

Arts and Culture



Introduction

Arts and culture are part of the city's rich history. They will play a major role in Seattle's future as a vital, thriving city. As in any dynamic urban area, the city's arts and culture contribute to its identity and sense of place. This aspect of the city enriches the lives of its residents and inspires their creativity and innovation.

Arts and culture extend to all aspects of civic life. For instance, the arts can teach students valuable skills—like critical thinking and observation—that can also be applied in math, science, and reading. These skills help students succeed in school and in the workplace. The city's arts and culture scene creates jobs and attracts visitors, customers, and highly skilled workers to the area. At the same time, arts and culture play an important social role by nurturing a welcoming and diverse urban community. Arts and culture can expand perspectives and encourage empathy toward people with different experiences. They help cultivate a greater appreciation and understanding of diverse cultures across Seattle.

A 2012 study by Seattle Public Schools found large disparities in access to arts education among its students. The study measured the number of students taking at least six arts classes during their middle school and high school years. The students who took fewer than six art classes were

- from low-household incomes,
- non-native English speakers, and/or
- African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic.

The Arts and Culture element of this Plan outlines goals and policies related to the arts, cultural institutions, and historic preservation. Together these aspects of the city encompass a broad range of people, activities, spaces, and levels of involvement. The City is committed to supporting the arts and to offering great experiences for art consumers and creators of art across Seattle. Making arts and culture accessible to all requires programs that represent Seattle's diversity. As Seattle grows, the City must make an extra effort to help everyone feel welcome within Seattle's arts and cultural environment.

Experiencing arts and culture should be fun and challenging. It should also be accessible so that it can be enjoyed regularly by all. There are so many ways to experience art. It can be created or observed or collaborated on. From tangible, physical objects, books, and digital works to experiences, gatherings, performances, and oral histories, the Seattle arts scene has many different points of entry. Cultural spaces are varied and can range from traditional theaters, galleries, and studios to schools, parks, libraries, and coffee shops.

Historic preservation recognizes and protects aspects of our shared cultural heritage—buildings, districts, and designed landscapes that link to Seattle's past. From the Native Americans who first established trading centers along the Duwamish River to the latest waves of newcomers from around the world, all have left their mark. Over time, Seattle has acquired historic features that have become part of the city's civic identity. Through the preservation of icons and historic locations such as the Space Needle, the Olmsted network of parks and boulevards, and Pioneer Square, the city can continue to celebrate its heritage and maintain its unique sense of place.

The benefits of historic preservation are not merely aesthetic. Preservation is integral to our economic-development planning, and it also enhances our city's identity as a center for tourism, itself an important source of local jobs. Preserving historic buildings can help incubate small businesses, revitalize commercial districts, and generate local jobs. Historic preservation promotes sustainability through the reuse, repair, and upgrading of existing built resources. Historic preservation policies are contained in the **Land Use element** of this Plan.

Arts and culture can revitalize historically underinvested communities, while helping them keep their culture as the city grows and changes. Investments in arts and culture can help preserve the cultural traditions and artistic expressions of existing communities, including communities of color, as well as those of newly arrived immigrants and refugees.

Public Art

Discussion

By integrating art into diverse public settings, Seattle has built on its reputation as a cultural center of innovation and creativity. Letting both visitors and locals alike encounter art in parks, libraries, and community centers—as well as on roadways, bridges, and other public venues—enriches people’s daily lives and gives voice to artists. The City’s public art collection includes more than four hundred permanently sited and integrated works and three thousand portable works. The collection will continue to grow through the City’s 1 Percent for Art program, which requires that 1 percent of the funds from eligible capital improvement projects be set aside for the commission, purchase, and installation of artworks in a variety of settings. To commission public art, the City uses a panel made up of artists and arts professionals, alongside community and City representatives. All public art is cared for through ongoing conservation, which includes inspections, major restorative work, and routine maintenance.

GOAL

- AC G1** Strengthen the diversity of public art and expand the City’s collection of public artworks.

POLICIES

- AC 1.1** Continue to set aside funding for new public art as part of capital improvement projects.
- AC 1.2** Encourage the inclusion of artists early in the design of capital improvement projects.
- AC 1.3** Prioritize locations for new public art where it is desired by the community, can be accommodated safely, and will be enjoyed by many people in locations throughout the city.
- AC 1.4** Enhance the diversity of panelists and community representatives that are included in the public-art selection process.
- AC 1.5** Strengthen the diversity of expression in public art to embrace a variety of artists, sites, disciplines, and media to fully reflect the cultural diversity of the city.
- AC 1.6** Encourage public participation in the planning and implementation of public art projects.

Creative Economy

Discussion

Partnering with individual artists, as well as arts and cultural organizations, the City strives to offer all Seattleites a rich array of quality art opportunities while promoting a healthy and diverse cultural community. Encompassing a wide variety of arts and cultural businesses, ranging from nonprofit museums, symphonies, and theaters to for-profit film, architecture, and advertising companies, the creative economy also includes thousands of independent artists working in Seattle.

