CIVIC ARTS COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, September 22, 2026
6:00 PM

Meeting Location: Cypress Conference Room

2180 Milvia Street, First Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704

Commission Members:

Chair Montgomery, Vice Chair Bachrach, Commissioner Woo, Commissioner Vaughn Scott, Commissioner Bullwinkel, Commissioner Pineda, Commissioner Blecher, Commissioner Truc-Dao Kramer, Commissioner Dutta-Choudhury

This meeting will be conducted in a hybrid model with both in-person and virtual attendance. Attend this meeting remotely using **Zoom: https://cityofberkeley-info.zoomgov.com/j/1653831015** To request to speak, use the "raise hand" function in Zoom. To join by phone: Dial **1-669-254-5252 or 1-833-568-8864 (Toll Free)** and enter **Meeting ID: 165 383 1015**. To provide public comment, Press *9 and wait to be recognized by the Chair. To submit a written communication for the public record, email civicarts@berkeleyca.gov.

This meeting will be conducted in accordance with the Brown Act, Government Code Section 54953. Any member of the public may attend this meeting, however, if you are feeling sick, please do not attend the meeting in person. Questions regarding this matter may be addressed to the Commission Secretary, Carianna Arredondo 510-981-7007, carredondo@berkeleyca.gov cc: civicarts@berkeleyca.gov

Roll Call

Chair Peter Montgomery (District 8)
Vice Chair Jonathan Bachrach (District 1)
Commissioner Cameron Woo (District 2)
Commissioner Sean Vaughn Scott (District 3)
Commissioner Lisa Bullwinkel (District 4)
Commissioner Eduardo Pineda (District 5)
Commissioner Dana Blecher (District 6)
Commissioner Audrey Truc-Dao Kramer (District 7)
Commissioner Devi Dutta-Choudhury (Mayor)

Land Acknowledgement

The City of Berkeley recognizes that the community we live in was built on the territory of Huchiun (Hooch-yoon), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo (Cho-chen-yo) speaking Ohlone (Oh-low-nee) people, the ancestors and descendants of the sovereign Verona (Vuh-roh-nuh) Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to all of the Ohlone Tribes and descendants of the Verona Band. We acknowledge and honor the original inhabitants of Berkeley, the documented 5,000-year history of a vibrant community at the West Berkeley Shellmound, and the Ohlone people who continue to reside in the East Bay. We recognize that Berkeley residents have and continue to benefit from the use and occupation of this unceded stolen land since the City of Berkeley's incorporation in 1878. As stewards of the laws regulating the City of Berkeley, it is not only vital that we recognize the history of this land, but also recognize that the Ohlone people are present members of Berkeley and other East Bay communities today. The City of Berkeley will continue to build relationships with the Lisjan (Lih-Shawn) Tribe and create meaningful actions that uphold the intention of this Land Acknowledgement

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Matters

Chairperson's Report

The Commission Chair may make announcements or provide information to the Commission in the form of an oral report. The Commission will not take action on such items but may request the items be placed on a future agenda for discussion.

Commission Action Items

The public may comment on each item listed on the agenda for action as the item is taken up. Following review and discussion of the items listed below, the Commission may continue an item to a future Commission meeting. ***No Action can be taken on items that are not noticed on the published agenda.***

1. **Recommendation of Artist for the Santa Fe Public Art Project** (10 Minutes)
   From: Mark Salinas, Public Art Program Lead (Attachment 1)
   Recommendation: To approve the Selection Panel and the Public Art Subcommittee's recommendation of Adrien Segal's proposal, *Murmur Nest*, for the Santa Fe Right-of-Way Public Art Project.

2. **Berkeley Arts and Culture Sector Resiliency Plan: Recommendation to City Council** (15 minutes)
   From: Carianna Arredondo, Assistant to the City Manager (Attachment 2)
   Recommendation: Recommend that the City Council adopt the Berkeley Arts and Culture Sector Resiliency Plan as an addendum to the City's Arts and Culture Plan and finalize a Commission report or memo, reflecting the recommendations approved by the Civic Arts Commission.

3. **Artist Affordable Housing Work Group** (5 minutes)
   From: Carianna Arredondo, Assistant to the City Manager

Recommendation: Identify and appoint Civic Arts Commission members to serve on the Artist Affordable Housing Work Group Subcommittee.

Presentations and Discussion Items

4. Dyson + Womack Public Art Strategic Plan Presentation (20 minutes)
From: Mark Salinas, Public Art Program Lead (Attachment 3)

5. Mokhtar Paki Sinbad's Voyage Mural Update (5 minutes)
From: Carianna Arredondo, Assistant to the City Manager (Attachment 4)

6. Civic Arts Program: Vision and Strategy (15 minutes)
From: Commissioner Eduardo Pineda, Public Art Subcommittee Chair

Information Items and Updates

7. Grants, Public Art and Civic Arts Programs Updates (15 minutes)
From: City Staff

a) Grants Program Updates, Hilary Amnah
b) Public Art Program Updates, Mark Salinas
c) Civic Arts Program Updates, Carianna Arredondo

Committee Updates

8. Grants, Public Art, and Policy Subcommittee Updates (10 minutes)
From: Civic Arts Subcommittees

a) Grants
- Dana Blecher, Chair
- Lisa Bullwinkel
- Cameron Woo
- Audrey Truc-Dao Kramer

b) Public Art
- Eduardo Pineda, Chair
- Jonathan Bachrach
- Devi Dutta-Choudhury

c) Policy Subcommittee
- Lisa Bullwinkel, Chair
- Dana Blecher
- Cameron Woo
- Audrey Truc-Dao Kramer

d) Representative on Design Review Committee
- Devi Dutta-Choudhury

Items for Future Agendas

These items are not scheduled for discussion or action at this meeting. The Commission may schedule these items to the Action Calendar of a future Commission meeting.

- **Requests by Commission members to add items to the next agenda**

Minutes for Approval

Draft minutes for the Commissions consideration and approval.

9. **Minutes of August 26, 2026**
From: Commission Secretary (Attachment 5)
Recommendation: Approve the draft minutes of the August 26, 2026, Regular Civic Arts Commission Meeting

Commissioner Announcements

Adjournment

Notices

Notice of Public Record

Communications to Berkeley boards, commissions or committees are public record and will become part of the City's electronic records, which are accessible through the City's website. Please note: E-mail addresses, names, addresses, and other contact information are not required but, if included in any communication to a City board, commission, or committee, will become part of the public record. If you do not want your e-mail address or any other contact information to be made public, you may deliver communications via U.S. Postal Service or in person to the secretary of the relevant board, commission, or committee. If you do not want your contact information included in the public record, please do not include that information in your communication. Please contact the secretary to the relevant board, commission, or committee for further information.

Any writings or documents provided to a majority of the commission regarding any item on this agenda will be made available for public inspection at the City Manager's Office located at 2180 Milvia Street, 5th floor, Berkeley, CA 94704

Communication Access Information

This meeting is being held in a wheelchair accessible location. To request a disability-related accommodation(s) to participate in the meeting, including auxiliary aids or services, please contact the Disability Services specialist at ada@berkeleyca.gov, (510) 981-6418 (V), or (510) 981-6347 (TDD) at least three business days before the meeting date. Attendees at public meetings are reminded that other attendees may be sensitive to various scents, whether natural or manufactured, in products and materials. Please help the City respect these needs.

Video and audio recordings of the Civic Arts Commission meetings are available upon request. Please contact the Commission Secretary at carredondo@berkeleyca.gov cc: civicarts@berkeleyca.gov or 510-981-7007 to obtain a recording.

Certification of public posting

I hereby certify that the agenda for this meeting of the Berkeley City Commission was posted at the display case located near the walkway in front of the Maudelle Shirek Building, 2134 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, as well as on the City's website, on September 16, 2026.

Carianna Arredondo, Secretary

MURMUR NEST

SCULPTURE AS HABITAT

Inspired by the motion and flight of birds and insects as they skillfully navigate the sky, these visually striking 9' tall 3D printed wood adobe sculptures serve as bold visual landmarks at each end of the park. Integrating layered textures, swooping curvature, and micro-alcoves, they offer cavity nesting habitat and sheltered perches for birds and non-stinging insects as they seek rest and shelter on their pollination and migratory journey.

- Created using a process reflective of the way birds and insects build their nests - by gathering natural materials and weaving, blending, and layering to build shelter, with subtle variation in color and tone with different types of wood.
- Made from locally sourced non-toxic materials, the artworks seamlessly integrate into the part setting and serve as a monument to natural building methods that highlight environmentally sensitive ways of living immersed in nature.
- Featuring a variety of cavity sizes, the artwork will provide cavity nesting space for both birds and insects, as well as high perches and ledges for safety and rest during their pollination journey.

Murmur refers to the soft rustling sounds made by thousands of birds' wings flapping as they swoop and dive in unison.

CONCEPT INSPIRATION

MATERIAL / PROCESS / NATURAL BUILDING

COAST LIVE OAK ACORN / ADOBE PIGEON TOWER

MURMURATION / MOTION / FLIGHT

MATERIAL / Wood Adobe

Fabrication Partner Alex Schofield

WOOD ADOBE is a durable, natural bio-composite formulated from a mixture of **wood fiber, water, clay, and a cellulose binder**. It has thermally insulating properties and contains no petroleum based or toxic ingredients that would deter insects or birds from inhabiting the sculpture. The primary ingredient would be salvaged redwood which has increased rot resistance. Selected parts of the sculptures would be printed in ceramic and fired or carved from solid wood for increased durability where the presence of debris and moisture is more common.

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Durable and rot resistant
- Lightweight
- Insulating for temperature
- Low maintenance
- Locally + sustainably sourced

FABRICATION PROCESS

My fabrication partner, Alex Schofield, has several clay printers at our shared workshop in Alameda where parts will be **3D printed, dried, fired, sealed, and assembled**. We will mix the wood adobe by hand in small batches, load it into the extruder and printed layer by layer into individual parts designed with built-in nesting cavities. Ceramic parts will be fabricated using the same process. They are then dried or fired, assembled, and mounted to an internal steel rod structure. Additional hand sculpted wood adobe will be used as mortar to fill in and detail the surface of the assembled sculptures.

INSTALLATION - October 2027

The sculptures will either be fully assembled at my workshop and delivered to the site for installation complete, or parts will be brought to the site and it will be assembled in-situ. The internal steel structure will be anchored into the concrete foundation with bolts with acorn caps.

MAINTENANCE + REPAIR

The sculptures will need to be inspected and maintained every 6 months. Debris should be removed and surface should be brushed off and cleaned with water and a gentle cloth or brush. Wood adobe is naturally **water resistant** and will be sealed with shellac for extra durability. In the case of vandalism, it can be **cleaned or sanded** and resealed, and individual **parts could be reprinted and replaced** as needed.

^ 3D printed Wood Adobe made from redwood fiber

^ Wood Adobe material samples being 3D printed with an extruder at Alex's studio.

INGREDIENTS

Wood Fiber

Kaolin Clay

CMC Binder (carboxylmethyl cellulose) - thickener, binder, stabilizer

^ Detail of surface texture and showing color variation from different colors of wood fiber.

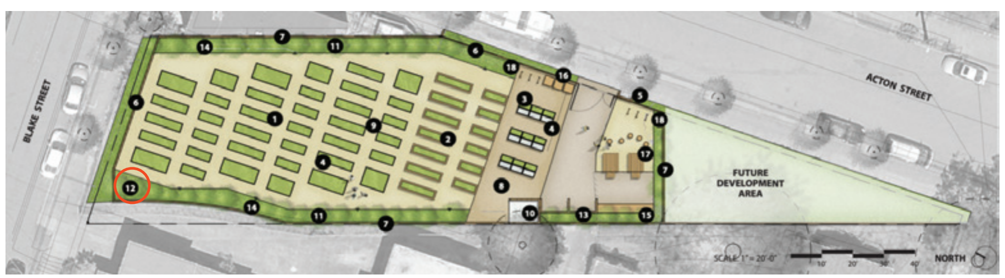
^ 3D printed ceramic texture samples fabricated for Emerging Objects by Alex Schofield.

SITE 1 CONCEPT / Dynamics of Wing Motion

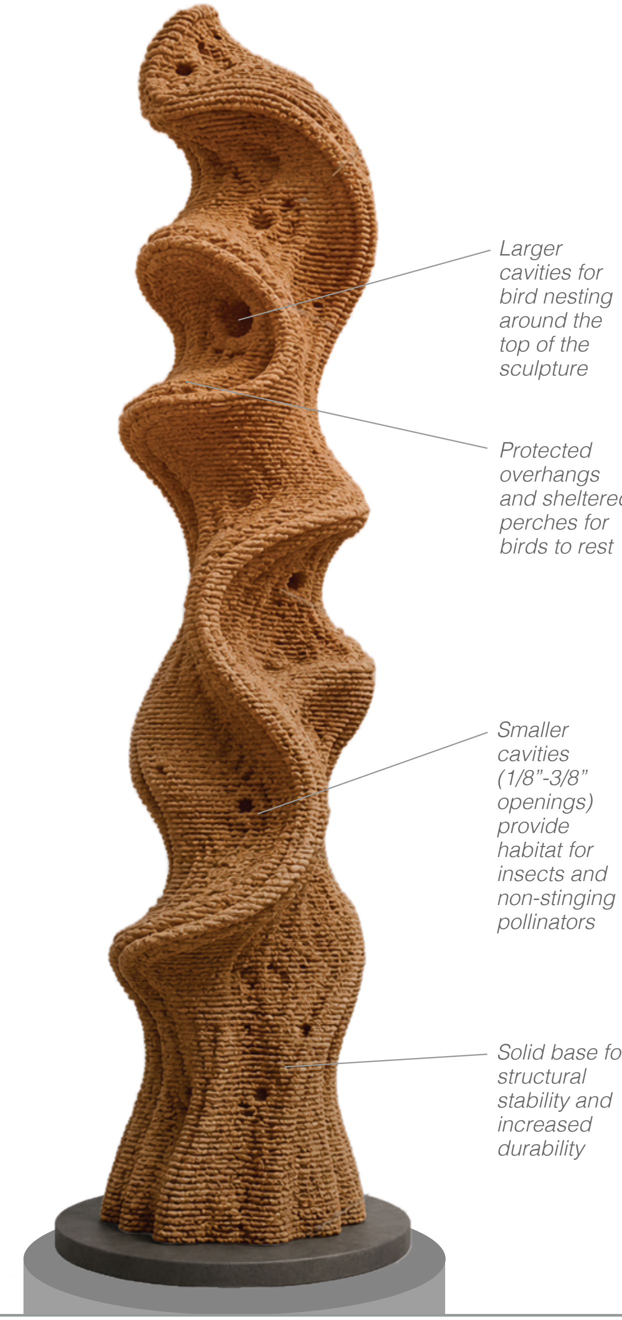
Inspired by the motion of flight of birds and insects as they skillfully navigate the sky, the sculpture designed as a visually striking landmark for the community garden at Site 1 captures the dynamic movement of a single flap of wings during flight. The swooping curves become ledges and perches for rest, while the alcoves are embedded with small openings and perforations for cavity nesting.

< Physical representation of the dynamics of wing motion during bird flight

LOCATION : Site 1 - Community Garden



DETAIL VIEW



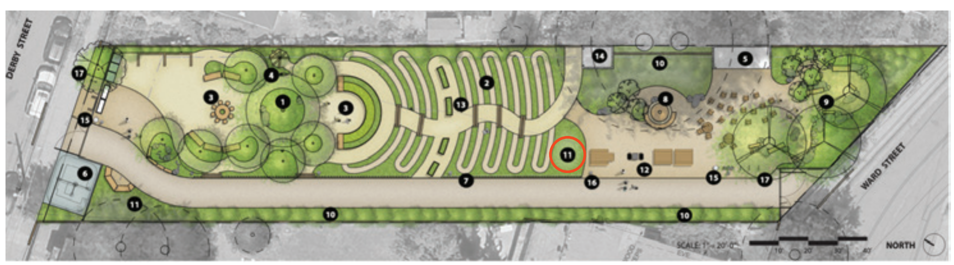
SITE 4 CONCEPT / Acorn Cap Nest

Reflecting on the natural and cultural history of the coast live oak acorn in the East Bay, the landmark sculpture integrated into the educational garden at Site 4 was designed using the acorn cap as the central building component . Additionally, Arab pigeon towers seen across Northern Egypt, made from ceramic and adobe construction, and are still used as human-made bird nesting habitat, contributed to the sculptural aesthetic.

