggest mistake was to go to art school... and it doesn't feel like people have the space to make rehearsals, but also do burlesque and I need time to go to other shows, and rehearse, and build another season, but I don't have time to just craft the thing... time to rest and relax... so the past 2 months I couldn't do any shows, I needed time to reassess."

- Attendee at CD Forum/LANGSTON Focus Group, who identifies as a POC Burlesque Artist



## B. Methodology

The conversations were organized, scheduled and facilitated by Vivian Phillips, creative economy consultant to ARTS, and former Seattle Arts Commission Chair, with support from the respective hosts. To ensure accurate capture of information, the process and sessions had the support of Aline Moch Islas, creative economy consultant to ARTS. A focus group toolkit was established that included background information and the findings and recommendations from the UW Evans School report, and was provided to all participants in advance. The consultant team created and sent all of the invitations to group meetings, and provided refreshments. Hosts were asked to provide space and contact information. This project was also staffed by Mytoan Nguyen-Akbar, Impact and Assessment Manager at ARTS.

In total, **151 individuals** participated in 15 focus groups and 3 interview sessions during summer 2019. Participating creatives include but are not limited to these occupations: visual artists, dancers, burlesque performers, singers, songwriters, film directors, gig workers, hip-hop artists, arts managers from the non-profit sector (including executive directors, program managers, fundraisers and other staff), union representatives, museum administrators, librarians, video gamers, YouTubers, podcasters, and festival organizers.

The cumulative efforts of the creative economy project include:

- OED statistical report based on Emsi data
- UW Capstone Team data analysis of the existing Creative Vitality Index dataset
- UW Capstone Team in-depth interviews = 16
- UW Capstone Team large-scale survey= 255
- OFM Mixer events = 320
- Focus groups/individual interviews = 151

The majority of the creatives that participated in our focus groups<sup>5</sup> live in zip codes that include Rainier Valley, Central District, Beacon Hill, and Madrona in Seattle. These neighborhoods have a greater representation of individuals of color compared to the rest of the city, which matches our goal to elevate the voices of creatives of color.

It is important to mention that **more than 20%** of the participants that provided their zip code data live outside of Seattle and the majority of them work in the city.

Our **host partners** included ONYX Fine Arts, AFM Local 76-493, Wa Na Wari, CD Forum/LANGSTON, KEXP Youth Resonance Board, Youngstown Residents, Seattle Art Museum Equity Team, The Vera Project, youth members (from The Hydrant, Creative Justice, and the City of Music Roundtable), Seattle Public Library (City of Literature), Seattle Center (Festál), Seattle Foundation, Seattle Latino Film Festival, King County Cultural Strategist, and 4Culture.

<sup>5</sup>The total number of participants was 151, however we are missing the zip code data of 59 creatives.

# C. Who We Talked To

Thank you to the many individuals who participated and the organizations that helped us host and spread the word to get involved in the community outreach process.

## Organizations

21 Progress  
 4Culture  
 AAWA  
 AFM Local 76-493 (The Musicians' Association of Seattle)  
 API Heritage Month Festál  
 Arts Corps  
 ArtsFund  
 Brazil Center  
 Brazil Fest  
 Central District Forum for Arts & Ideas (CD Forum)  
 Chief Seattle Club  
 City of Literature  
 City of Music Youth Roundtable  
 Creative Justice  
 Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association (DNDA)  
 Diwali Lights India  
 Elliott Bay Book Company  
 Festál  
 Hip Hop is Green  
 Hugo House  
 IATSE Local 15 (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees)  
 Indigenous Showcase  
 International Capoeira Angola Foundation (ICAF) Seattle  
 Juan Alonso Studio  
 KEXP Youth Resonance Board  
 King County Cultural Strategist  
 LANGSTON  
 Northwest African American Museum (NAAM)  
 Northwest Film Forum  
 Northwest Folklife  
 Northwest Tap Connection  
 ONYX Fine Arts  
 Open Books: A Poem Emporium  
 Philippine Festival  
 Satterberg Foundation  
 Seattle Art Museum Equity Team  
 Seattle Center  
 Seattle Foundation  
 Seattle Latino Film Festival  
 Seattle Office of Arts & Culture

