

Cultural Spaces Inventory

Neighborhood Deep Dive

Best Practices



OFFICE OF ARTS & CULTURE
SEATTLE

Cultural Space Investigation

Thank you for your efforts to improve the City of Seattle's [Cultural Space Inventory](#). Contained here are some thoughts and “best practices” developed by a team of University of Washington planning and design students in the course of their “deep dive” into cataloguing the University District’s cultural spaces. Using this document and the links embedded, we hope that you will deepen the city’s understanding of the cultural space assets in your neighborhood. Please feel free to reach out to Cultural Space Liaison [Matthew Richter](#) for more information.

While this guide is not an exhaustive review, the examples are intended to provide glimpses of the challenges and solutions that were encountered in one neighborhood. As you, the user of this document, come up with your own solutions, please let us know and we’ll add to this tool. Deepening our understanding of the presence of cultural spaces is crucial as the Office of Arts & Culture strives to empower communities through its programs and its investments.

Defining Scope

The first step to performing a Cultural Spaces Inventory Neighborhood Dive is defining your scope. When defining the scope of the deep dive three initial decisions need to be made;

1. **Establish the boundaries of your neighborhood.** Define where you will be doing the search. These boundaries may be official [City of Seattle neighborhood boundaries](#), or any custom geography you prefer, but be sure to define it clearly.
2. Discuss **what is considered a cultural space** (museum, record store, library, theater, etc) and what is not considered a cultural space (coffee shop, public art, sidewalk where an art fair happens, etc). Make sure to use the Office of Arts & Culture’s [definition of cultural space](#) for reference, to maintain consistency between neighborhood inventories. Feel free to engage the office with questions about their definition.
3. **Set a timeline** for the deep dive and let it be known, both within your group and to the neighborhood, that this “deep dive” neighborhood project has an end-date. Capture as much information as you can within that timeline, but also know that the larger Inventory project is ongoing, and in fact is premised on the idea that we are not simply capturing a snapshot, but we are identifying changes over time.

Finding Spaces

- **Walk the Grid** Walking down every street is time-consuming, but ensures that spaces aren’t overlooked, and allows you to spot smaller signage for spaces that might be hidden inside of buildings, and spaces that might not have retail street frontage.
- **Windshield observations** For more spread-out neighborhoods, an initial survey could be done from a car or bike. This method provides up-to-date information, but requires a vehicle and a driving partner – please do not attempt to drive and catalogue spaces simultaneously.
- **Google Maps Street View** Using street view maps to do an initial virtual walk-through is incredibly convenient, but that convenience is traded for information that is less accurate and needs to be ultimately confirmed directly.
- **Neighborhood Maps & Wayfinding Tools** Many neighborhoods have already created cultural maps (for artwalks, or tourists) or general maps that include cultural spaces.
- **Local Media Outlets** Listings of arts events in city-wide publications such as *The Stranger*, *City Arts*, *Seattle Weekly* and others are a great source of venues you may not have known about, as well as neighborhood-specific outlets like the *Capitol Hill Times*, or online blogs such as [westseattleblog.com](#).
- **Daisy-chains** You know who’s great about knowing where the cultural spaces are? People who work at cultural spaces. Each time you identify a cultural space, use the resources you’ve discovered there to guide you to the next space.

Outreach / Data Collection

The data in our Cultural Space Inventory is all user-submitted¹, and the goal of your outreach is to get the cultural spaces to fill out the Inventory survey themselves. Typically it’s a Facilities Manager, or a Managing Director, or an Operations Manager who is best positioned to fill out the survey. It is not necessary to complete all of the information in the survey (if, for example, they don’t know the age of the building, that shouldn’t keep them from submitting the rest of the information).

- **Email** Sharing the survey [URL](#) with organizations over email is obviously the easiest method, but also the least effective. At a minimum, you’ll want to customize a cover letter and get a direct email address for someone (meaning, not an info@ or contact@

¹ Well... *almost* all user-submitted. If you are completely unsuccessful in getting an organization that you know exists to complete the survey, you can submit a partial survey for them, including only information that’s publicly available. Contact the Arts & Culture Office to check before going this route.

email) and you'll need to follow up. Multiple times.