^ Coast live oak acorns

^ Adobe and fired ceramic pigeon tower construction

LOCATION: Site 4 - Educational Garden

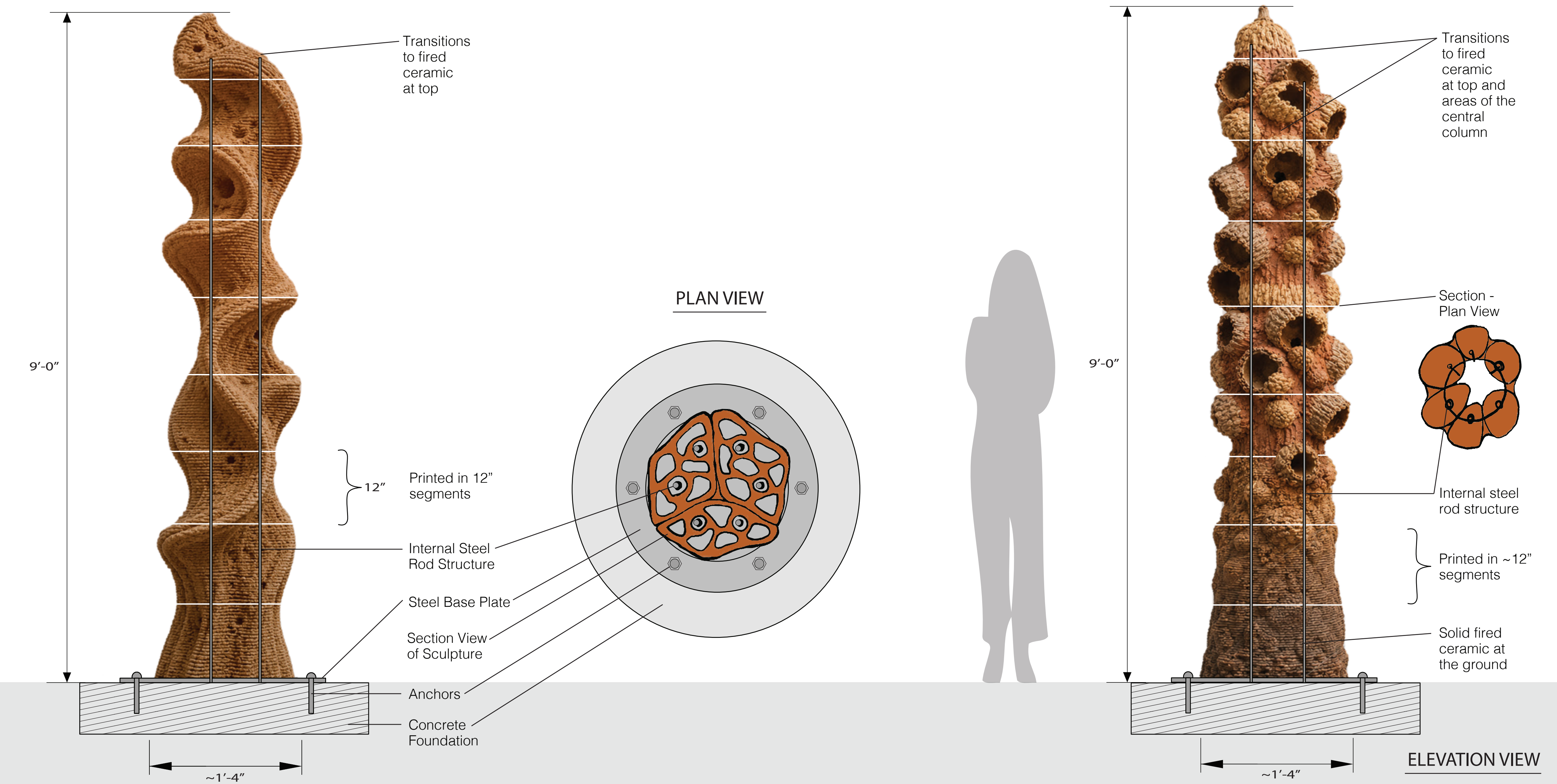


DETAIL VIEW

PUBLIC ART PROPOSAL Santa Fe Trackbed Park | PROJECT TITLE Murmur Nest | ARTIST Adrien Segal | DATE 8.31.2026

STRUCTURE + SCALE

- All dimensions approximate pending structural engineering.



IN-SITU SCALE RENDERING

Project Timeline

Nov 2026
Artist Under Contract

Dec 2026 - Feb 2027
Review of Design Development and Construction Documents, Engineering, Permitting

Feb - Sep 2027
Artwork Fabrication

October 2027
Installation Complete

Project Partners (Tentative)

Fabrication Partner - Alex Schofield

Engineering - Rbhu, LLC. or

Artwork Delivery and Installation - Paul Troutman,

Site 1 - Community Garden

Site 4 - Educational Garden

ESTIMATED PROJECT BUDGET		
Santa Fe Trackbed to Park Conversion Public Art		
	Total Budget per RFQ:	$150,000.00
ARTIST/TEAM NAME:	Adrien Segal	
ARTWORK TITLE:		
INSTRUCTIONS:	*Provide item description and amount, adding lines if needed.*	
Item	**Description**	**Budgeted Amount**
Artist Fee	1-2 year commitment to oversee artwork from conception to production through a successful permanent installation with professionalism and thoroughness.	30,000
Design	Design Development for CAD modeling, creating technical drawings for engineering and permitting, printing materials samples, testing finish samples, producing build plans, file prep for printed parts.	10,000
Engineering	Estimated fee for stamped engineering drawings for permiting.	3000
Fabrication	Labor and overhead for mixing materials, prepping equipment, printing, drying and firing parts, subcontracting steel structure, sculpture assembly, detailing, sealing, finishing, and preparation for delivery.	46,000
Tools + Equipment	Replacement parts, drying kiln, mixing equipment.	4,000
Materials	Biomaterial ingredients, finishes, consumables.	10,000
Delivery	Packing, truck rental, additional insurance, unloading, additional help.	2500
Installation	Estimate for engaging labor and materials required for contractor to anchor sculptures into concrete foundation (provided by the city).	12,000
Administration		
Project Management	Communication, research, coordination, budgeting, and scheduling, and timliness in working with engineers, city staff, community representatives, stakeholders, subcontractors, photographers, engineers, contractors, installation. Managing orders of materials and supplies, payments, invoicing, accounting. Submitting a maintenance plan. Applying for licenses and permits, and coordinating inspections if needed.	13,000
Documentation	Photography and/or video of design process and completed artwork after installation.	1000
Insurance	General Liability	1000
Legal	Contract Negotiation	1500
Permits		500
Business License	Registering with the City of Berkeley	500
Contingency	Unexpected overages	15,000
TOTAL		150000

CULTURAL
PLANNING
GROUP

Building Creative Society

CITY OF BERKELEY

Arts and Culture Sector Resiliency Plan

A Framework for Sustaining Berkeley's Creative Ecosystem

Prepared for the
City of Berkeley
Civic Arts Program

September 2026

Cover: La Peña Cultural Center mural
Photo courtesy City of Berkeley

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 3

Introduction and Background 7

Resiliency Plan for Berkeley's Arts and Culture Sector 13

Strategy Tables 19

Near Term Summary Table (1–2 Years) 19

Mid Term Summary Table (3–5 Years) 24

Long Term Summary Table (5+ Years) 29

Veterans Memorial Building 33

Summary Review of City Arts Policies and Programs 37

Financial Health Assessment 41

Findings from Stakeholder Engagement 46

Comparative Analysis 52

Conclusion and Next Steps 57

Executive Summary

01

Berkeley has an opportunity to be a national leader in arts resiliency policy. The strategies in this plan, implemented with sustained commitment and adequate resources, can preserve and strengthen one of Berkeley's most distinctive and valuable community assets, and demonstrate to other cities what intentional, holistic support for the arts can achieve.

Berkeley's arts and culture sector is at an inflection point. A distinctive and internationally recognized ecosystem of nonprofit organizations and individual artists is showing significant signs of structural financial stress, even as it continues to generate outsized value for the community. This Resiliency Plan gives the City of Berkeley and its arts community a shared framework for responding grounded in financial analysis, extensive stakeholder engagement, and lessons drawn from peer cities, rather than the case-by-case emergency response that has characterized the City's approach to date.

Why This Plan, Why Now

Berkeley's vibrant arts and culture ecosystem is sustained not only by its nonprofit organizations but by individual artists and artist collectives working throughout the city. This Plan's scope — nonprofit organizational financial health, funding mechanisms, and implementation strategy — reflects the availability of comparable data (primarily IRS Form 990 filings) rather than a judgment about relative contribution or importance. Supporting individual practitioners remains a parallel priority for the City's broader cultural strategy.

This plan grew out of a pattern of emergency requests for financial help from Berkeley arts and culture organizations, and a City Council with no consistent framework for responding. A May 2024 Council referral for Aurora Theatre Company was prompted by an acute financial crisis, and a January 2025 referral by Councilmember Rashi Kesarwani[1] documented $8.8 million allocated to community organizations outside a competitive process. Together, these cases underscored the need for a more systematic and transparent approach. Former Councilmember Susan Wengraf[2] proposed the study that led to this plan, which draws on financial analysis of IRS Form 990 data for nonprofit organizations, comparative benchmarking with six peer cities, and extensive engagement with Berkeley's arts community and City leadership.

The plan arrives at a challenging moment: the City faces a structural General Fund deficit for FY27 of approximately $29 million, which has already reduced Civic Arts Program grant funds by approximately 10%. At the same time, the

1. City of Berkeley, Councilmember Rashi Kesarwani (author) and Mayor Adena Ishii (co-sponsor), "Establish Rules and Limits When Community-Based Organizations Receive City Funding Without Procurement to Promote Transparency, Fairness, and Stewardship of Public Funds," Consent Calendar Item 29, Berkeley City Council, January 21, 2025.

Berkeley Arts Coalition has qualified a community-driven initiative, the Berkeley Arts and Creative Economy Rescue and Sustainability Measure, for the November 2026 ballot—a voter initiative independent of City Council action that, if approved, would generate an estimated $5.5 to $6.5 million annually for the sector. This plan does not assume the measure's passage and is not organized around it as a solution; it is intended to provide the framework the City needs regardless of the outcome.

THE SECTOR AT A GLANCE

What Five Years of Financial Data Show

108
arts and culture nonprofits call Berkeley home

46%
of reporting organizations operated at a deficit in 2023, up from 40% in 2019

45%
of operating budgets now consumed by staffing costs, up from 39%

62%
of theater organizations reported deficits — the most strained discipline

$4.10
per-capita City arts grant investment, trailing four of six comparison cities

14%
median deficit as a share of total expenses in 2023, up from 9% pre-pandemic

A Framework for Action

The plan presents resiliency strategies and organizes them into three tiers reflecting sequencing and feasibility, not importance.

- **Near Term (1–2 years):** Near Term strategies can begin now, using existing capacity and relationships.
- **Mid Term (3–5 years):** Mid Term strategies require more sustained planning, coordination, or new investment over a three- to five-year horizon.
- **Long Term (5+ years):** Long Term strategies are long-range and transformational, generally contingent on new dedicated revenue, Council action, or voter approval. Within each tier, strategies are organized across six areas: direct funding and operating support; space and facilities; technical assistance and capacity building; audience development and marketing; policy and systems improvements; and partnership opportunities.

Guiding this framework are six principles:

- A holistic approach that treats funding as necessary but not sufficient;
- A toolkit of solutions rather than a single fix;
- A commitment to equity for smaller and culturally specific organizations and individual artists;
- Stewardship and transparent triage in how the City allocates limited public resources;
- Partnerships that leverage philanthropic, university, and business resources; and consistency and predictability in funding cycles.

2. Council Member Susan Wengraf Study Memo.

The plan also outlines development and operating considerations for the Veterans Memorial Building, envisioned as a future community arts center, and recommends feasibility and demand analysis before the City commits to a specific building program, delivery model, or operating structure.

Near-Term Priorities

The following actions can begin immediately, using existing capacity and before new revenues are secured:

- [ ] Inventory City-owned properties for potential arts uses.
- [ ] Compile a shared directory of available arts spaces and venues for the City's website and communications.
- [ ] Convene a special-event permitting working group with festival producers and City departments.
- [ ] Revive the Berkeley Cultural Trust as a regular convening structure.
- [ ] Develop a draft policy framework for emergency arts organization allocations for Council consideration, using the Organizational Viability Assessment Framework in Appendix A.
- [ ] Initiate a formal dialogue between City leadership and UC Berkeley on space access and arts partnerships.
- [ ] Develop a citywide Arts Resiliency Policy statement for Council adoption.

Looking Ahead

Berkeley's arts and culture sector demonstrates real resilience: it is deeply embedded in community life and returns extraordinary economic value relative to the modest public investment it receives. The strategies in this plan are designed to build on that resilience while addressing the structural conditions that threaten it. They are practical, informed by peer city experience, and calibrated to Berkeley's fiscal reality and the scale of the challenges facing the sector. The outcome of the November 2026 Berkeley Arts Measure will shape the pace of implementation, but the framework in this plan — and the City's role as funder, convener, champion, and partner — will remain relevant regardless of that outcome.

> *"Our practice is to plan events, then figure out how to pay for it. This approach has made our work possible."*
>
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

SECTION TWO

Introduction and Background

Why this plan exists, how resiliency is defined here, and the research and engagement process behind its findings.

Berkeley Repertory Theatre, *The Lunchbox*
Photo by Kevin Berne, courtesy Berkeley Rep

Introduction and Background

02

Background and Purpose of this Study and Plan

This plan grew out of a simple but urgent observation: Berkeley's arts and culture organizations were coming to the City Council with emergency requests for financial help, and the Council lacked a consistent framework for responding to these requests. This issue became acute as Berkeley cultural organizations sought emergency support amid severe financial distress. In May 2024, Aurora Theatre Company was the subject of an urgent Council referral for technical support and a one-time emergency grant of up to $150,000 due to a financial crisis threatening immediate closure. The City was in a reactive posture, responding to crises case by case, without a strategy for identifying and addressing organizational distress before it became acute.

Past City investments demonstrate that well-targeted support can help retain important arts assets. In an earlier period, the City awarded capital improvement funds to UC Theatre and Kala Art Institute when both were identified as anchor institutions at risk of becoming non-operational, and both institutions remain active contributors to Berkeley's cultural life today. The contrast between these cases is instructive: the issue is not that City support is ineffective, but that support works best when it is guided by clear criteria, an assessment of organizational sustainability, and an alignment between the intervention and the specific need. In Aurora's case, one-time emergency funding could provide short-term relief but could not, on its own, resolve underlying structural challenges; by contrast, the support provided to UC Theatre and Kala addressed specific, bounded capital needs for organizations with a credible path forward. A central purpose of this plan is therefore to move the City from case-by-case emergency response toward a transparent framework for assessing organizational distress, identifying credible paths to sustainability, and matching City support to the type and scale of need.[3]

This concern was also reflected in a January 2025 Council referral by Councilmember Rashi Kesarwani, which documented that the City had allocated $8.8 million to community-based organizations (arts and culture and other community service organizations) over five fiscal years outside of any competitive procurement process. The referral noted that this approach, in which organizations with existing Council relationships were better positioned to seek support than those without, was neither equitable nor transparent, and called for the establishment of clear rules and open processes for emergency funding. The referral underscored what the pattern of arts emergency requests had already made apparent: the City needed a more systematic, fair, and proactive approach to supporting its nonprofit sector.

Former Councilmember Susan Wengraf proposed a study to understand the systemic conditions behind these emergencies and develop recommendations for a more proactive and effective approach. The resulting engagement, commissioned by City Council to include financial analysis, comparative benchmarking with peer cities, extensive stakeholder engagement with arts organizations and City leadership, and community workshops, forms the basis for this plan.

The plan arrives at a particularly challenging moment. Berkeley faces a structural General Fund deficit estimated at approximately $29 million. The City Manager's April 2026 proposed budget for FY2027 identified rising costs for

3. The City of Berkeley has an adopted an RFP process through the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services for community agency requests. Information on this program may be found here.

employee benefits, contracts, and infrastructure alongside state and federal revenue limitations as key drivers of the shortfall leading to the proposed elimination of numerous staff positions and departmental budget reductions across all City departments. These constraints directly affect the Civic Arts Program's own staffing and operational capacity, including an approximately 10% reduction in grant funds. This environment informs and shapes the realistic implementation horizon for the recommendations in this plan. Many recommendations are explicitly designed to be achievable within these constraints or to leverage partnerships, outside funding, and community capacity in ways that minimize demands on the General Fund. It is imperative to consider the impact of staff constraints and reductions on the ability over time to achieve this plan. Investing in staff capacity will be necessary as the city moves beyond a period of constrained budgets.

At the same time, Berkeley's arts community is mobilizing in response to the same conditions that prompted this plan. A coalition of arts advocates, organized as the Berkeley Arts Coalition, has gathered more than 4,600 signatures to qualify a voter initiative, the Berkeley Arts and Creative Economy Rescue and Sustainability Measure, for the November 2026 ballot. This measure is a community-driven effort, placed on the ballot through a signature-gathering campaign independent of City Council action. If approved by voters, it would impose a parcel tax estimated to generate approximately $5.5 to $6.5 million annually, with 75% directed toward nonprofit performing arts grants and the remainder supporting civic arts grants, arts infrastructure, and community festivals. Should it pass, it would represent a meaningful and durable new revenue source for the sector. This plan does not assume its passage, however, and it is not organized around the measure as a solution. Federal funding for the arts is also under pressure, and the broader political and philanthropic environment remains uncertain. Building long-term resiliency requires structural change in several areas:

- how the City supports and coordinates with the sector;
- how organizations manage their finances and diversify revenue; and
- how affordable space is planned, secured, and preserved.

No single funding source, however significant, can substitute for these deeper changes. The measure, if voters approve it, would provide important momentum or expand the resources available to support the sector or create new momentum or strengthen the sector. This plan provides the framework that should be in place regardless of the outcome.

How We Define Resiliency

For purposes of this plan, resiliency in the arts and culture sector means the capacity of Berkeley’s arts organizations and individual artists collectively to absorb disruptions, adapt to changing conditions, and continue to serve their communities over the long term. Resiliency is not simply financial stability—though financial health is foundational to it. It encompasses the ability of organizations to withstand shocks (pandemic, economic downturns, policy shifts, loss of a major funder or real estate), to rebuild when weakened, and to evolve their programs and business models in response to a changing cultural and economic landscape.

Resiliency and sustainability are related but distinct ideas, and it is worth being clear about use these terms. Sustainability, as used in the title of this plan and throughout the field, typically refers to an organization's ability to maintain its operations and mission over time, generally through sound financial management, stable revenue, and controlled costs. Resiliency goes further. A sustainable organization maintains equilibrium; a resilient one can absorb disruption and recover. Resiliency assumes that disruption is not the exception but the rule. Arts organizations will inevitably face economic shocks, audience and market shifts, changing philanthropic priorities, the loss of key staff or space, and unexpected crises. A resilient organization has the structures, relationships, and adaptive capacity to withstand these disruptions and recover from them. Sustainability is the goal; resiliency is the capacity to keep pursuing it when conditions change.