When supported, arts and culture can help drive the City's future economic growth. Arts companies and their employees stimulate innovation, playing an important role in building and sustaining economic vibrancy in Seattle. They employ a creative workforce, spend money locally, generate government revenue, and are a cornerstone of tourism. The arts are also an economic-development tool, creating neighborhoods where businesses want to operate and employees want to live. The creative economy also contributes to Seattle's high-quality of life, helping our city and region attract talent from across the globe. Encouraging creative economy activities in communities of color can provide pathways to new skills, jobs, and prosperity. In other words, the impact of the arts reaches far beyond aesthetics.

GOAL

- AC G2** Enhance support for artists, creative professionals, and cultural organizations, allowing them to grow and mature.

POLICIES

- AC 2.1** Recognize and expand the economic impact of arts and culture.
- AC 2.2** Encourage collaboration across the spectrum of traditional and creative economy businesses, especially businesses that rely on innovation and design to be competitive.
- AC 2.3** Encourage access to affordable workspaces for artists, arts, and cultural organizations.
- AC 2.4** Improve technical- and financial-assistance programs to better target and serve both artists and arts organizations of various sizes and at various stages of growth, representing a broad range of cultures.
- AC 2.5** Enhance equitable access to technical and financial assistance for all artists and organizations.

Youth Development

Discussion

All students in all schools should be given the chance to learn through the arts. The arts are a core component of basic education, uniquely suited to develop twenty-first-century skills such as creative and critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and perseverance—skills directly linked to student success in school, career, and life.

Partnerships, both inside and outside of City government, are needed to bring back equitable access to arts education for all K–12 students. These collaborations will also help support after-school arts programs in diverse neighborhoods throughout the city. Through these in-school and after-school programs, experienced teaching artists, community groups, and cultural organizations can introduce children to all types of art, including visual arts, theater, dance, and film. Such programs give young people a chance to shine, to express themselves, and to develop positive goals for the future. Providing arts programs in schools with high numbers of low-income students is especially important, as many schools provide arts programs with additional funding from parents. This may not be possible in some schools.

GOAL

- AC G3** Improve access to arts education in all schools and outside the school setting so that students are prepared to be successful in school and life.

POLICIES

- AC 3.1** Encourage schools to offer culturally relevant K–12 arts curricula that emphasize development and assessment of twenty-first-century skills.
- AC 3.2** Encourage schools to provide professional development in the arts for teachers and community arts partners.
- AC 3.3** Expand partnerships with educational institutions, arts institutions, youth service agencies, libraries, foundations, businesses, and arts and cultural organizations to increase participation in arts and culture programs, creative learning opportunities, and creative economy careers.
- AC 3.4** Help make arts education available in areas of high violence and poverty or where school performance is poor.
- AC 3.5** Prioritize arts and culture opportunities for youth and communities with limited or no access to the arts.

Cultural Space and Placemaking

Discussion

Every successful neighborhood includes cultural spaces, which not only house a range of cultural activity but also help define the very social character and identity of neighborhoods. These spaces include traditional spots such as theaters, galleries, art-house cinemas, and museums, as well as nontraditional areas such as music clubs, coffeehouses and bars that hang art, bookstores, and behind-the-scenes places such as artists' studios, rehearsal rooms, and offices. Creative placemaking uses arts and culture to increase the vibrancy of neighborhoods, cities, and regions. Instead of a single arts center or a cluster of large arts and cultural institutions, placemaking enriches public and private spaces, structures, and streetscapes to enhance quality of life and strengthen neighborhood identity. Creatively attracting people to places that need revitalization or are vacant or underutilized can also improve local business and public safety while bringing diverse people together.

GOAL

- AC G4** Support affordable cultural spaces in all neighborhoods, especially urban centers and villages where they are accessible to a broad range of people and where they can help activate the public realm.

POLICIES

- AC 4.1** Create and maintain an inventory of both public and private cultural spaces.
- AC 4.2** Create incentives to preserve or expand space for artists, arts organizations, and other cultural uses.
- AC 4.3** Consider making surplus City-owned property available to both artists and arts and cultural organizations.
- AC 4.4** Consider public-private partnerships as a way to provide affordable space to both artists and arts and cultural organizations.
- AC 4.5** Encourage using public and institutional spaces, such as parks, community centers, libraries, hospitals, schools, universities, and City-owned places, for arts and culture.
- AC 4.6** Encourage the designation of existing clusters of cultural spaces as cultural districts.
- AC 4.7** Encourage partnerships between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to engage in creative placemaking projects.
- AC 4.8** Share a tool kit of ways communities can make their own art and culture, created in partnership with City departments and community interests.

- AC 4.9** Establish creative placemaking as part of local area planning.
- AC 4.10** Encourage the creation of cultural spaces for informal gathering and recreation, especially in more densely populated urban centers and villages and in communities of color that lack cultural spaces.
- AC 4.11** Enhance access to a variety of arts and cultural institutions and programs for at-risk youth, non-English-speaking residents, seniors, the visually and hearing impaired, and people with other disabilities.