- **Over the Phone** Making contact by phone and explaining the importance of the survey can be the nudge that most space managers need to complete the survey. You can also fill the survey out for the managers over the phone (they answer on the phone, you type in the form). Best with smaller spaces, but requires time and energy.
- **Face-to-Face** The most labor-intensive, but also the most effective way to get a response. Plus, this has the added benefit of meeting local business people, which is part of the goal of all of this... You can bring the survey in on paper (one student had a lot of luck bringing multiple copies around on a clipboard) and upload it later, or on a portable device such as an iPad.
- **Surveys** A note about the two surveys that are a part of this project. Both surveys are hosted by SurveyMonkey.com. The first, located at www.surveymonkey.com/s/spaceinventory, is for organizations that are considered cultural spaces. The second, located at www.surveymonkey.com/s/supplementaryspaceinventory, is for individuals who have generative creative cultural space (meaning, typically, an art studio space, a dedicated rehearsal space, a darkroom, a woodshop, or any other creative spaces, either in the home or separate).
- **Location Intelligence** Through all of this outreach, there should be a running theme about the importance of building this body of knowledge. We want to empower you to articulate why this data is important. Are you worried about coming developments displacing important neighborhood uses? Are you looking to fill existing gaps, either geographic or arts-oriented? Are you looking to reduce duplication? To address scarcity? Look at your group's motives and articulate them plainly and in a way that builds community.

Data Organization & Presentation

- **Know the Baseline** As soon as you begin your exploration, please go to the existing Cultural Space Inventory spreadsheet [here](#) and Export a copy of the most current spreadsheet to your computer. Then Sort the data by neighborhood, and save this section – it's your starting point, the amount of cultural space we've already catalogued in your neighborhood.
- **Upload the Information** Ideally, the organizations you contact will complete the Cultural Space surveys online, and your work is done. If you complete the surveys for them (on the phone, or on paper) you'll need to upload that information yourself. Once uploaded through the SurveyMonkey portal, there's a human step in the process that can take up to a week, before the data is incorporated into the online database.
- **Play** Once you have the data for your neighborhood collected, you can play with it in all sorts of interesting ways. Take a look at some of the [graphs and charts](#) that we've generated from the citywide data, and start exploring ways of presenting the data that might teach us (and you) things about your neighborhood that we didn't know.

Best Practices

- **Be a Good Neighbor** Identify yourself as a neighbor, and explain that this (typically, but not always) is part of a process that the neighborhood is going through in order to become an official [City of Seattle Arts & Cultural District](#). Let the business know that you live in the neighborhood and are volunteering for the neighborhood. Offer your help in completing the surveys, if they need.
- **Follow Up** Most of the organizations to whom you'll be reaching out are understaffed, under-resourced, and overworked. That's simply the reality of professional arts organizations. Keep reaching out. Try different people within the organization. Try different modes of outreach (email, phone, walking in, etc).
- **Eyes on the Prize** Explain the benefits of becoming a District. Make sure that the organizations understand that the organizations will ultimately be the beneficiaries of the support that the Inventory data can leverage.
- **Play Up a Deadline** If you set an initial timeline (and even if you didn't) you can use that to your advantage in trying to get organizations to take part. Many people function well under the threat of a looming "deadline."
- **Follow Up Again** Keep following up. We have found that repeated outreach (not just repeating mass emails, but one-on-one outreach in various modes) really does get through.
- **Placeholders**. As we mentioned above, if there's a space you know exists and is functioning that simply won't respond to your outreach, you can submit information on their behalf to hold their place in the inventory until we can get them to take part directly. ONLY submit information that's publicly available, and leave anything else blank in the survey.
- **Cultural Census** The UW team had success pitching this project as a "Cultural Census" and thinking of themselves as Census Takers. The point of a census is to get a better picture of the situation "on the ground," so that government can best aim resources at where they're needed.
- **Play the Government Card** Some people will be more likely to take part if they know this is an official governmental project; some will be less likely. Feel this out, and either rely on our office with language like "We're working with," or "We're working under the aegis of," the Office of Arts & Culture, or distance yourself from government, with language like "We're a neighborhood group trying to organize local small arts businesses into an Arts District."
- **Existing Channels** Wherever possible, try to use existing channels to talk to communities. Get the Inventory written up in a neighborhood newsletter. Present to a neighborhood Chamber of Commerce meeting. Post on bulletin boards, both real and virtual. Join neighborhood facebook groups, or arts facebook groups, to spread the word.
- **Divide and Conquer** You could choose to divide your neighborhood geographically and each team member could take a section. You could also choose to divide by mode of outreach and each member could take a mode – email, walking, phone, etc. However you choose to divide the project, you should rely on the breadth of your team and stay in touch to compare notes (a shared online spreadsheet has proven very helpful to others).