In the Berkeley context, resiliency also means preserving the distinctive character of the city's arts ecosystem: its concentration of community-rooted, mission-driven organizations; its breadth across disciplines from literary arts to music, dance, theater, and cultural heritage; its multilingual and multicultural programming; and its identity as a place where artists and organizations have historically been able to take creative risks. The threat to that character is real as documented throughout this plan: rising costs; loss of affordable space; declining contributed revenue; federal funding reductions; and audience shifts have combined to push a significant share of Berkeley's arts organizations into structural deficit. The plan that follows is a response to that threat.

Resiliency as defined here requires action on multiple fronts simultaneously. Funding is an essential part of the solution—Berkeley's $4.10[4] per capita investment in arts organizations is among the lowest of those included in the comparable cities comparison (see Appendix), and the gap between what the sector needs and what it currently receives is substantial. But funding alone is insufficient. Resiliency requires affordable and stable access to space; strong organizational capacity and leadership; a connected, mutually supportive arts community; effective marketing and audience development; a city government that acts as an active partner and facilitator; and alignment between arts policy and the City's broader goals for economic development, downtown vitality, equity, and quality of life.

Overview of Challenges in the Arts Sector

The challenges facing Berkeley's arts sector are real, deep, and interconnected. They are also not unique to Berkeley: arts organizations across the country are navigating the compounding effects of pandemic-era losses, post-pandemic audience shifts, rising costs, and an increasingly competitive philanthropic environment. What makes Berkeley distinctive, based on the study's inventory, is the concentration and range of arts and culture organizations relative to the city's population, including organizations in disciplines focused on music, theater, dance, literary arts, visual arts, film/media, cultural heritage and more.

The central dynamics are these:

- Earned revenue remained essentially flat in nominal dollars between 2019 and 2023; after adjusting for inflation, that revenue had approximately 16% less purchasing power. Traditional subscription models declined substantially during and after the pandemic and, while subscriptions are now rebuilding, the model has changed. National benchmark data show that subscription households remained 26% below 2018 levels in 2025, with organizations increasingly using flexible packages and other loyalty models, leaving subscriptions less able to provide the same predictable foundation of advance revenue and committed attendance they once did. Audiences are rebuilding, but many organizations—particularly in the performing arts—have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels.[5]
- Contributed revenue declined nearly 15% between 2019 and 2023. Stakeholders report that foundations have shifted priorities away from general arts support and in many instances toward social justice issues that arose

4. This figure is based on a grants budget of $500,000 divided by population of 122,000.

during the pandemic. Individual donors are stretched. Federal grant funding is uncertain amid shifting federal priorities.

- Costs have risen sharply, with staffing expenses increasing 22% since 2019 and now representing 45% of total operating budgets, up from 39%.[6] California AB 5 (the “gig worker bill”) reclassifies many independent contractors to employees and added significant payroll costs to many small and mid-sized organizations. Insurance, venue rental, and event permitting costs have also increased substantially.
- Space and real estate pressures are severe. The loss of affordable performance, rehearsal, and studio space is described by arts leaders across every discipline as the underlying driver of most financial challenges. Organizations that own their facilities face large capital and maintenance burdens; those that do not face escalating rents and competition for limited affordable space.
- The result is structural margin compression: revenues are not growing fast enough to keep pace with rising costs, leaving organizations with shrinking operating cushions and increasing deficits. Forty-six percent of reporting organizations operated at a deficit in 2023—up from 45% before the pandemic, and the median deficit was equivalent to 14% of total expenses. Theater organizations faced the greatest stress, with 62% reporting deficits and a median deficit of 23%.

Against this backdrop, Berkeley’s arts sector demonstrates remarkable resilience. Organizations are deeply community-rooted. Berkeley’s arts community shared through stakeholder engagement that there is a high level of collaboration rather than competition; organizations routinely cross-promote, share resources, and support one another in difficulty. The density of the ecosystem means that arts and culture are genuinely woven into the fabric of daily life in Berkeley in ways that generate both social value and economic activity: a 2025 CVL Economics study found that organizations receiving City arts and culture grantees collectively generated $137.4 million in economic activity within Berkeley.[7]

> *“Berkeley is uniquely collaborative and not competitive. Theaters call each other when in trouble, cross-promote, help one another. This is a strength — we need to preserve it.”*
>
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

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5. Source: TRG Arts, “Audience Growth, Engagement Decline? What the Latest U.S. & Canada Arts Data Reveals,” March 2026.

6. California Assembly Bill 5, signed in 2019, codified worker classification rules that generally apply the “ABC test” to determine whether a worker may be treated as an independent contractor or must be treated as an employee. Stakeholders reported that compliance with AB5 increased payroll and administrative costs for some arts organizations that had historically relied on independent contractor models. For additional background and discussion of the impact on the California arts community, see Victoria Plettner-Saunders & Arlene Yang, “California Assembly Bill 5 and Worker Classification: Their Effects on Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations,” Wolf Brown, 2020.

7. Berkeley Creative Economy Economic Impact Analysis, 2025, CVL Economics: City arts and cultural grantees generated a total of $137.4 million in economic activity within the City of Berkeley in 2024. This measure of economic impact includes the direct contributions of grantees and their employees, supply chain effects on local vendors, contractors, and service providers, along with the induced spending of households supported by arts-related jobs. Grantees included nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, community festivals, and individual artists. They received a total of $698,782 in grant funding from the City.

Planning Process and Methodology

This plan was developed through a multi-method research and engagement process spanning approximately ten months, from summer 2025 through spring 2026. The process included:

01

Financial analysis of IRS 990 data for approximately 108 Berkeley-based arts and culture nonprofits, with longitudinal trend data from 2019 through 2023, supplemented by Civic Arts grant application data from the City's Submittable database.

02

Review and analysis of City arts policies, ordinances, programs, and plans, including the 2017 MIG Arts and Culture Plan, public art policies, grant program structures, and related economic development documents.

03

Seven community discussion groups with arts and cultural organizations during the October 2025 site visit, drawing approximately 70 participants representing a cross-section of Berkeley's arts ecosystem by discipline, size, and geography.

04

Interviews with City leadership, including the Mayor, City Manager, Deputy City Manager, Office of Economic Development Manager, Director of Public Works, and Real Property Administrator.

05

Interviews with the leadership of key arts organizations, including Berkeley Symphony, Cal Performances, Berkeley Rep, and others.

06

A community workshop at the Kala Art Institute in February 2026, where preliminary financial findings and potential strategies were shared and refined with arts community participants.

07

A presentation to the Civic Arts Commission at their February 2026 meeting on preliminary findings and potential strategies.

08

Comparative benchmarking interviews with arts administrators in Bellevue, Washington; Pasadena, California; Santa Monica, California; and desk research on San Francisco, California Boulder, Colorado; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Ann Arbor, Michigan.

09

A parallel economic impact study by CVL Economics (completed October 2025, published December 2025), which assessed the economic contribution of Berkeley's arts sector and the impact of City pandemic relief investments.

SECTION THREE

Resiliency Plan for Berkeley's Arts and Culture Sector

A framework organized by implementation readiness — not importance — sequencing strategies from immediate, lower-lift actions to long-range transformational investments.

Photo courtesy City of Berkeley

Resiliency Plan for Berkeley's Arts and Culture Sector

03

Framework for Implementation

How to Read the Plan

The strategies in this plan are organized into three tiers based on implementation readiness, complexity, cost, and time horizon—not importance. Actions in all three tiers are important to the long-term resiliency of Berkeley's arts and culture sector. Near Term strategies are generally more feasible to initiate in the near term, while Mid Term and Long Term strategies may require additional funding, legal or fiscal review, Council direction, partner commitments, or staff capacity. Some of the highest-impact strategies therefore appear in the later tiers because the conditions needed to implement them will take more time to establish.

NEAR TERM · 1–2 Years — Near-Term/ Lower-Lift Opportunities

Strategies that may be explored or initiated in the near term using existing staff capacity, existing relationships, or limited new resources. These actions are intended to create early progress, improve coordination, clarify policy, and lay the groundwork for larger structural investments. Even where direct costs are low, some Near Term actions may still require staff time, interdepartmental coordination, legal review, or partner participation.

MID TERM · 3–5 Years — Mid-Range Structural Improvements

Strategies that require more sustained planning, policy development, coordination across departments or partners, and/or modest to significant new investment. These actions may be feasible within a three- to five-year timeframe, but many will require additional budget analysis, Council direction, legal review, implementation planning, or new revenue sources.

LONG TERM · 5+ Years — Long-Range / Transformational Opportunities

Strategies that represent larger-scale or longer-term opportunities to reshape Berkeley's arts and culture infrastructure. These actions may require dedicated revenue, major capital investment, new governance models, voter approval, state or regional coordination, philanthropic partnerships, or future cultural planning processes. Long Term strategies should be understood as a long-range vision and feasibility agenda rather than immediate implementation commitments.

Within each tier, strategies are organized under six categories:

- Direct Funding / Operating Support
- Space and Facilities
- Technical Assistance / Shared Services / Capacity Building
- Audience Development / Downtown Activation / Marketing

- Policy and Systems Improvements
- Partnership Opportunities

Each tier opens with a summary table listing the proposed strategy or action, anticipated resources, and potential lead entity or partner. These tables are intended as a quick-reference guide. As the City moves toward implementation, each strategy should be further evaluated for cost, staff capacity, legal authority, fiscal constraints, equity impact, required Council action, and partner readiness. The narrative that follows each table provides additional context, rationale, and considerations for implementation.

Each summary table includes an implementation filter—a set of columns designed to translate each strategy into the practical terms the City uses to plan and budget. For every action, the table indicates an estimated cost level (low, moderate, or high relative to current Civic Arts resources); the City authority required to act (ranging from administrative or staff-level discretion to Council direction, a new ordinance, a partner agreement, voter approval, or state enabling legislation); and whether Council action is required to proceed. A notes column flags whether legal or fiscal review is likely needed, identifies the probable lead department or partner, highlights equity considerations, and gives an indicative timeframe. These designations are planning-level estimates intended to support prioritization and sequencing; each should be confirmed through the City's budget, legal, and departmental review processes at the point of implementation.

Staff Capacity as an Implementation Condition

Nearly every strategy in this plan depends on staff capacity to carry it out. Even the Near Term actions, which require little or no new funding, require staff time to convene partners, coordinate across departments, manage new processes, and sustain relationships with the arts community over time. The Civic Arts Program is currently absorbing reductions alongside other City departments, and the realistic pace of implementation will reflect that. It is therefore important to recognize that reduced staffing limits what the City can accomplish in the near term, and that restoring and strengthening Civic Arts staff capacity will be necessary as the City moves beyond this period of fiscal constraint. Sequencing decisions should account for available capacity, and as budget conditions improve, reinvestment in staffing should be considered alongside reinvestment in grants and programs — recognizing that the City's role as funder, convener, champion, facilitator, and partner is delivered through people.

Guiding Principles

Holistic approach

Financial support is necessary but not sufficient. Resiliency requires coordinated action on funding, space, capacity, marketing, and ecosystem health.

Toolkit of solutions

No single strategy will resolve the sector's structural challenges. The plan offers a menu of interventions that can be implemented in combination based on available resources.

Equity and inclusion

Strategies should strengthen the full diversity of Berkeley's arts ecosystem, with attention to smaller and newer organizations, cultural heritage groups, immigrant-serving organizations, and individual artists who may have limited access to existing programs.

Stewardship and transparent triage

Public resources are limited, and the City has a responsibility to steward them transparently and effectively. Rather than responding to distress case by case, the City should apply clear and consistent criteria to assess organizational viability, distinguish short-term disruptions from structural challenges, identify credible paths to sustainability, and match the type and scale of support to the type of need. This approach protects both the organizations seeking help and the public's confidence that support is allocated fairly and on a sound basis. The Organizational Viability Assessment Framework in Appendix A provides a structured basis for making these determinations.

Partnership and leverage

The City cannot solve the resiliency challenge alone. Every City investment should be designed to leverage additional resources from philanthropy, university partnerships, the business community, and regional funders.

Consistency and predictability

Arts organizations need to plan. Multiyear grants, predictable funding cycles, and stable policy frameworks are more valuable than larger one-time allocations.

Role of the City

The City's primary roles in supporting arts resiliency are:

Funder

providing direct grants, eligible capital investments, and fee waivers where legally and fiscally feasible.

Convener

facilitating connections within the arts community and between arts organizations, City departments, and external partners.

Champion

making the sector's case for investment with elected officials, regional funders, the Civic Arts Commission, and the business community.[8]

Facilitator

identifying opportunities to streamline processes, improve coordination, and reduce unnecessary administrative barriers.

Regulator and permitting authority

ensuring that arts activities can occur safely, accessibly, and in compliance with applicable laws.

Strategic partner

supporting information-sharing, grant opportunities, and regional collaboration.

The City's role is not to manage arts organizations or dictate artistic direction, but to create the conditions in which a diverse, community-rooted arts sector can operate, adapt, and contribute to Berkeley's civic, cultural, and economic life.

Role of the Arts Community

Arts organizations also play a central role in sector resiliency by maintaining effective governance, pursuing diverse revenue sources, planning for leadership transitions, managing costs where possible, and adapting programs to changing audience and community needs. These responsibilities exist within a broader environment shaped by rising costs, space constraints, shifting philanthropy, audience changes, and public funding limitations.

The plan encourages arts organizations to engage collectively—through a revived Berkeley Cultural Trust or similar convening structure— to strengthen peer learning, share resources, coordinate advocacy and information-sharing, and explore shared services. Individual artists are encouraged to engage with the Artists Space Trust and other resources for affordable housing and professional development, and other supports that help them remain part of Berkeley's cultural ecosystem.

Current Conditions Affecting Implementation

The plan is necessarily constrained by the City's budget realities. With a $29 million General Fund deficit for FY2027, new spending in the near term is limited. Many of the most impactful strategies in Mid Term and Long Term are contingent on new revenues from, for example, the Berkeley Arts Measure, philanthropic partnerships, or future

8. This role does not extend to public-facing campaign activity on the proposed ballot initiative, which falls outside the City's permissible scope.

General Fund recovery. The plan also carries the risk that strategies may inadvertently favor larger, better-resourced organizations with more capacity to engage with programs and grant applications. Equity-centered implementation requires deliberate attention throughout.

Updated Strategies to Meet Contemporary Demands

Resiliency and sustainability are not new concerns for the arts and culture sector. Organizations have grappled with questions of financial stability, audience engagement, and long-term viability for as long as the sector has existed. What has changed over time is not the underlying challenge, but the toolbox available to address it. Meeting this moment requires adaptability: the capacity to respond to conditions that are financial, economic, and political, and that continue to evolve even as this plan is implemented.

The strategies in this plan reflect that reality. In some respects, they represent a return to fundamentals: the strategies described here are, at their core, familiar methods for building organizational and sector-wide strength. What makes them newly relevant is the contemporary context in which they are applied.

Approaches to arts-sector resiliency have evolved in recent years. New models for capacity building, equitable funding, audience development, collective action, advocacy, and technology offer additional tools for strengthening organizations and the broader sector. Many relevant resources are now available within the Bay Area, and the strategies in this plan draw on both established practices and newer models.

SECTION FOUR

Strategy Tables

Fifty strategies organized by implementation horizon, each tagged with estimated cost, the City authority required, and whether Council action is needed.

Community festival, downtown Berkeley
Photo courtesy City of Berkeley

Strategy Tables

04

Each strategy below is tagged with three indicators: estimated cost to implement, the City authority required, and whether Council action is needed to proceed.

Low–High Estimated Cost **Administrative** City Authority Required **Yes / No** Council Action Required

NEAR TERM · 1–2 Years

Lower-Lift Opportunities

Near Term strategies are actions the City or partners could begin exploring or initiating in the near term using existing resources, existing relationships, or limited new investment. These strategies are intended to create early progress, improve coordination, clarify policy, and lay the groundwork for larger structural investments.

While Near Term strategies are generally lower cost than Mid Term and Long Term strategies, they are not necessarily “no cost.” Several require staff time, legal or fiscal review, interdepartmental coordination, external partner participation, or additional implementation planning before they can be fully launched.

The table below summarizes Near Term strategies by strategy area, proposed action, anticipated resource needs, and potential lead entity. These actions should be understood as planning-level recommendations subject to further review and implementation planning.

Near Term Summary Table

Direct Funding / Operating Support

Increase consistency & predictability of General Operating Support (GOS) grants; clear renewal criteria, advance notice of cycles

Low **Administrative** **No**

Lead/partner: Civic Arts Program
Equity: Predictable cycles help under-resourced orgs plan

MODELS & RESOURCES

(1) provide 3-5 year operating grants with annual renewal pathway for organizations in good standing, also (2) a size-based tier system that scales both the award formula and the documentation burden. Examples: Mass Cultural Council's new five-year GOS grants program and City of Boulder Cultural Grants Program, which extended GOS grants to a fourth year with inflation-adjusted award amounts.

Streamline grant application; tiered process by organizational size; adopt simpler criteria

Low | Administrative | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts Program
Equity: Lowers application burden for small orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

(1) provide 3-5 year operating grants with annual renewal pathway for organizations in good standing, also (2) a size-based tier system that scales both the award formula and the documentation burden. Examples: Mass Cultural Council's new five-year GOS grants program and City of Boulder Cultural Grants Program, which extended GOS grants to a fourth year with inflation-adjusted award amounts.

Space and Facilities

Inventory city-owned properties for potential arts uses

Low | Interdepartmental | No

Lead/partner: Public Works / Real Property / Civic Arts
Equity: Foundation for below-market access

MODELS & RESOURCES

The single most consistently recommended near-term action from peer city experience. Case studies for adapting public buildings for arts uses: Mass Cultural Council (coupled with Cultural Facilities Fund). City inventory for arts uses is currently underway in Cambridge, Ontario.