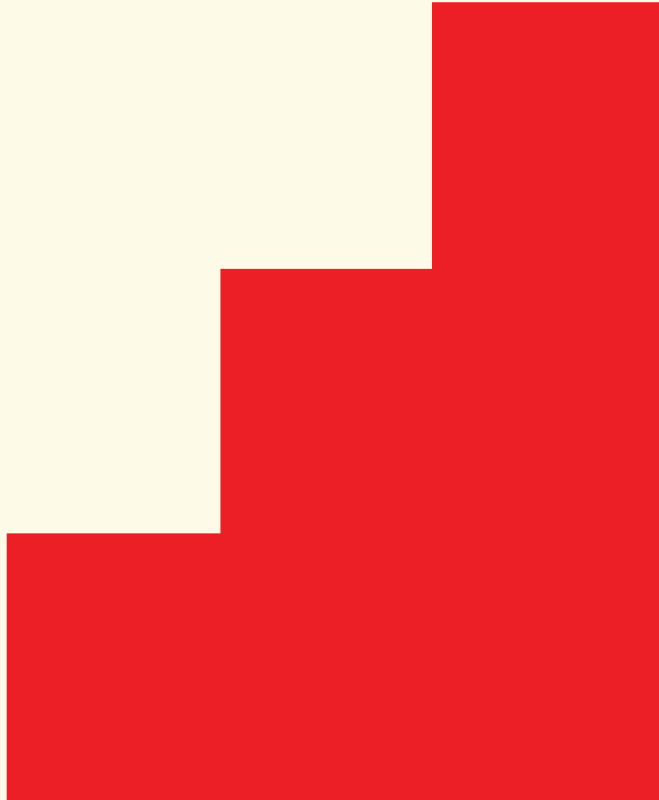
Seattle Foundation  
 Macklemore  
 Microsoft  
 Nesholm Family Foundation  
 Seattle Public Library  
 Seattle University  
 Spectrum Dance Theater  
 Seattle Theatre Group  
 Studio Lazo  
 Surge Reproductive Justice  
 TeenTix  
 The Hydrant  
 The Vera Project  
 Tibet Fest  
 Totem Star  
 Wa Na Wari  
 Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience  
 Youngstown

## Individuals

Anna Allegro  
 Brittany Allyson  
 Juan Alonso-Rodriguez  
 Aurora B  
 Kate Becker  
 Erika L. Bell  
 David Bestock  
 Susanna Bluhm  
 Stesha Brandon  
 Julie Chang Schulman  
 Barbara Calander  
 Brian J. Carter  
 Jenn Charoni  
 Jason Clackley  
 Virginia Coffman  
 Minnie Collins  
 Monique Courcy  
 Mary Cutrera  
 Lucy D  
 Zoser D  
 Earnest D. Thomas  
 Ruth Dickey

Molly Duttey	Emily Kelly	Debbie Miller	Rick Simonson
Bailey E	Kerry	Nia-Amina Minor	Sky
Jace ECAj	Omitosin King	Delia Mulholland	Motter Snell
Esther Ervin	Hasaan Kirkland	Sharon Nyree Williams	Scott Squire
Marco Farroni	Kayla L	Maggie O'Rourke	Tree Swenson
Kelli Faryar	Frank L	Nate Omdal	Billie Swift
Priya Frank	Alec L	Merri Ann Osborne	Sharmaine T
Nakeesa Fraziek-Jennings	Cameron L	Kathryn P	Koloud "Kay" Tarapolsi
L. Fried	Tim Lennon	Daniel Pak	Dominique Thomas
Andrea A. Friedland	Elena Loper	Maia Pagán	Traci Timmons
Sevawn G	Clara M	JP Paredes	Karen Toering
Jashuné G	Sebastian M	Lola Peters	Peter Tsai
Erwin Galah	Dajon M	Isabella L. Price	Tenzin Tsomo
Paul Goldstein	Lynia M	Harmony R	Bryce V
Jorge E. Gonzalez Pacheco	Michael Madder	Diana R	Aurelio V
Ricky Graboski	Michael B Maine	Ashby Reed	Aline Vida
Olivia Hamilton	Marcus	Juan Carlos Reyes	Nina Wasankari Perceful
Emily Harrir	Mars	Perri Rhoden	Tekla Waterfield
Eddie B. Hill	Alyssa Martini	Jen Richardson	Nari Weaver
Susan James	Naomi McCulloch	Fausto Rivera	Malcom Williams
George Jennings	Elizabeth McDaniel	Bella S	Brenetta Ward
Desiree Jones	Maria McDaniel	Hero S	Nina Yarbrough
Mirabai K	Eduardo Mendonça	Latha Sambamurti	Karen Zammit
Yeji K	Ana Paula Mendonça	Jessica Schollmeyer	
Kaela K	Sharlese Metcalf	Jazmyn Scott	
Megan Kelly	Yeggy Michael	Martin Sepulveda	