Activate vacant storefronts for arts pop-ups; explore landlord tax incentives

Low–Mod | Partner-dependent | No

Lead/partner: Economic Dev / Civic Arts / DBA
Equity: Opportunities for emerging artists

MODELS & RESOURCES

Examples: (1) San Francisco Vacant to Vibrant, targets vacant Downtown storefronts (East Cut, Financial District, Yerba Buena) and connects them with small businesses, artists, entrepreneurs, and cultural organizations for temporary activations. Provides three months of free rent, (2)
Zero Empty Spaces — a national vacant-storefront artist-studio program — is already opening its first Berkeley location in a former Downtown storefront; see Daily Cal coverage.

Develop and publish shared arts space directory (City and UC venues)

Low | Administrative | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts Program
Equity: Improves space access transparency

MODELS & RESOURCES

Given difficulty of replacing former Spacefinder/BAPAS, develop a basic citywide or East Bay venue directory. Examples: Utah Arts Alliance nonprofit venues list; Arts for LA Cultural Asset Map; Spacefinder/BAPAS field structure (service no longer active).

Review ADA permitting and barriers for arts space improvements

Low | Interdepartmental | No

Lead/partner: Public Works / Civic Arts
Equity: Improves accessibility & compliance

MODELS & RESOURCES

Explore expedited review, permit coaching, permitting guide, fee waivers, and/or low-interest loan programs to support arts organizations undertaking facility/space improvements. Examples: Mass Cultural Council Artists Space Guide

Technical Assistance / Shared Services / Capacity Building

Expand free grant-writing coaching for applicants (modeled on Bellevue)

Low | Administrative | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / university partner
Equity: Reduces equity barriers for small applicants

MODELS & RESOURCES

Modeled on the City of Bellevue Arts Grants offering free coaching and one-on-one grant-writing assistance for arts and cultural facilities grant applicants — improves application quality and success rates for smaller organizations at low cost through existing staff, a contracted service, or a university partnership.

Revive Berkeley Cultural Trust as regular convening forum (monthly/quarterly)

Low | Administrative | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts Program / Arts Community
Equity: Open to all disciplines & sizes

MODELS & RESOURCES

Reinstate monthly or quarterly convenings of Berkeley arts organization leaders, facilitated by Civic Arts staff or a contracted convener, for networking, information sharing, and peer learning.

Develop arts capacity-building program: financial management, board development, marketing, IT, equity, etc.

Low–Mod | Partner-dependent | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / UC Berkeley / philanthropy
Equity: Target smaller, newer organizations

MODELS & RESOURCES

Partner with regional consultants, university programs, or intermediary organizations for workshops on financial management, board development, earned revenue, marketing, technology, equity, and permitting — complements the grant-writing coaching above (Bellevue model, this table) and City of Pasadena's Cultural Equity & Inclusion technical assistance workshop requirement (see Mid Term). Bay area capacity building resources: Center for Cultural Innovation, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services.

Explore Arts Ambassador / Liaison position at City (existing staff or intermediary)

Low–Mod | Administrative | No (Yes if new funded position)

Lead/partner: City Manager / Civic Arts / Visit Berkeley
Equity: Single point of access for all orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

Staff position or contracted intermediary serving as connector between arts organizations and City resources; see the expanded, dedicated version of this role proposed under Mid Term (Berkeley Arts Ambassador program).

Audience Development / Downtown Activation / Marketing

Develop citywide arts calendar & shared marketing; leverage Visit Berkeley kiosks

Low–Mod | Partner-dependent | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Visit Berkeley / DBA
Equity: Shared platform benefits small orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

Partner with Visit Berkeley, the Downtown Berkeley Association, and individual organizations on a centralized, maintained, and promoted arts calendar; leverage existing digital kiosks downtown managed by Visit Berkeley. Examples: Arts Boston BOSTIX Calendar.

Promote Berkeley as regional arts destination (‘Build a Day in Berkeley’ narrative)

Low–Mod | Partner-dependent | No

Lead/partner: Visit Berkeley / Civic Arts / DBA
Equity: Spotlights diverse cultural offerings

MODELS & RESOURCES

Cohesive arts-tourism narrative — “Build a Day in Berkeley” — packaging arts events, dining, and other experiences into itineraries for visitors from the broader Bay Area. Examples: Visit Philadelphia (DiscoverPHL)-"The Art Lovers' Philadelphia Itinerary", Three-Day Miami Itinerary For Art Lovers by the Greater Miami & Miami Beach tourism

Support cross-organizational marketing and audience-sharing agreements

Low | Administrative | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Arts orgs
Equity: Pools reach across budget levels

MODELS & RESOURCES

Facilitate cross-promotion and collaborative-programming agreements among organizations to reduce individual marketing costs and build aggregate attendance. Examples: Arts Boston BOSTIX Calendar.

Policy and Systems Improvements

Civic Arts grant eligibility to community-based organizations through fiscal sponsored organizations

Low | Administrative (policy) | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / City Attorney
Equity: Includes heritage & immigrant-serving groups

MODELS & RESOURCES

Expands access to Civic Arts grants for organizations operating under fiscal sponsorship, including many heritage and immigrant-serving groups that do not have independent 501(c)(3) status.

Develop a policy framework for emergency allocations to arts organizations with viability criteria and grant ceiling

Low | Council direction | Yes (to adopt framework)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / City Manager
Equity: Transparent, consistent criteria for all

MODELS & RESOURCES

Establish clear viability criteria, a grant ceiling, and follow-up conditions, replacing the current ad hoc approach with a defensible Council framework.

Convene special-event permitting working group; design streamlined online system

Low–Mod | Interdepartmental | No (fee changes may need Council)

Lead/partner: City Manager / Special Events / Civic Arts
Equity: Eases burden on community festivals

MODELS & RESOURCES

Convene festival producers, City departments, and other stakeholders to design a more efficient, online, affordable permitting system; a "Festival Producers Bill of Rights" process could codify reasonable standards.

Partnership Opportunities

Initiate formal City–UC Berkeley dialogue on arts space access and partnership

Low | Partner-dependent | No

Lead/partner: City Manager / Economic Development
Equity: Could open campus space to community orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

Formal dialogue between City leadership and the appropriate UC Berkeley offices, including Capital Strategies–Real Estate and Government and Community Relations, to explore expanded community use of university space at affordable rates.

Convene dialogue with Rainin Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, East Bay Community Foundation and other regional philanthropies

Low | Administrative | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / City Manager
Equity: Encourages general operating support for under-funded organizations

MODELS & RESOURCES

Encourage the Rainin Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, East Bay Community Foundation, and other regional funders to explore collaborations that would benefit Berkeley arts organizations.

Formalize partnership with Visit Berkeley (goals, metrics, shared marketing investment)

Low | Administrative | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Visit Berkeley
Equity: Shared promotion across the sector

MODELS & RESOURCES

Clear goals, metrics, and shared marketing investment; explore using a portion of increased Berkeley Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID) revenues to arts-specific promotion.

> *"The city could use a culture of yes."*
>
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER, 10/23 DISCUSSION GROUP

MID TERM · 3–5 Years

Structural Improvements

Mid Term strategies require more sustained planning, policy development, fiscal analysis, legal review, interdepartmental coordination, and/or external partner commitments. Some may be feasible within a three- to five-year timeframe, but implementation will depend on available funding, staff capacity, Council direction, eligible funding sources, and partner readiness.

These strategies should be understood as structural improvements that may be advanced through feasibility analysis, program design, policy development, or pilot implementation before being brought forward for full funding or adoption.

Mid Term Summary Table

Direct Funding / Operating Support

Significantly increase GOS grant amounts toward 5–10% of organizational budgets (contingent on Berkeley Arts Measure passage or new revenues)

High | Council + new revenue | Yes (appropriation)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / City Council
Equity: Set caps/tiers so small orgs benefit

MODELS & RESOURCES

Moving toward the 5–10% of budget benchmark identified by stakeholders would require a substantial increase to the grants budget; if the Berkeley Arts Measure passes, allocating the majority of revenues to GOS grants would be a meaningful step toward peer-city funding levels. Boulder, CO's dedicated Arts, Culture & Heritage Tax funds a comparable level of investment — see City of Boulder Cultural Grants Program.

Implement 3–5-year multiyear operating grants with inflation adjustments (modeled on Mass Cultural Council and Boulder, CO)

Mod–High | Council direction | Yes (multiyear commitment)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts Program
Equity: Stability aids under-capitalized orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

Extends the current 2-year GOS cycle to 3–5 years. Grant tiers calibrated to organizational budget size. See examples from Near Term: Mass Cultural Council's new five-year GOS Grants for Organizations program and City of Boulder Cultural Grants Program, which extended GOS grants to a fourth year with inflation-adjusted award amounts.

Establish permanent emergency grant fund with clear criteria

High | Council + eligible revenue | Yes

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / City Manager / Council
Equity: Viability criteria applied transparently

MODELS & RESOURCES
Establish clear viability criteria, a grant ceiling, and follow-up conditions, replacing the current ad hoc approach with a defensible Council framework. Use the Organizational Viability Assessment Framework in Appendix A to assess need, organizational viability, and appropriate conditions for support.

Space and Facilities

Reinstate and expand capital grants program for arts facilities (modeled on Bellevue $2M biennial)

High | Council + eligible revenue | Yes (budget/bond)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Public Works / Council
Equity: Prioritize owned-facility & ADA needs

MODELS & RESOURCES
Modeled on Bellevue, WA's Art and Cultural Facilities Grant Program — a biennial capital program (most recently $2.0 million per cycle) funding facility acquisition, renovation, ADA compliance, equipment, and preventive maintenance. See City of Bellevue Arts Grants.

Develop a dollar-lease or other below-market lease program for qualifying nonprofits in City-owned properties

Moderate (foregone rent) | Council direction | Yes (property disposition)

Lead/partner: Public Works / Real Property / Civic Arts
Equity: Clear, open qualification criteria

MODELS & RESOURCES
Work with the Real Property Administrator to offer city-owned properties to qualifying nonprofits at dollar leases or substantially below-market rates; builds on the Near Term city-property inventory (this table, Near Term).

Strengthen planning incentives and community-benefit tools supporting affordable arts space in private development

Low–Mod | Council + Planning Commission | Yes (code amendment)

Lead/partner: Planning / Economic Dev / Civic Arts
Equity: Builds long-term affordable space

MODELS & RESOURCES
Strengthen requirements and incentives — including density bonuses and community-benefits agreements — for arts space in mixed-use and commercial development projects.

Assess feasibility of tax-increment or similar financing mechanisms for arts facility development in cultural districts

Moderate (study) | Requires legal/fiscal review | No (feasibility stage)

Lead/partner: Economic Dev / Finance / Civic Arts
Equity: Target district-based cultural assets

MODELS & RESOURCES
Assess feasibility of tax increment financing or similar mechanisms for arts facility development in designated cultural districts and/or the Civic Center.

Adopt local ordinance implementing AB 812 for affordable artist housing in/near cultural districts

Low–Mod | Council ordinance | Yes (ordinance)

Lead/partner: Planning / Civic Arts / City Council
Equity: Addresses artist displacement

MODELS & RESOURCES

AB 812 (2023) authorizes local governments to reserve up to 10% of deed-restricted, locally required affordable-housing units for income-qualified artists within or near a designated cultural district. See California Legislative Information — AB 812.

Technical Assistance / Shared Services / Capacity Building

Develop shared-services platform: bookkeeping, graphic design, IT, insurance, box office

Moderate | Partner-dependent | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Berkeley Cultural Trust / Foundation partner
Equity: Greatest benefit to small orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

Work through an intermediary organization or the revived Berkeley Cultural Trust to develop shared services for small organizations, including bookkeeping/financial management, graphic design, social media/marketing, IT support, insurance, and box office. Explore collaborative support from regional funders. Examples: ArtsPool (workforce administration & financial management), Theatre Bay Area (cooperative marketing, group ticketing/discount programs, professional development, etc.), CultureWorks (fiscal sponsorship, coworking), Catalyst's Nonprofit Sustainability Initiative (back office consolidations, shared ventures).

Implement annual Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) technical-assistance program for grantees (modeled on Pasadena)

Moderate (~$20,000–50,000 annually) | Administrative | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts Program
Equity: Builds equity capacity sector-wide

MODELS & RESOURCES

Modeled on City of Pasadena's practice of requiring Cultural Equity and Inclusion workshops for Civic Arts grantees.

Develop succession-planning resources: workshops, consulting, peer learning

Low–Mod | Partner-dependent | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Regional arts consultants
Equity: Supports leadership transitions

MODELS & RESOURCES

Workshops, consulting, and peer-learning opportunities focused on leadership succession for organizations approaching generational transitions.

Audience Development / Downtown Activation / Marketing

Launch Berkeley Arts Ambassador program (dedicated regional marketing and curation role)

Moderate | Council + partner | Yes (if City-funded position)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Visit Berkeley
Equity: Promotes full range of organizations

MODELS & RESOURCES

Create or fund a dedicated position to curate and market Berkeley arts experiences to regional audiences, coordinating with Visit Berkeley, restaurants, transit, and cultural venues.

Develop coordinated Arts District activation program with Downtown Berkeley Association (signage, pop-ups, programming)

Mod–High | Council + partner | Yes (capital budget)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / DBA / Planning
Equity: Include Black Arts and Culture District

MODELS & RESOURCES

Coordinated program of arts activation — signage, pop-ups, programming — in the downtown Arts District and the Black Arts and Culture District, developed with the Downtown Berkeley Association and other BIDs.

Develop coordinated digital presence strategy (social media, SEO, AI visibility) for Berkeley arts

Moderate | Partner-dependent | No

Lead/partner: Visit Berkeley / Civic Arts
Equity: Levels visibility for small orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

Coordinated digital marketing strategy for Berkeley arts and culture, including social media, search optimization, and AI query visibility. Ex: Arts Boston BOSTIX Calendar.

Policy and Systems Improvements

Adopt City Arts Resiliency Policy via Council resolution with metrics and annual reporting

Low | Council direction | Yes (resolution)

Lead/partner: City Council / City Manager / Civic Arts
Equity: Embeds equity metrics & reporting

MODELS & RESOURCES

Council resolution or policy document formally committing the City to arts and culture resiliency, with defined metrics, annual reporting, and accountability mechanisms. Would be a national first and model.

Coordinate arts-sector input into broader City efforts to address barriers to downtown attendance, including safety, cleanliness, parking, and transit access

High | Council + interdepartmental | Yes (capital/budget)

Lead/partner: City Manager / Public Works / Visit Berkeley
Equity: Improves access for evening audiences

MODELS & RESOURCES

Work with relevant City departments on the safety, cleanliness, parking, and transit-access issues stakeholders identified as deterring attendance at downtown arts events, particularly evening programming.

Partnership Opportunities

Explore an MOU with UC Berkeley for community arts access, shared programming, and joint funding opportunities

Low | Partner-dependent | No (may go to Council)

Lead/partner: City Manager / UC Berkeley
Equity: Community (non-affiliated) access

MODELS & RESOURCES

Formal memorandum of understanding or partnership agreement with UC Berkeley establishing shared goals for arts and culture collaboration.

Develop an East Bay arts consortium with Oakland, Emeryville and other cities

Low–Mod | Partner-dependent | No

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Regional peers
Equity: Shared regional advocacy

MODELS & RESOURCES

Explore a regional consortium of East Bay municipalities and arts organizations for shared marketing, advocacy, and resource development.

LONG TERM · 5+ Years

Transformational Opportunities

Long Term strategies are transformational in scope and impact, but require larger investments, longer time horizons, significant political will, or enabling conditions (such as new dedicated revenues) that do not yet exist. These strategies define Berkeley's long-range arts resiliency vision.

Long Term Summary Table

Direct Funding / Operating Support

Secure stable, dedicated revenue for arts and culture

Revenue-generating | Voter approval / state enabling | Yes (place measure)

Lead/partner: City Council / City Manager / Arts Community
Equity: Allocation formula can prioritize equity

MODELS & RESOURCES

The Berkeley Arts Measure of November 2026 is the most immediate opportunity. Longer-term options could include a TOT set-aside, an admissions tax or fee, and eligible developer-fee revenues (modeled on Pasadena's Cultural Trust Fund — see Mid Term), plus state and federal program alignment where available.

Develop sector-wide capitalization strategy: endowments, operating reserves, rainy-day funds

High | Partner + Council (match) | Yes (if City match)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Rainin Foundation / EBCF / Arts orgs
Equity: Build reserves for under-capitalized orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

Working with regional philanthropies, explore a coordinated campaign to build organizational endowments, operating reserves, and rainy-day funds for Berkeley's arts organizations.

Explore a guaranteed-income or recurring stipend program for individual artists facing displacement

High | Council + dedicated revenue | Yes (program + funding)

Lead/partner: City Council / Civic Arts / Foundation partners
Equity: Targets displaced & marginalized artists

MODELS & RESOURCES

Consistent with the City's 2019 artist affordability study. See Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' Guaranteed Income Pilot for Artists, developed with the City and County of San Francisco to provide monthly cash payments to artists disproportionately affected by economic disruption — a directly relevant precedent for a Berkeley program targeting displaced or marginalized artists. Also see, Creatives Rebuild New York, a statewide guaranteed-income pilot for artists with published process and impact evaluations.

Space and Facilities

Explore development of community arts center at Veterans Memorial Building in Berkeley's Civic Center (affordable performance, rehearsal, community space)

Very High (capital) | Council + voter (bond) | Yes (capital/bond)

Lead/partner: Council / Public Works / Civic Arts / OED / Capital Projects
Equity: Shared affordable space for all

MODELS & RESOURCES

The Veterans Memorial Building, a City-owned Civic Center property, represents a long-range opportunity to create an affordable community arts facility. The 2020 Civic Center Vision Plan includes case studies of comparable facilities, including Oakland's Henry J. Kaiser Center for the Arts, that may help inform potential development, funding, and operating approaches. Further evaluation should assess market demand, capital costs, funding feasibility, and sustainable operating models.

Develop cultural land trust or public development corporation

High | Council direction | Yes (establish entity)

Lead/partner: City Council / Civic Arts / Foundation partners
Equity: Holds space outside market pressure

MODELS & RESOURCES

Modeled in part on 4Culture, the King County Cultural Development Authority, which supports cultural-facility acquisition and improvement through its Building for Equity program and receives dedicated lodging-tax and sales-tax revenues. Other examples and potential partners include: Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST), Community Vision CREATE, Artists Space Trust, Cultural Land Trust, Cultural Space Agency.

Develop a 10-year affordable arts space strategy integrating City real estate, developer requirements, university partnerships, and a cultural land trust

Moderate (plan); High (build-out) | Council + Planning | Yes (adopt plan)

Lead/partner: Planning / Public Works / Civic Arts / UC Berkeley
Equity: Long-term affordability across districts

MODELS & RESOURCES

Long-range plan combining City real estate, developer requirements, university partnerships, and land-trust development to expand Berkeley's stock of affordable arts space. Examples: City of Vancouver's Making Space for Arts and Culture (10-year plan with numerical targets), City of Boston Cultural Space Fund & Cultural Space Needs Register (coordinated funding and needs assessment)

Technical Assistance / Shared Services / Capacity Building

Develop permanent Berkeley Arts Support Center providing shared office services, professional development, consulting, and legal and accounting referrals

High | Partner + Council (facility) | Yes (if City facility)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Intermediary organization / Foundation partners
Equity: Concentrated support for small orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

Permanent hub providing shared office services, professional development, consulting, legal and accounting referrals, grant-writing support, and peer-learning convenings—a longer-range extension of the shared-services platform and grant-writing coaching proposed in Near Term and Mid Term.

Develop youth arts employment pipeline with BUSD and Parks & Rec

Mod–High | Council + BUSD partner | Yes (budget)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Parks & Rec / BUSD / OED
Equity: Opportunity for underserved youth

MODELS & RESOURCES

Expand arts internship and employment opportunities for young Berkeleyans, working with the Berkeley Unified School District and Parks, Recreation & Waterfront. Ex: LA County Bloomberg Arts Initiative (summer internships for high school seniors), LA County Arts Internship Program (for college students)

Audience Development / Downtown Activation / Marketing

Develop Berkeley as a leading Bay Area arts destination through wayfinding, marketing, programming, and visitor infrastructure

High | Partner + Council | Yes (capital/budget)

Lead/partner: Visit Berkeley / Civic Arts / OED
Equity: Promote diverse cultural identity

MODELS & RESOURCES

Long-range strategy for positioning Berkeley as a leading Bay Area arts destination, with coordinated investment in wayfinding, marketing, programming, and visitor infrastructure — building on the near-term marketing strategies proposed in Near Term and Mid Term.

Expand and strengthen Arts District and Black Arts and Culture District through programming, governance, dedicated funding

Mod–High | Council direction | Yes (designation/funding)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / Planning / Arts community leaders
Equity: Support Black arts, culture and cultural organizations

MODELS & RESOURCES

Expand Berkeley's Arts District and Black Arts and Culture District designations with active programming, physical improvements, governance structures, and dedicated funding, drawing on the San Francisco Cultural Districts Program whole-of-government model.

Policy and Systems Improvements

Develop comprehensive framework for monitoring organizational financial health and graduated City response to distress

Moderate | Administrative + Council adoption | Yes (framework adoption)

Lead/partner: Civic Arts / City Manager / Finance
Equity: Consistent, transparent triage criteria

MODELS & RESOURCES

Develop a systematic framework for monitoring the financial health of key arts organizations, assessing viability when distress is identified, and offering a graduated range of City responses—from technical assistance and emergency grants to voluntary partnership, organizational restructuring, or merger support. See Appendix A, Organizational Viability Assessment Framework.

Advocate at state and federal levels for arts funding (NEA, CAC, state grants, affordability policy)

Low | Administrative | No (or legislative platform)

Lead/partner: City Manager / Civic Arts / CA Arts Advocates
Equity: Defends funding for vulnerable orgs

MODELS & RESOURCES

Work with Greater Bay Area Arts Coalition, California Arts Advocates, Americans for the Arts, and other advocacy organizations to support sustained state and federal investment in the arts.

Partnership Opportunities

Explore regional arts tax or dedicated county-level revenue mechanism with Alameda County and neighboring cities

Revenue-generating | County, voter, and potentially state authorization | Yes (place measure)

Lead/partner: City Council / Alameda County / Regional cities
Equity: Regional equity in arts funding

MODELS & RESOURCES

Working with Alameda County, neighboring municipalities, and state legislative partners, explore the feasibility of a regional arts funding mechanism providing stable, dedicated revenue at scale.

Veterans Memorial Building

05

The Veterans Memorial Building is a central component of Berkeley's Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan and is envisioned as a publicly accessible community arts center. The project would rehabilitate a historic civic asset and create performance, teaching, rehearsal, exhibit, event, and community-use spaces. Before advancing design or selecting a delivery structure, the City should determine whether the program is supported by demonstrated demand, what users can afford to pay, and what ongoing public funding will be required. Development and operating models should be evaluated separately because they allocate different responsibilities for control, risk, funding, and long-term performance.

The Veterans Memorial Building shortly after completion. Designed by county architect Henry H. Meyers and built in 1928 in the Classic Moderne style.

The building today. It anchors the Civic Center alongside the former City Hall and is designated a City of Berkeley Landmark.

Current Planning Parameters

The preferred concept adopted by the City Council in July 2023 calls for approximately 28,000 gross square feet within the existing 1928 building, together with a roughly 5,950-square-foot stage addition. The preliminary program includes an auditorium, gallery and visual arts rooms, practice and small performance rooms, learning labs, and a potential rooftop event space and terrace.

Preliminary construction costs were estimated at approximately $26.3 million to $36.9 million as of July 2023, including a seismic retrofit to the Building Performance Objective standard. The City's preliminary estimate for annual operations and maintenance is approximately $1.07 million, based on the per-square-foot cost of the 1947 Center Street building. It does not yet reflect a detailed staffing plan, programming strategy, utilization forecast, revenue analysis, capital reserve, or the requirements of a specific operator. The final public cost could therefore vary substantially depending on the program, activity level, operating structure, and responsibility for major maintenance and capital replacement.

The central financial question is not only whether additional arts and cultural space is needed, but whether the proposed spaces can be used frequently enough, and at rates users can afford, to support a workable business and operating model. Because many arts and community organizations have limited rent-paying capacity, the project is unlikely to support substantial development debt or recover its full operating cost from earned revenue alone. Public funding, philanthropy, tax credits, grants, commercial revenue, or another reliable source of repayment will almost certainly be required.

Development Model Framework

The development model determines who will assemble capital, manage design and construction, and assume development, financing, cost-escalation, and completion risk. The principal alternatives are City-led delivery, delivery through a mission-driven nonprofit or private development partner, or a joint public-philanthropic structure. Examples of the following development models are included in the Appendix.

City-led model

Under a City-led model, Berkeley would retain direct control but would also remain responsible for predevelopment, capital funding, construction management, cost overruns, escalation, and completion risk. Funding would likely require a combination of bonds, grants, City revenues, philanthropy, and other public sources.

Third-party developer / nonprofit

A third-party developer or mission-driven nonprofit could potentially assemble a broader financing package, monetize Historic Tax Credits or New Markets Tax Credits, manage rehabilitation, and assume a greater share of development risk. The City could retain ownership, provide the property through a long-term lease, contribute capital, or serve as a funding partner.

Joint public-philanthropic approach

A joint public-philanthropic approach could combine public ownership and capital investment with a nonprofit capital campaign and independent operator. This structure can broaden the funding base, but it requires a strong fundraising entity and clear responsibility for cost overruns, completion guarantees, and long-term capital needs. California precedents demonstrate that each approach can work, but none eliminates the need for significant public involvement or a financially capable partner.

Operating Model Options

Operating structures for publicly owned community and cultural facilities fall along a continuum rather than into a small number of fixed models. The principal distinction is the allocation of responsibility for facility operations, programming, fundraising, earned revenue, capital maintenance, and financial risk between the City and a nonprofit or private partner. The operating model should be evaluated separately from the development structure. A facility can remain publicly owned under any of the models below, and public funding generally remains necessary even when day-to-day operations are assigned to a nonprofit. Examples of the following operating models are included in the Appendix.

Direct City operation

Direct City operation. The City would be responsible for staffing, programming, rentals, maintenance, financial performance, and annual operating support. This approach provides direct policy control and access to shared municipal functions, but leaves the City fully exposed to deficits and may limit flexibility in hiring, contracting, marketing, events, and fundraising.

City operation + nonprofit partner

City operation with a nonprofit program and fundraising partner. The City would retain responsibility for the building and core operations, while a nonprofit manages defined functions such as fundraising, education, marketing, events, or selected programming. This model combines municipal stability with nonprofit expertise, but requires detailed agreements governing roles, revenues, expenses, insurance, contracting authority, and decision-making.

Nonprofit operator, City-owned building

Nonprofit operator in a City-owned building. The City would retain ownership while a nonprofit assumes primary responsibility for programming and operations under a lease or management agreement. This approach can provide stronger mission alignment and flexibility, but the operator must have substantial financial, facility-management, fundraising, and public-accountability capacity. The City would likely continue to provide some operating or capital support.

Commercial operator

Commercial operator. A commercial venue manager could operate and book the facility under contract, but this model is best suited to facilities with strong ticketing, rental, sponsorship, food-and-beverage, and naming-rights potential. Given the proposed emphasis on community access and nonprofit use, it is unlikely to be viable without a public management payment or reduced community-access requirements.

Next Steps

City of Berkeley Landmark designation, 1985. The building has hosted a wide range of civic and cultural events since 1928.

The Civic Center concept plan establishes a preliminary building program and preliminary capital and operating cost ranges, but it does not establish whether there is sufficient market support for the proposed spaces or what share of operating costs can realistically be recovered from users. Before advancing design or committing to a development or operating structure, the City should complete a focused feasibility and implementation process. The purpose would be to confirm the scale and mix of spaces that can be supported, establish a realistic operating and public-funding framework, and identify the development and operating partners best positioned to deliver the project. Key areas that should be addressed include:

- Estimate of market and effective demand for the proposed performance, rehearsal, teaching, exhibit, event, and community-use spaces, including realistic utilization levels and users' ability to pay.
- Refinement of the building program, operating plan, and financial model based on demonstrated demand, achievable earned revenue, operator requirements, updated project costs, and the level of ongoing City support that may be available.
- Evaluation of the most viable development, financing, and operating structures, including the potential roles of the City, nonprofit partners, private developers, philanthropy, grants, and tax-credit financing.
- Development of an implementation strategy that identifies key City decisions, partner qualifications, procurement and selection steps, fundraising requirements, project phasing, and responsibility for operating deficits, major maintenance, and future capital replacement.

The final building program should be calibrated to demonstrated market and effective demand, operator capacity, achievable tenant and user revenues, available capital funding, and the level of ongoing General Fund support the City is prepared to provide. Without this analysis, the City risks developing spaces that address demonstrated community needs but cannot be utilized at a frequency or price consistent with a financially sustainable business and operating model or the level of City funding available.

Summary Review of City Arts Policies and Programs

06

Overview of Relevant Policies and Programs

The City of Berkeley supports arts and culture through its Civic Arts Program, housed within the City Manager's Office, which administers a grants program, manages public art, the city's poet laureate program, and provides policy guidance. The City's annual competitive Civic Arts grants budget is approximately $500,000, equivalent to about $4.10 per resident and among the lowest per-capita funding levels in the comparison cities. Approximately 100 grantees receive awards through General Operating Support grants, which are awarded on a two-year cycle, Community Festival grants, and Individual Artist grants.

The City's primary policy framework for arts and culture is the 2018-2027 Arts and Culture Plan developed by MIG and adopted by City Council in 2018. The plan identified affordable space, funding, and sector capacity as central challenges. Many of these issues remain relevant and should be revisited when the City revises or updates its cultural plan. Recommendations from this resiliency plan are expected to inform any future planning effort. It is anticipated that the current Arts and Culture Plan timeframe will be extended. The framework and recommendations in this plan can inform the existing plan and serve as a guiding document for Civic Arts annual work plans.

Other relevant programs and funding mechanisms include Fund 148[9], which collects developer fees for public art and has an available balance of approximately $3.2 million; Fund 150, the City Capital Improvement Program's public-art set-aside, with an available balance of approximately $527,000; and a capital grants program initiated in FY2024 with $300,000 in one-time funding that has not been renewed. The eligible uses of Funds 148 and 150 would need to be reviewed before either could be considered as a funding source for broader arts-facility investments. The City's real estate portfolio also includes several City-owned buildings leased to community organizations at nominal or below-market rates, presenting an opportunity to evaluate whether additional properties could support arts and cultural uses.

9. Fund 148 revenues and balances fluctuate based on actual in-lieu and administrative fees collected from private development projects. Certain projects are exempt from the public art requirement, and approved State Density Bonus concessions may waive the requirement for qualifying projects. Project changes may therefore reduce anticipated revenue and, in some cases, result in refunds of previously collected fees.

Delivered, Mable's Promissory Note, 2024, by Mildred Howard, part of the City of Berkeley permanent public art collection. Public art acquisition and maintenance are supported through Fund 148 and the Capital Improvement Program set-aside. Photo courtesy City of Berkeley.

Alignment of Arts Policy and Non-Arts Policy

Arts and culture intersect with several non-arts policy areas relevant to resiliency, including economic development, housing, real estate and public works, special-event permitting, and workforce development. These connections include downtown activation and tourism, artist affordability and displacement, the use of City-owned buildings for arts purposes, permitting challenges for festivals and community events, and AB 5-related employment costs.

These intersections present both challenges and opportunities. The City's percent-for-art requirement for private development, which supports Fund 148, is reduced by exemptions for affordable housing projects. Costs associated with special events have risen in recent years, placing significant pressure on the continued viability of community events. At the same time, the City's real estate portfolio, relationships with developers, and economic-development programs may offer opportunities to support arts resiliency without relying exclusively on new General Fund appropriations.

Overview of the Nature and Character of Berkeley's Arts and Culture Assets

Berkeley hosts approximately 108 arts and culture nonprofit organizations—roughly one per 1,100 residents, representing a substantial concentration of organizations relative to a city of Berkeley's size. The ecosystem is diverse: Music represents 38% of the total; Dance/Movement, Theatre, Film & Media, Visual Arts, and Literary Arts each represent roughly 10–15%; and Cultural Heritage organizations reflect Berkeley's distinctive international and multicultural character.

Día de los Muertos celebration, downtown Berkeley. Cultural heritage organizations reflect the city's distinctive international and multicultural character and are a defining feature of the sector. Photo courtesy City of Berkeley.

The ecosystem is structurally small-scale. Based on available IRS and grant data, 28% of organizations operate under $50,000 in gross receipts, 50% under $250,000, and nearly 70% under $500,000. Only 20% exceed $1 million in annual revenue. Small and mid-sized organizations are most vulnerable to financial shocks but also represent the diversity and community rootedness that make Berkeley's arts sector distinctive. Vulnerability varies by size and structure: smaller organizations often have limited reserves and administrative capacity; mid-sized organizations may face deeper proportional deficits; and larger organizations may carry larger absolute losses, staffing costs, and facility obligations.

Berkeley also hosts three major UC Berkeley arts and culture institutions—Cal Performances, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, and the Magnes Collection—that are regionally significant cultural anchors. These institutions do not currently face the same resiliency challenges as the community-based nonprofit sector, but they represent important potential partners for future dialogue around space, programming, audience development, and City-university collaboration.

SECTION SEVEN

Financial Health Assessment

What five years of IRS Form 990 filings reveal about the financial condition of Berkeley’s arts and culture nonprofits.

Ruthie Foster at Freight & Salvage, June 2026 · photo by Dave Padilla

Financial Health Assessment

07

City Arts Funding and Trends

Berkeley's annual arts grants budget is approximately $500,000[10], supporting roughly 100 organizations. This is equivalent to about $4.10 per resident, among the lowest per-capita funding levels in the comparison cities. For context: Boulder, CO invests $12.96 per capita through a dedicated Arts, Culture & Heritage Tax; Bellevue, WA invests $9.93–$10.60 per capita in operating grants; San Francisco invests $12.87 per capita. Santa Monica, a city of comparable size to Berkeley, invests $8.57 per capita.

The City has historically relied on General Fund revenues for arts grants, supplemented in recent years by federal pandemic relief funds that have now expired. The City faces a structural General Fund deficit of approximately $29 million. The proposed Berkeley Arts Measure, if approved by voters in November 2026, would generate an estimated $5.5 to $6.5 million annually.

Financial Health of the Nonprofit Arts Sector

Analysis of IRS 990 data for the period between 2019 and 2023 reveals a sector under significant and growing financial stress:

Figure 1: Share of Organizations Operating at a Deficit

Median deficit deepened from 9% to 14% of total expenses over the same period.
Source: IRS Form 990 filings; Cultural Planning Group analysis.

Figure 2: Staffing Costs as Share of Operating Budgets

Staffing costs rose 22% since 2019, leaving less flexibility for programming and audience rebuilding.
Source: IRS Form 990 filings; Cultural Planning Group analysis.

- 46% of reporting organizations operated at a deficit in 2023, up from 40% in 2019. The sector shifted from an aggregate surplus of $2.8 million pre-pandemic to an aggregate deficit of $5.3 million in 2023.
- The median deficit was equivalent to 14% of total expenses in 2023, up from 9% before the pandemic, suggesting that financial pressures extend beyond short-term fluctuations.

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10. The approximately $500,000 figure refers to the City's competitive Civic Arts grants process, which supports Individual Artist Projects, Community Festivals, and two-year General Operating Support grants. Separately, through the City's budget process, the City Council makes Community Agency allocations in arts-related categories totaling approximately $300,000 annually. Those allocations are not included in the $500,000 figure.