Note: All youth are identified by first name and last initial.



# D. Focus Group Questionnaire

1. What are some of your thoughts about the creative economy (creative economy definition from the UW study: “Creative and cultural labor – both paid and unpaid – carried out by people living or working in the Seattle area”)?
2. Do you feel included in the creative economy in Seattle?
  - i. If not, why?
  - ii. What are some of the challenges you have experienced while working, or trying to work, in Seattle’s creative economy?
  - iii. And what are some of the opportunities you’ve had?
3. Can you point to specific actions, activities, and experiences that you would consider good examples of things working well for creatives in Seattle?
4. What resources do you need to succeed as part of the creative economy in Seattle?
5. There are 3 specific aspects we would like to get your thoughts about. They are:
  - i. Space affordability
  - ii. Youth opportunity/career pathways
  - iii. Affordability and wages
6. Would you also like to comment on the following?  
Relationships to the Creative Tech Industry  
Structural barriers that may include:
  - i. Underrepresentation
  - ii. Undervaluing art created by people of color
7. Are there other thoughts you would like to share, or suggestions you would like to make?

## E. Impactful Assets That Currently Serve Creatives of Color

Participants did recognize the many resources that do exist. Specific opportunities and existing models for increased support include:

- Continue growing programs such as Artists Up and Seattle Made.
- Expand direct outcomes from City-supported Career Days (e.g. City of Music Career Day, Film Career Day).
- Develop initiatives that provide longer term support for collective-run gallery and cultural spaces like ONYX Fine Art Gallery and Wa Na Wari.
- Expand youth programs at KEXP, Totem Star, and collaborations with The Vera Project and TeenTix. Participants recognized the work of Intiman Theater's Starfish Project.
- Elevate and continue the work of affordable housing models such as the Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association at Youngstown.
- Help elevate the presence of local creatives at PAX, Comic Con, and independent games developer events where they tend to be relegated to "dark corners of the room".
- Support stronger alliances and share best practices between organizations like Reel Grrls and Northwest Film Forum to create collaborative programs such as "Be an Influencer".

## F. Study Team

**Vivian Phillips** is a former Arts Commissioner and Commission chair. She is an arts management and communications consultant, formerly director of marketing and communications for Seattle Theatre Group, and director of communications to Mayor Paul Schell. Founding member of the Historic Central Area Arts and Cultural District, and The Hansberry Project African American Theatre Lab, and founding advisor to the Arts Ecosystem Research Project.

**Aline Moch Islas, MPA**, has conducted quantitative and qualitative data analysis and provided support to a variety of private and public arts and culture organizations while working in Mexico City and Seattle. She is interested in elevating the voices of all marginalized communities through rigorous research and policy analysis to collectively develop programs and new opportunities.

**Mytoan Nguyen-Akbar, PhD**, advised on this project in her capacity as Impact and Assessment Manager at the Office of Arts & Culture. Her research background is in studies of comparative race and ethnicity, qualitative methods, and public policy analysis. She began working on this project as a Mellon/American Council of Learned Societies Public Fellow (2017-2019) at the City of Seattle.

**Alex Rose**, Creative Economy Advocate for both the Office of Film + Music and Office of Arts & Culture, contributed significantly to this report.

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