- Total revenue declined 4% while expenses increased 5%, creating a 9-point gap. Earned revenue was essentially flat in nominal terms, representing 16% less purchasing power than in 2019 after inflation. Contributed revenue declined nearly 15%.
- Staffing costs increased 22% since 2019 and now represent 45% of total operating budgets, up from 39%. This leaves significantly less financial flexibility for programming, marketing, and audience rebuilding.
- Theater organizations faced the greatest financial strain, with 62% reporting deficits and a median deficit depth of 23%. Film & Media and Music also experienced elevated deficit frequency.
- Mid-sized organizations ($100K–$500K in revenue) show the deepest proportional deficits (23%); large organizations absorb the largest dollar losses – an average of $801,000 among large organizations operating with a deficit.

Figure 3: Financial Strain by Discipline and Organization Size

Theater organizations show the greatest exposure by share of organizations affected; mid-sized organizations show the deepest proportional deficits among those affected.
Source: IRS Form 990 filings; Cultural Planning Group analysis.

> *“Even with full houses, we still required contributed income.”*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

Theater organizations reported the highest rate of operating deficits of any discipline in 2023, at 62%, with a median deficit of 23% of total expenses.
Shotgun Players, *Iron Shoes*.

Financial Vulnerabilities and Challenges

- **Balance sheet weakness:** Many Berkeley organizations have depleted reserves, have never built endowments, and lack the capitalization to absorb even modest shocks. Facility ownership may provide greater long-term stability and control but can also expose organizations to significant maintenance and capital-repair obligations.
- **Concentration of contributed revenue risk:** Many organizations are highly dependent on a small number of major donors or a single foundation relationship.
- **Federal funding vulnerability:** Several Berkeley organizations have relied on National Endowment for the Arts and other federal grants that are now under pressure or have been eliminated.
- **Earned revenue constraints:** Subscription models have declined across disciplines. This is consistent with national trends and the challenges facing performing arts organizations. Many organizations have limited capacity for audience development and marketing.
- **Space and real estate costs:** Facility costs are the single most frequently cited driver of financial stress. Organizations that lease space remain vulnerable to market-rate rent increases, displacement, lease termination, and limited control over their facilities.

Pandemic Effects and Trends

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated pre-existing structural problems in Berkeley's arts sector while also temporarily providing relief through federal ARPA funding and City emergency allocations. The CVL Economics study assessed the impact of approximately $3 million in City pandemic investments ($1 million Immediate Relief Fund, $2 million ARPA); these investments provided critical short-term support but did not resolve underlying structural deficits.

Post-pandemic trends include: declining subscription models in favor of single-ticket purchasing; passive programming losing ground to more participatory and social formats; shifting audience demographics; and accelerated leadership transitions as founding directors retired or left during the pandemic.

Financial Conclusions

Berkeley's arts and culture sector is experiencing structural margin compression—a condition that will worsen without deliberate intervention. The combination of flat earned revenue, declining contributions, rising costs, and depleted reserves means that even organizations currently managing their budgets are doing so without the financial cushion needed to weather future disruptions. A significant share of the sector is operating at a deficit, and the broader trends indicate sustained structural pressure, although the causes and severity vary by organization.

At the same time, financial intervention alone is insufficient. Organizations also need help with space access, organizational capacity, marketing, and connection to the broader arts community.

SECTION EIGHT

Findings from Stakeholder Engagement

What Berkeley’s arts and culture community told us, in their own words, across seven discussion groups, a community workshop, and dozens of individual interviews.

The Capoeira Arts Foundation, Inc. (CAF)

Findings from Stakeholder Engagement

08

Current Challenges and Opportunities

Across seven community discussion groups, a community workshop, and numerous individual interviews, consistent themes emerged from Berkeley's arts and culture community.

Discussion group sessions were structured around two lines of inquiry. The first queried participants about their current operating environment, asking about trends in charitable giving and non-City grant revenue, the business model pressures organizations face around operating costs and facility access, how those pressures differ for organizations that do not own their own venues, and what has changed in recent years to contribute to present conditions. The second turned to solutions, asking participants what level of additional funding would be meaningful, what other forms of assistance they would find valuable, what practices from other cities they would like to see considered in Berkeley, and how they envisioned the City's role going forward.

Invitations to participate in the discussion groups were sent to the database of 108 organizations. They were provided the opportunity to register for one of seven discussion groups over three days at varying times for convenience. Approximately 70 of those organizations were represented in the discussion groups.

Space and Real Estate

Access to affordable, stable space is the challenge most frequently and urgently raised across all types of organizations. The issues include: escalating rental costs and loss of spaces that had served arts organizations for decades; difficulty finding rehearsal, performance, storage, and studio space; the high cost of ADA compliance and renovation permitting for older buildings; the unaffordability of UC Berkeley campus spaces for community organizations; and persistent downtown vacancies that represent both a challenge and an opportunity.

Kala Art Institute, which received City capital support when it was identified as an anchor institution at risk. Access to affordable, stable space was the challenge most frequently raised across all organization types. Photo by Gabriela Yoque, 2020.

> *"[The property owners] are willing to have their properties vacant rather than accept less."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

> *"We end up performing in Oakland because there is no space."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

Financial Pressures

Organizations across disciplines described the same fundamental dynamic: costs rising faster than revenues. AB 5 legislation added significant payroll and administrative costs for some organizations. Venue rental, insurance, and event permitting fees have increased sharply. Foundations are shifting priorities. Federal funding is uncertain or declining. Individual donors are stretched.

> *"Big changes in grant amounts are stressful, and it's getting worse."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

> *"Everyone is uneasy about the current uncertainty."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

Audiences and Attendance

Audience patterns have shifted post-pandemic. Subscription models have declined; single-ticket purchasing is more common. Some organizations reported stronger audience response and earned revenue from more participatory, experiential, or community-embedded programming. Downtown safety concerns and parking challenges are meaningful deterrents, particularly for evening programming.

> *"Coming downtown is not appealing for many. People don't want to spend time downtown."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

> *"Downtown Berkeley faces vacancies and unhoused individuals, making it unappealing for cultural activities."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

Organizational Capacity and Sector Connectivity

A strong and consistent theme across all stakeholder conversations is the desire for greater connection, convening, and mutual support within the arts community. The Berkeley Cultural Trust, a monthly convening of arts organization leaders that was active before the pandemic, is widely missed and frequently cited as a model worth reviving. Organizations expressed interest in shared services—particularly marketing, graphic design, accounting, box office, and technology support—that are currently beyond the individual capacity of most small organizations.

Community members viewing *Enchanted Forest* by Julia W Chang. Across every discussion group, stakeholders described wanting more opportunities to convene, connect, and share resources. Photo courtesy City of Berkeley.

> *"There is no service organization doing [capacity building] in Berkeley. Many arts administrators are artists."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

Specific Challenges by Segment

- Performing arts organizations (theater, dance, music): Highest financial stress; most affected by AB 5 payroll costs; most dependent on audience recovery; most urgently need both operating support and space.
- Literary arts organizations: Relatively larger budget profiles; need space for events and readings.
- Cultural heritage and immigrant-serving organizations: Facing the additional stress of federal immigration enforcement, which has reduced attendance at events and created fear in communities that these organizations serve.
- Individual artists: Facing displacement from Berkeley due to housing costs; limited access to studio space; minimal support from the current grants program ($50,000 total for individual artist grants annually).
- Festival and event producers: Festival permit costs have tripled for some events. Street closure fees have increased to $5,000 or more. The permitting process is paper-based and was described as cumbersome and opaque.

> *"[We have to] consider whether it is safe for us to hold our events."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

Suggestions for Strategies and Approaches to Sustainability

- General operating support: Provide funding consistently and predictably. Stakeholders identified grants equivalent to 5–10% of organizational operating budgets as a meaningful funding target. Multiyear grants are strongly preferred.
- Affordable space: Develop a space directory, rental subsidies, City-facilitated access to vacant storefronts, a revived capital grants program, and activation of City-owned properties for arts uses.
- Arts ambassador or liaison: Establish a City role to convene the arts community, connect organizations to resources, and coordinate with City departments.
- Berkeley Cultural Trust: Revive the Trust as a regular convening and networking forum for arts organization leaders.
- Special-event permitting: Develop a streamlined online system with interdepartmental coordination and reduced fee burdens for community and arts festivals.
- Community-wide arts marketing: Create a centralized arts calendar, use digital kiosks, support "Build a Day in Berkeley" itineraries, and strengthen partnerships with Visit Berkeley.
- Capacity building: Provide professional development, technology assistance, business consulting, and shared services for small organizations.
- Philanthropic support: Encourage grantmakers, including the East Bay Community Foundation, to provide more general operating support to Berkeley arts organizations.

- Property incentives: Explore commercial-property tax or other incentives for landlords that lease space to nonprofit arts organizations.
- Artist housing: Implement AB 812 to create affordable housing opportunities for artists in Berkeley's designated cultural districts.

> *"Love the idea of quarterly community meetings, convened by the city."*
>
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

Potential Partners

- UC Berkeley: Cal Performances, BAMPFA, and the Magnes Collection are all interested in strengthening their connection to the broader Berkeley arts community. The Chancellor's Community Partnership Fund and the university's Office of Community and Government Relations represent potential channels for deeper collaboration. The university also holds real estate that could potentially be made more available to community arts organizations not affiliated with UC Berkeley.
- Visit Berkeley: Already engaged in arts-related marketing and promotion; a strengthened partnership could leverage the Berkeley TBID's marketing capacity, including its cultural-tourism allocation, to support community-wide arts promotion.
- Downtown Berkeley Association and other BIDs: Partnerships on vacant storefront activation and downtown arts programming are promising.
- Regional philanthropies: Rainin Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, East Bay Community Foundation, and other funders could help expand general operating support and other resources for Berkeley arts organizations.
- Proposed East Bay arts consortium: Santa Monica's regional arts-corridor experience suggests potential value in a consortium of East Bay municipalities and arts organizations focused on shared marketing, advocacy, and resource development.
- Berkeley Unified School District: Partnership opportunities for arts education, shared use of school facilities, and youth employment in the arts.

SECTION NINE

Comparative Analysis

How six peer cities fund, structure, and sustain their arts and culture sectors — and what their experience suggests for Berkeley.

Enchanted Forest by Julia W Chang
Photo courtesy City of Berkeley

Comparative Analysis

09

Benchmarking of Funding Models in Comparison Cities

Cultural Planning Group conducted desk research and benchmarking interviews with arts administrators in Santa Monica, CA; Pasadena, CA; Bellevue, WA; Cambridge, MA; and Boulder, CO; and desk research for San Francisco, CA.* Comparison cities were selected based on a combination of population, high-cost urban conditions, university presence, cultural-sector density, and relevant arts policies. Because municipal responsibilities and revenue structures differ, the comparisons are intended to identify transferable practices rather than rank cities as directly equivalent.

Berkeley

Pop. 124,000

GRANTS BUDGET	ANNUAL GRANTEES	PER CAPITA
$500,000	**~100**	**$4.10**

Two-year general operating support grants; community festival & individual grants; relatively low per-capita funding

San Francisco

Pop. 826,000

GRANTS BUDGET	ANNUAL GRANTEES	PER CAPITA
$10.4 million	**151**	**$12.87**

Dedicated revenue source; among the highest per-capita funding levels in comparison group

Santa Monica

Pop. 90,000

GRANTS BUDGET	ANNUAL GRANTEES	PER CAPITA
$797,000	**~80**	**$8.57**

Airport arts campus in city-owned properties; BID art-in-vacant-storefront initiatives with Zero Empty Spaces

Pasadena

Pop. 138,700

GRANTS BUDGET	ANNUAL GRANTEES	PER CAPITA
$189,000	**~50**	**$1.37**

Emergency reserve supported by developer fees; DEI technical assistance program

Boulder

Pop. 105,700

GRANTS BUDGET	ANNUAL GRANTEES	PER CAPITA
$1.4 million	**157**	**$12.96**

Dedicated revenue source; highest per capita among peers; four-year operating grants

Bellevue

Pop. 154,193

GRANTS BUDGET	ANNUAL GRANTEES	PER CAPITA
$1.5–$1.6 million annual operating funding; $2 million biennial capital program	**~70**	**$9.93 (operating funding) $17.22 (total operating + capital)**

Biennial capital grants; free grant coaching; shared- services models

Cambridge

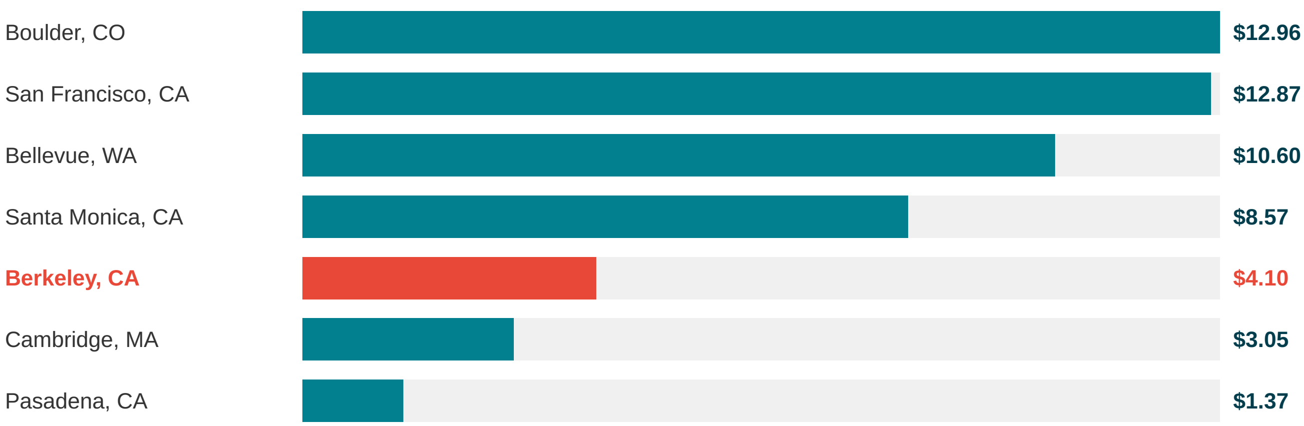
Pop. 122,588

GRANTS BUDGET	ANNUAL GRANTEES	PER CAPITA
$369,715	**~70**	**$3.05**

Close working relationship with Harvard and MIT and their significant presence in the city. Strong partnership with the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority in addressing space and facility issues for artists and arts organizations.

**Note: Funding figures are not fully comparable because some cities' totals include capital or other cultural investments in addition to annual operating and/or project grants. Per-capita figures are calculated using the annual funding amount shown and the relevant city population.*

Figure 4: Per-Capita City Arts Grant Investment



Berkeley trails four of six comparison cities on a per-capita basis.
Source: Cultural Planning Group benchmarking interviews and desk research, 2025–2026.

Key Themes from Comparison Cities

1. Accumulation of Crises

Leaders of benchmark organizations described their arts communities as navigating the compounding effects of pandemic-era revenue losses, post-pandemic audience shifts, rising operating costs, and—for Santa Monica and Pasadena—the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires. The consistent message was that no single event was responsible; rather, the accumulation of these pressures has placed many organizations under severe financial strain.

2. Programming Dollars Are Not Enough

One strategic insight from peer city interviews: operating grants that fund programming cannot by themselves sustain organizations that lack real assets. As Bellevue's arts administrator emphasized, funding programs alone will not stabilize organizations that lack adequate assets, reserves, and balance-sheet strength. Bellevue's $2.0 million biennial capital facilities grant program directly addresses this. Pasadena's Cultural Trust Fund provided $550,000 in emergency operating grants during the pandemic, demonstrating the value of an available reserve for crisis response.

> *"We are responsible for the ecosystem, but we cannot expect that everyone will survive."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

> *"Programming dollars alone won't cut it for the arts. We must address the balance sheet — assets."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

3. Space and Affordability

Access to affordable, stable space was identified as a critical and worsening problem in all interviewed cities. Santa Monica is developing a full-scale creative campus at the municipal airport; exploring dollar lease models for City-owned properties; and piloting art programs in vacant storefronts in partnership with BIDs and Zero Empty Spaces. Bellevue is writing developer density bonuses for arts space into its municipal code and exploring a cultural land trust model.

4. Shared Services and Capacity Building

Bellevue provides free grant writing coaching to all applicants—a relatively low-cost intervention with meaningful equity benefits. Santa Monica uses master agreements with intermediary organizations to move arts funding faster than city procurement allows. Pasadena contracts with an outside organization for annual DEI technical assistance training for grantees. These models provide practical approaches that are well-suited to Berkeley's needs.

> *"We are trying to remove red tape and bureaucracy. That makes us more responsive and lets us seize opportunities."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

5. Federal Funding Environment

All cities interviewed are managing the impacts of federal funding uncertainty. Pasadena has already rephrased grant program language in response to federal policy shifts. Organizations in all interviewed cities also reported increasing their reliance on earned revenue and local philanthropy.

6. Ecosystem Triage and Realism

Peer-city administrators stressed the need for realism: not every organization in financial distress will have a sustainable path forward. The Bellevue Arts Museum's experience—years of emergency operating grants followed by receivership—reinforced the lesson that operating support alone cannot resolve structural problems.

> *"Not all nonprofit arts orgs are going to survive."*
> — ORGANIZATION LEADER

7. Regional Coordination

Santa Monica is building arts corridors with West Hollywood, Malibu, and Beverly Hills around the 2028 Olympics, World Cup, and Super Bowl. The Santa Monica Cultural Affairs Director raised the question of whether an East Bay consortium could serve similar functions for Berkeley and neighboring communities.

Conclusions of the Comparisons

- Berkeley's arts-grant investment of $4.10 per resident is well below most comparison cities. If the Berkeley Arts Measure passes, Berkeley would likely move into the top of the comparison range, providing renewable revenues to support sustained investment over time.
- Dedicated revenues and recurring capital-funding mechanisms can provide greater stability and scale than one-time or annually discretionary appropriations. Examples include San Francisco's hotel-tax funding, Boulder's voter-approved arts tax, Pasadena's developer-fee-supported Cultural Trust Fund, and Bellevue's biennial capital-grants program.
- Capital grants for facilities emerged as an impactful resiliency intervention identified by comparison-city administrators in part because they can simultaneously address balance sheet strength and the need for affordable space.
- Free grant writing coaching in Bellevue and master agreements with intermediaries in Santa Monica offer relatively low-cost models that could be applied in Berkeley. Bellevue's use of developer incentives for arts space provides a longer-term policy model.
- City-owned real estate is a major untapped resiliency asset in Berkeley's toolkit. Working with Public Works and Real Property staff to complete an inventory of underutilized properties and assess their suitability for arts uses should be an early priority.

SECTION TEN

Conclusion and Next Steps

Berkeley's arts and culture sector is at an inflection point. This plan offers a path forward — one that starts now, with what the City already has.

Building Together, mural by Girls Garage & Alex Bowman
Photo courtesy City of Berkeley

Conclusion and Next Steps

10

Berkeley's arts and culture sector is at an inflection point. The conditions that made Berkeley a distinctive, community-rooted, internationally recognized center for arts and culture—affordable space, a dense ecosystem of mission-driven organizations, a collaborative creative community—are under serious threat. The financial analysis is clear: nearly half of the sector's organizations operated at a deficit in 2023, with declining revenues and rising costs creating sustained structural pressure across the sector that cannot be addressed through incremental adjustments alone.

At the same time, Berkeley's arts and culture sector is a distinctive civic and economic asset. The sector's economic contribution—$137.4 million in economic activity from organizations receiving less than $700,000 in City grants—represents an extraordinary return on public investment.

The strategies in this plan are designed to build on that resilience and address the structural conditions that threaten it. They are practical, informed by what has worked in peer cities, and calibrated to Berkeley's specific context, constraints, and opportunities. They also reflect the scale of the challenges facing the sector.

Dance performance supported through the City's Civic Arts grants program. The plan's aim is to keep Berkeley's creative ecosystem intact and capable of adapting. Shawl-Anderson Dance Theater.

Near-Term Actions (Immediate Priority)

The following actions can and should begin immediately, before new revenues are secured:

- [ ] Inventory City-owned properties for potential arts uses and assign staff or contract responsibility immediately.

- [ ] Convene a special events permitting working group with festival producers and City departments.
- [ ] Begin organizing the revival of the Berkeley Cultural Trust as a regular convening structure.
- [ ] Develop a draft policy framework for emergency arts organization allocations for Council consideration, using the Organizational Viability Assessment Framework in Appendix A.
- [ ] Initiate a formal dialogue between City leadership and UC Berkeley on space access and arts partnership.
- [ ] Compile a shared directory of arts spaces for the City's website and communications.
- [ ] Develop a city Arts Resiliency Policy for future Council consideration.

Longer-Term Opportunities

As new resources become available—whether through the Berkeley Arts Measure, budget recovery, philanthropic investment, or other sources—the following should be prioritized:

- Significantly increase and restructure the Civic Arts grants program toward grants equivalent to 5–10% of organizational budgets, multiyear awards, and tiered grant categories.
- Reinstate and expand the capital grants program for arts facilities.
- Develop a formal dollar-lease or below-market lease program for qualifying non-profits in City-owned properties.
- Launch shared services, an arts ambassador role, and a capacity building program.
- Complete a focused feasibility and implementation process for the Veterans Memorial Building community arts center, including assessment of demand and viable development and operating models.
- Implement AB 812 for affordable artist housing in Berkeley's cultural districts.

Considerations for Implementation, Sequencing, and Future Refinement

- Budget alignment: Implementation sequencing should be aligned with the City's budget cycle, with Near Term strategies designed to be initiated within existing appropriations and Mid Term and 3 strategies contingent on new revenues.
- Berkeley Arts Measure: The measure's outcome in November 2026 will significantly shape the pace and scope of implementation. The plan should be positioned to accelerate quickly if the measure passes.
- Annual progress reporting: Civic Arts should develop annual progress reports on the implementation of the resiliency plan strategies, using grants data, IRS Form 990 filings, and other indicators to track the financial health of the sector over time.
- Cultural plan development: Recommendations from this resiliency plan should be formally incorporated into the next ten-year cultural plan, anticipated to begin around 2027.
- Equity monitoring: Implementation should be tracked for equity outcomes, with particular attention to the reach of programs and investments to smaller organizations, culturally specific organizations, and individual artists.

Acknowledgments

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Cultural Planning Group is a full-service consulting firm specializing in cultural planning, strategic planning, cultural district planning, public art planning, community engagement, and creative economy strategy, partnering with municipalities, local, state and regional arts agencies, and institutions nationwide to build resilient and equitable cultural ecosystems.

ROBINETT ECONOMICS
LEISURE AND CULTURE

Robinett Economics is an economic consulting firm specializing in market and attendance forecasting, business planning, and economic and fiscal impact analysis, partnering with museums, attractions, and cultural and leisure destinations nationwide to plan resilient, sustainable visitor experiences.

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Building Creative Society

CITY OF BERKELEY

Arts and Culture Sector Resiliency Plan

APPENDICES

Supporting Documentation and Analysis · A–E

Prepared for the
City of Berkeley
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Contents

These appendices accompany the Berkeley Arts and Culture Sector Resiliency Plan and provide the supporting frameworks, analysis, and engagement documentation referenced throughout the report.

APPENDIX A **Framework for Assessing Arts Organization Viability** 3

A five-domain assessment tool for evaluating organizational viability and calibrating funder response, including a graduated response matrix and equity considerations.

APPENDIX B **Veterans Memorial Building: Development and Operating Models** 12

Background on the Civic Center Plan, development and operating model alternatives with California precedents, and the scope of a recommended feasibility study.

APPENDIX C **Community Workshop Presentation** 17

Slides presented at the Arts and Culture Sustainability Workshop, Kala Art Institute, February 25, 2026, including preliminary financial analysis and possible strategies.

APPENDIX D **Discussion Group Participants, October 2025** 39

Participants in the small group discussion sessions held October 22–24, 2025 as part of the stakeholder engagement process.

APPENDIX E **Community Workshop Attendee List** 40

Arts and culture community representatives attending the Arts and Culture Sustainability Workshop at Kala Art Institute, February 25, 2026.

Framework for Assessing Arts Organization Viability

Purpose and Context

This framework is designed to support public arts funders—such as city or county arts agencies—in evaluating the organizational viability of arts and culture nonprofits when making decisions about specifically related to emergency funding requests, and the appropriate level and type of funder support. It gives effect to a guiding principle increasingly adopted in public arts funding—"realism and triage"—the recognition that not all organizations will survive periods of sector-wide financial stress, and that a funder's role is to invest strategically in organizations with credible paths to sustainability when presented with critical requests for resources.

The framework is drawn from a range of accepted best practices in the nonprofit sector and related assessment tools that have been developed in recent years for understanding operational systems. It is intended to guide the development of a more proactive monitoring posture as well, rather than waiting for organizations to arrive in crisis, funder program staff can use available data—990 filings, grant application materials, attendance and program reports—to identify organizations showing early signs of stress and offer support before conditions become critical.

This framework is intended as a tool for informed judgement, not a mechanical scorecard. It is designed to support consistent, transparent and equitable decision-making, not to substitute for the contextual knowledge of the ongoing relationship between the funding entity and the organizations.

How to Use This Framework

The framework evaluates organizations across five domains. Within each domain, indicators are described at three levels:

✓ STABLE	Organization is managing the relevant dimension adequately. No immediate intervention required.
⚠ STRESSED	Organization shows warning signs in this dimension. Proactive outreach and technical assistance are appropriate.
✖ CRITICAL	Organization is in significant difficulty in this dimension. Active assessment and a defined funder response are required.

No single domain is determinative. An organization that is Critical in one domain but Stable or Stressed across the others may still have a viable path forward—particularly if leadership is actively engaged in recovery. The overall assessment should consider the pattern across all five domains, the trajectory of change (improving, stable, or deteriorating), and the quality of the organization's own plan for addressing its challenges.

The basis for assessment utilizes available sources: IRS Form 990 data, internal financial statements and program reports, direct conversations with organizational leadership, and community feedback where available. Assessments should be reviewed particularly when an organization submits an emergency funding request.

DOMAIN 1 Financial Health

Financial health indicators are the most quantifiable and should form the starting point of any viability assessment. However, they should be interpreted in context: a single bad year may reflect a recoverable shock rather than structural failure, while an organization with adequate current ratios may still be on an unsustainable trajectory if revenue trends are consistently downward.

Indicator	✓ Stable	⚠ Stressed	✖ Critical
Operating surplus / deficit as % of total expenses (most recent year)	Surplus, or deficit less than 5%	Deficit of 5–10%	Deficit greater than 10%
Operating deficit trend (multi-year)	Surplus or improving trend over 2+ years	Deficit in 1 of last 3 years; stable or mixed trend	Deficit in 2 or more consecutive years; deepening trend
Months of cash and unrestricted operating reserves	3 or more months	1–3 months	Less than 1 month
Current ratio (current assets ÷ current liabilities)	Greater than 1.5	1.0–1.5	Less than 1.0
Revenue source diversification (largest single source as % of total)	No source exceeds 35% of total revenue	Largest source is 35–50% of total revenue	Largest source exceeds 50% of total revenue; or major revenue source recently lost
Debt obligations relative to annual operating budget	Debt service is manageable relative to cash flow; no delinquencies	Debt service creates meaningful constraint on operations	Debt delinquencies; creditor pressure; or debt exceeds annual revenue

DOMAIN 2 Organizational Capacity and Governance

Organizational capacity indicators assess whether the organization has the internal infrastructure—leadership, governance, and staff—to manage a recovery. Financial distress is often survivable if leadership is capable, engaged, and honest about the organization's situation. It is rarely survivable when governance has broken down or leadership is in denial.

Indicator	✓ Stable	⚠ Stressed	✖ Critical
Board engagement and governance	Active, quorate board; functional committees; regular meeting cadence; no governance conflicts	Board engaged but gaps in membership, attendance, or committee function; minor governance issues	Quorum problems; significant governance conflicts; board disengaged from organizational crisis; or material fiduciary failures
Executive / artistic leadership	Stable, experienced leadership in place; clear succession pathway identified	Leadership transition underway with plan; or capable interim leadership in place	Unplanned leadership vacancy with no clear interim; or leadership actively contributing to organizational distress
Staff capacity relative to program scope	Adequate staff to deliver mission; manageable workloads	Staff stretched; some functions understaffed; over-reliance on volunteers or contractors for core functions	Insufficient staff to deliver core programs; critical staff departures without replacement
Fiscal management track record	Clean audits or reviews; timely 990 filings; no material weaknesses	Minor audit findings or late filings; corrective action underway	Material weaknesses in audit; multi-year filing delinquency; financial controls breakdown
Succession planning	Written succession plan or clear informal pathway for key leadership roles	No formal plan but leadership engaged on transition planning	No succession planning; key person dependency with no identified successors

DOMAIN 3 Mission Relevance and Community Rootedness

This domain assesses whether the organization is doing meaningful, wanted work with genuine community support—and whether its loss would create a gap in the local arts ecosystem that would not otherwise be filled. An organization may be financially stressed and organizationally stretched but still be doing irreplaceable work with strong community backing: this domain should weigh in its favor. Conversely, an organization that is financially viable but has lost its community connection or drifted from its mission presents a different kind of concern.

Indicator	✓ Stable	⚠ Stressed	✖ Critical
Evidence of active community constituency	Strong attendance, participation, and documented community relationships; diverse and growing audiences	Attendance or participation declining but still present; community relationships intact	Attendance collapsed; programming occurring without meaningful community engagement; or community served has shifted away from the organization
Alignment of programming with stated mission	Clear, consistent alignment between programs and mission; community can articulate what the organization does	Some drift or inconsistency between stated mission and actual programming	Significant mission drift; organization no longer doing what it says it does
Uniqueness / distinctiveness of role in the ecosystem	Organization serves a community, discipline, or function not otherwise served locally; its loss would create a clear gap	Organization's role partially duplicates other organizations; gap would be partially filled by others	Organization's programs substantially duplicated by other local organizations; loss would not create a significant gap
Community support beyond public funding	Active individual donor base; meaningful earned revenue; volunteer engagement; community advocacy for organization	Limited individual donors; modest earned revenue; some volunteer support	Almost entirely dependent on public grants; negligible earned revenue; little evidence of community financial investment

DOMAIN 4 Strategic Adaptability

This domain assesses whether the organization has demonstrated the capacity and willingness to adapt to changed conditions—and whether leadership is actively engaged in problem-solving or waiting passively for external rescue. Organizations that have already begun adapting their programs, revenue strategies, or operating models in response to post-pandemic realities are better positioned for recovery than those that have maintained pre-2020 approaches without adjustment.

Indicator	✓ Stable	⚠ Stressed	✖ Critical
Demonstrated adaptation to changed conditions	Organization has meaningfully adjusted programs, revenue model, or operations in response to post-pandemic realities; adjustments are documented and intentional	Some adaptation underway but limited; organization acknowledges need to change but has not yet made significant adjustments	No meaningful adaptation; organization continues pre-pandemic model despite significantly changed conditions; leadership does not acknowledge need to change
Active strategic planning	Current strategic plan or clear organizational direction with leadership alignment; plan addresses current challenges	Strategic plan exists but outdated; or informal strategic direction with limited board alignment	No strategic plan; no clear organizational direction; leadership focused on short-term survival without longer-term planning
Leadership engagement in problem-solving	Board and staff actively identifying and pursuing solutions; transparent with stakeholders about challenges; seeking help proactively	Leadership engaged but reactive; seeking help in response to crisis rather than proactively	Leadership disengaged, in denial about severity of challenges, or actively resistant to outside input or assessment
Use of capacity-building and technical assistance resources	Organization has engaged with available TA, peer learning, or capacity-building programs; applies learnings	Limited engagement with TA resources; some awareness of available support but not yet accessed	No engagement with TA resources despite availability; leadership not aware of or not interested in available support

DOMAIN 5 Path to Sustainability

This is the decisive domain. An organization may score Stressed or even Critical on financial health and organizational capacity indicators and still merit funder investment—if there is a credible, realistic path to sustainability and leadership is genuinely committed to pursuing it. Conversely, an organization that presents no credible path forward, or whose leadership is unwilling to engage seriously with structural options, is unlikely to benefit from additional operating support regardless of its history or community value.

Assessment of this domain requires direct conversation with organizational leadership—it cannot be fully assessed from 990 data or grant application materials alone.

Indicator	✓ Stable	⚠ Stressed	✖ Critical
Root cause analysis	Leadership demonstrates clear understanding of the causes of financial distress; analysis is honest and specific, not generic	Leadership has partial understanding of root causes; some areas of denial or avoidance	Leadership cannot or will not articulate the causes of distress; blames external factors entirely; no analytical engagement with the organization's own situation
Written recovery or stabilization plan	Specific written plan with named actions, timelines, responsible parties, and measurable milestones; board has adopted the plan	Informal or partial plan; leadership can describe intended actions but plan is not written, not specific, or not board-adopted	No plan; leadership states intention to seek more funding without articulating what will change
Credibility of identified revenue and expense adjustments	Specific, realistic revenue and/or expense actions identified; at least some already underway; timeline is achievable	Revenue or expense actions identified but not yet initiated; or reliant on a single speculative revenue prospect	Recovery plan relies entirely on speculative major gifts, grants not yet applied for, or revenue increases without changed strategy; no expense discipline
Openness to structural options	Leadership has considered and is genuinely open to partnership, merger, fiscal sponsorship,	Leadership acknowledges structural options in principle but has not	Leadership categorically unwilling to consider structural options; views survival of

	program transfer, or other structural options if operating model is not sustainable	seriously explored them	current organizational form as the only acceptable outcome
Near-term credible revenue prospects	Specific, high-probability revenue prospects identified (pending grants with strong track record, donor commitments, earned revenue initiatives already launched)	Some prospects identified but speculative or early-stage	No identified near-term revenue prospects beyond hoped-for funder emergency grant

Graduated Funder Response Matrix

The following matrix describes the range of funder responses mapped to overall viability assessments. The overall assessment—Stable, Stressed, Critical with viable path, or Critical without viable path—reflects the staff reviewer's judgment across all five domains. It is not a mechanical average of domain scores.

Assessment	Trigger Conditions	Funder Response
STABLE	No deficit pattern; adequate reserves; strong governance; active community engagement	Standard General Operating Support (GOS) grants on regular cycle; invitation to participate in capacity-building programs; proactive communication of grant timelines
STRESSED	Deficit of 5–10% for 1–2 years; reserves below 2 months; leadership transition underway; or other single-domain weakness	Standard GOS grant plus proactive outreach from funder staff; eligibility for emergency grant contingent on written stabilization plan; referral to capacity-building and shared services programs
CRITICAL — Viable Path	Deficit >10% for 2+ years; reserves below 1 month; significant governance or leadership failure; OR emergency request received	Emergency grant contingent on: written stabilization plan with measurable milestones; funder co-monitoring at 60- and 90-day intervals; board resolution affirming commitment to plan; no additional emergency grants without demonstrated progress
CRITICAL — No Viable Path	Emergency operating deficits with no credible recovery plan; leadership unwilling or unable to act; mission no longer meeting community need; or repeated	No emergency operating grant. Possible one-time transition support for: responsible wind-down (final payroll, staff notices, archive); facilitation of program or asset transfer to another organization; public communication to affected communities. The funder

	emergency requests without improvement	may convene peer organizations to assess whether mission can be carried forward.

Equity Considerations

This framework must be applied with deliberate attention to equity. Several dynamics can produce misleading results when applied to smaller organizations, newer organizations, and organizations serving communities that have historically been underresourced:

- Small and micro-organizations (under $100,000 in annual revenue) may show indicators that look like financial stress—low reserves, high dependence on a single funding source, limited staff—that are in fact structural features of their scale rather than signs of organizational failure. The framework should be calibrated to organizational size, and staff should apply different absolute thresholds for organizations at different budget levels.
- Newer organizations (under five years old) have shorter financial track records and are more likely to show volatility in early years. The multi-year trend indicators should be applied with appropriate context for organizational age.
- Organizations serving communities that have experienced systemic disinvestment—including BIPOC-led organizations, immigrant-serving organizations, and organizations serving communities experiencing economic displacement—may show indicators of stress that reflect decades of underfunding rather than organizational failure. The Mission Relevance and Community Rootedness domain should weigh heavily in assessments of these organizations.
- The current federal policy environment has created particular stress for organizations serving immigrant communities, whose attendance and programming have been affected by enforcement actions. This is an external shock, not an indicator of organizational failure, and should be treated accordingly.

Staff should document equity considerations as part of every viability assessment and should flag cases where the framework may produce misleading results for review by the funder's program director and, where appropriate, its arts commission or advisory board.

Process and Transparency

The credibility and fairness of this framework depend on transparent and consistent application. The following process guidelines apply:

- The framework and criteria should be publicly available on the funder's website, so that organizations understand how viability assessments are made and can prepare accordingly.

- Viability assessments should be documented in writing using a standard template and retained in organizational files. Documentation should identify the data sources used, the assessment level assigned in each domain, and the overall assessment rationale.
- Emergency funding requests should trigger a viability assessment within ten business days of receipt. Staff should communicate the assessment and proposed funder response to the requesting organization, with an opportunity to provide additional information or context before a final decision is made. Staff should consider engaging an external consultant versed in the assessment process with the capacity to efficiently prepare an objective review and recommendations for the funder.
- Organizations assessed as Critical—whether or not a viable path is identified—should receive a direct conversation with funder program staff, not a written denial alone. The funder's goal is to support the arts ecosystem, and that includes supporting organizations through difficult transitions even when emergency operating grants are not appropriate.
- The funder's arts commission or advisory body should receive an annual summary report on viability assessments conducted during the year, including the distribution of assessments across the sector and any patterns or trends that warrant policy attention. Individual organization assessments should remain confidential.
- This framework should be reviewed and updated annually, with input from arts community stakeholders, to ensure it remains appropriate, fair, and useful.
- *The goal of this framework is not to make it harder for organizations to access funder support. It is to ensure that funder support reaches organizations where it can make a real difference, and that the funder's stewardship of public arts resources reflects both strategic judgment and genuine care for the arts community it serves.*

Veterans Memorial Building

Background and Role in the Civic Center Plan

The Veterans Memorial Building (1928) is one of two historic structures at the core of Berkeley's Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan. Under the preferred design concept adopted by City Council in July 2023, the building is programmed as a city-run Community Arts Center with performance venues, teaching and exhibit space, and public access as its organizing principle. The concept plan allocates roughly 28,000 gross square feet of existing building plus a 5,950 square foot stage addition, with an auditorium, gallery and visual arts rooms, practice and small performance rooms, learning labs, and a potential rooftop event space and terrace. Preliminary construction costs were estimated at $26.3 million to $36.9 million (as of July 2023), including a seismic retrofit to the Building Performance Objective standard. The city's preliminary operations and maintenance budget for the building, derived from the per-square-foot cost of the 1947 Center Street building, is approximately $1.07 million annually. Two considerations will have the greatest effect on the project's financial feasibility and long-term public cost:

- **Development model.** The entity responsible for assembling capital, managing design and construction, and assuming development and real estate risk.
- **Operating model.** The entity responsible for programming, staffing, facility management, fundraising, tenant relationships, and annual operating performance.

The ownership and development structure will determine access to tax credits, grants, public financing, and private capital. Because arts organizations generally have limited rent-paying capacity, the project is unlikely to support substantial development debt without public funding, philanthropy, commercial revenue, or another reliable source of repayment.

Development Model

The primary development alternatives are City-led delivery and delivery through a mission-driven nonprofit or private development partner. The ownership and development structure will determine access to Historic Tax Credits, New Markets Tax Credits, grants, tax-exempt financing, private capital, and California public-financing tools such as an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District. The applicability and financial capacity of each source would require further analysis. A third-party development structure may provide access to Historic Tax Credits and New Markets Tax Credits, which generally require a taxable entity to monetize the credits.

- **City-led development.** The City retains control of the asset and project delivery and assumes responsibility for predevelopment, capital funding, construction management, cost escalation, and completion risk. Funding would likely require a combination of bonds, grants, City revenues, philanthropy, and other public sources.
- **Mission-driven or private development partner**. A nonprofit or for-profit partner may assemble financing, monetize tax credits, manage rehabilitation, and assume a greater share of development risk. The City may retain ownership, provide the property under a long-term lease, contribute capital, or serve as a funding partner.

- **Joint public-philanthropic development.** Public ownership and capital funding can be combined with a nonprofit capital campaign and an independent operating organization. This structure can broaden the funding base but requires a strong fundraising entity and clear allocation of cost-overrun and completion risk.

Some relevant California precedents include:

- **Geneva Car Barn Powerhouse, San Francisco**. The City funded predevelopment and stabilization and selected the nonprofit Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST) as developer and master tenant. The approximately $17.5 million in capital included City bond funds, State grants, Historic and New Markets Tax Credits, and a developer contribution.
- **Oakland Civic**. Oakland selected Orton Development through an RFP and entered into a 99-year lease. The developer assumed responsibility for financing, rehabilitation, and operations through an approximately $64 million package that included developer equity, tax credits, debt, and a capital campaign, with limited direct City capital.
- **Gallo Center for the Arts, Modesto**. Stanislaus County funded and owns the approximately $47 million facility, supplemented by contributions from more than 4,000 private donors to the nonprofit operator.
- **Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture**. The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture in Riverside provides a recent example of public ownership and capital investment combined with nonprofit operation. Opened in 2022, the center occupies the City's former Main Library, which was renovated through a partnership among the City of Riverside, Riverside Art Museum, and Cheech Marin. The City retained ownership of the building, funded and managed the rehabilitation, and entered into a long-term agreement with Riverside Art Museum to operate and program the facility. The project illustrates a current development model in which a public agency provides the real estate and substantial capital support, while an established nonprofit assumes responsibility for cultural programming, fundraising, and day-to-day operations. Its applicability to Berkeley would depend on identifying a nonprofit operator with sufficient organizational and financial capacity.

Operating Model Framework

Operating structures for publicly owned community and cultural facilities fall along a continuum rather than into a small number of fixed models. The principal distinction is the allocation of responsibility for facility operations, programming, fundraising, earned revenue, capital maintenance, and financial risk between the City and a nonprofit or private partner. The operating model should be evaluated separately from the development structure. A facility can remain publicly owned under any of the models below, and public funding generally remains necessary even when day-to-day operations are assigned to a nonprofit.

Direct City Operation

Under this model, the City is responsible for staffing, programming, rentals, maintenance, financial performance, and annual operating support. A nonprofit foundation or friends organization may provide supplemental fundraising and program support without assuming responsibility for the building.

Advantages include direct policy control, integration with existing City department, access to shared administrative, legal, finance, and maintenance functions, and clear public accountability. Challenges to consider are that full financial exposure remains with the City, municipal hiring, procurement, contracting, and event policies can reduce operating flexibility and efficiencies, and City departments may not have dedicated programming, marketing, or fundraising capacity. Examples include:

- **Irvine Fine Arts Center, Irvine**. The City of Irvine operates a dedicated visual arts facility offering exhibitions, classes, camps, open studios, and community events. The example demonstrates direct municipal delivery of a broad arts education and community programming portfolio within an existing City department.
- **Firehouse Arts Center, Pleasanton**. The City of Pleasanton operates a mixed-use arts center with a small theater, gallery, classes, youth programs, and community rentals. Its combination of performance, exhibition, education, and rental uses is closer in scale and program mix to the proposed Veterans Memorial Building than a major regional performing arts center.
- **Homeland Cultural Center, Long Beach**. Operated through the City of Long Beach Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine, the center provides year-round urban and traditional arts classes, performances, and community programming. It illustrates a smaller cultural facility embedded within a municipal parks and recreation system.

City Operation with a Nonprofit Program and Fundraising Partner

In a more integrated hybrid model, the City retains responsibility for the building and core operations while a nonprofit partner manages defined functions such as fundraising, education, community engagement, marketing, events, or selected programming. In some cases the nonprofit primarily fundraises to support these roles and functions, while in others, nonprofit and City staff work together. The major strength of this model is the combination of the stability and facility-management capacity of a public agency with nonprofit fundraising, program expertise, and operating flexibility. However, this structure requires clear allocation of staff responsibilities, revenues, expenses, insurance, contracting authority, and decision-making. Overlapping responsibilities can create operational inefficiencies if the agreement is not specific. Examples include:

- **Randall Museum, San Francisco.** San Francisco Recreation and Parks manages the publicly owned facility, while Randall Museum Friends supports fundraising, programs, supplies, and capital improvements. City and nonprofit staff work alongside one another, with City staff leading museum operations and programs and Randall Museum Friends providing fundraising, administrative, and volunteer support. The facility offers art, science, nature, classes, workshops, camps, and community events.
- **Palo Alto Art Center.** The City owns and operates the Art Center, while the Palo Alto Art Center Foundation provides fundraising, advocacy, and supplemental program support. The facility combines exhibitions, studios, classes, school programs, and community events with a dedicated nonprofit support organization.
- **Lesher Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek.** The City owns and operates the performing arts complex, while the Diablo Regional Arts Association raises private funds, presents programming, and supports

arts access. Although larger than the proposed Berkeley facility, it demonstrates that direct City operation may still require a specialized nonprofit partner for fundraising and program support.

Nonprofit Operator in a City-Owned Building

In this model, the City retains ownership while a nonprofit assumes primary responsibility for programming and operations under a lease, management agreement, or related funding agreement. The City may continue to fund operations, maintain major building systems, provide below-market occupancy, or support capital improvements. Advantages include stronger alignment between mission and programming, greater flexibility in hiring, contracting, fundraising, partnerships, and event operations, and clearer responsibility for audience development and facility activation. However, the operator must have sufficient capacity in facility management, finance, fundraising, maintenance, and public accountability, not only arts programming. The City retains exposure if the operator underperforms or the building requires substantial capital investment, and typically there is still some type of public agency operating subsidy. Examples include:

- **San Francisco Cultural Centers.** Four City-owned cultural facilities, including the African American Art & Culture Complex and Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, are operated by independent nonprofit arts organizations. The operators provide cultural programming, classes, exhibitions, performances, and rentals, supported by City grant funding and their own fundraising. The structure uses separate but coordinated occupancy and funding agreements, with performance measures tied to public programming and community access.
- **Sunset Center, Carmel-by-the-Sea**. After operating the converted school property directly for nearly four decades, the City created Sunset Cultural Center, Inc. to manage the facility. The center supports performances, resident organizations, gallery and education programs, and rentals through City funding and contributed revenue.
- **Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena**. The nonprofit Armory Center operates galleries, classrooms, and workshops in a publicly owned historic property under a long-term lease. In lieu of conventional rent, the lease has required the organization to provide arts programming of comparable value, illustrating how occupancy terms can be linked directly to public-service obligations.

Commercial Operator

A commercial venue manager may operate and book a publicly owned facility under contract. This model is most applicable to facilities with strong ticketing, event-rental, sponsorship, food-and-beverage, and naming-rights potential. The proposed community arts program is unlikely to support a fully commercial model without a public management payment, reduced community-access requirements, or both.

Need for a Full Feasibility Study

The Civic Center concept plan establishes a preliminary building program and preliminary capital and operating cost ranges, but it does not establish whether there is sufficient market support for the proposed spaces or what share of operating costs can realistically be recovered from users. A full feasibility study should be completed before design development fixes the building program or the City commits to a development and operating structure. The study should include the following elements:

- **Market and effective demand.** Assessment of demand for performance, rehearsal, teaching, studio, exhibit, event, and community-use space within the relevant trade area. The analysis should distinguish stated need from effective demand. Organizations may express strong interest in additional space but have limited ability or willingness to pay under current financial conditions. Interviews and surveys should therefore be tested against existing facility use, current rents, organizational budgets, competing supply, and realistic payment capacity.
- **Utilization, pricing, and revenue potential.** Estimation of achievable rental rates, attendance, class enrollment, event frequency, occupancy, and annual utilization by space type and user segment. Revenue assumptions should reflect discounts required for community access, the cost of generating and servicing rentals, and the time required to build stabilized utilization.
- **Program refinement.** Analysis of market-supported physical planning parameters, including recommended scale, capacity, mix of uses, shared spaces, support areas, and phasing based on demonstrated demand and operator requirements.
- **Operating pro forma.** Development of staffing, programming, utilities, maintenance, security, insurance, marketing, capital reserve, and other operating costs under each candidate model. Earned revenue should be based on demonstrated effective demand rather than the number of groups that indicate they would like to use the facility.
- **Annual public funding requirement**. Translation of market findings into realistic assumptions regarding the share of costs recoverable from rents, classes, tickets, and events, and estimate the resulting City subsidy, management payment, in-kind support, capital maintenance obligation, and exposure to operating deficits under each model.
- **Development and financing strategy**. Evaluation of public funding, grants, philanthropy, Historic Tax Credits, New Markets Tax Credits, debt capacity, developer participation, ownership alternatives, and delivery structure.
- **Risk analysis**. Sensitivity testing for construction escalation, project delays, lower-than-projected utilization, reduced fundraising, operator underperformance, and higher operating costs.
- **Implementation strategy.** Recommended governance, procurement approach, partner selection process, preopening schedule, fundraising requirements, and decision points.

The final building program should be calibrated to demonstrated market and effective demand, operator capacity, achievable tenant and user revenues, available capital funding, and the level of ongoing General Fund support the City is prepared to provide. Without this analysis, the City risks developing spaces that address demonstrated community needs but cannot be utilized at a frequency or price consistent with a financially sustainable business and operating model or the level of City funding available.

Berkeley Arts Resiliency Study

Community Workshop
Kala Institute

February 25, 2026

Agenda

Introduction and Background
Project Purpose
Framing Questions
Overview & Process
Key Challenges
Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights
Preliminary Resiliency Solutions
Funding Needs
Discussion (by table)
Debrief and Next Steps

Framing Questions

- What is the nature of the resiliency issues within the nonprofit arts/culture community? What are the specific financial challenges? Which organizations are most affected?
- What are the city’s current relevant policies?
- How have other cities addressed resiliency?
- What are potential interventions to strengthen resiliency?
- What are non-financial resiliency strategies?
- What is the role of city government? Partners?
- What are possible strategies and approaches for use of the Veteran’s Memorial building as an arts facility?

Overview & Process

Engagement

- Arts organization discussion groups
- Individual interviews with City & civic leadership
- Financial and policy analysis
- Tour of sites and venues

Focus

- Assess challenges facing nonprofit arts organizations
- Explore solutions for long-term sustainability

Overarching Observations

- Space challenges and rising operating costs underlie most financial challenges.
- Sustainability requires increased funding plus capacity building and collective action.
- Need to shift perception of arts from charity to essential economic and community infrastructure.
- Berkeley's collaborative (not competitive) arts culture is a unique strength to preserve.

Key Challenges Identified

Real Estate & Space

- Escalating rental costs & loss of affordable spaces
- Difficulty finding rehearsal, performance, and storage space
- Expensive ADA and renovation permitting
- UC spaces too expensive for community use
- Ongoing downtown vacancies

Financial Pressures

- Dramatic increases in operating costs
- AB5 legislation significant payroll cost increases
- Federal funding cuts (NEA) created budget gaps
- Shifting donor/foundation priorities

Audiences & Attendance

- Subscription models declining
- Challenge attracting younger audiences
- Downtown safety concerns deter attendance

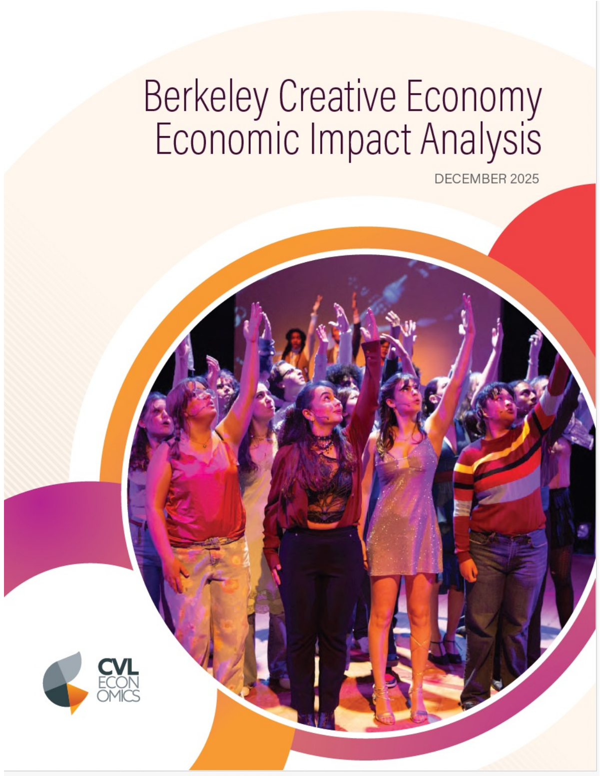
Operational Issues

- Cumbersome event permitting
- Street closure fee increases
- Staff burnout and board recruitment challenges
- Technology capacity lags behind needs

Arts and Culture Return on Investment

"When accounting for both direct activity and the broader ripple effects across the local economy, these organizations and individuals that received grants* from the City of Berkeley together generated $137.4 million in economic activity within the City of Berkeley."

*around $700,000



Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

Financial Health of Berkeley's Arts and Culture Nonprofits
(based on IRS 990 data, 2019-2023)

What does the ecosystem look like?

How financially stable are organizations?

What has changed since 2019?

Where is financial stress concentrated?

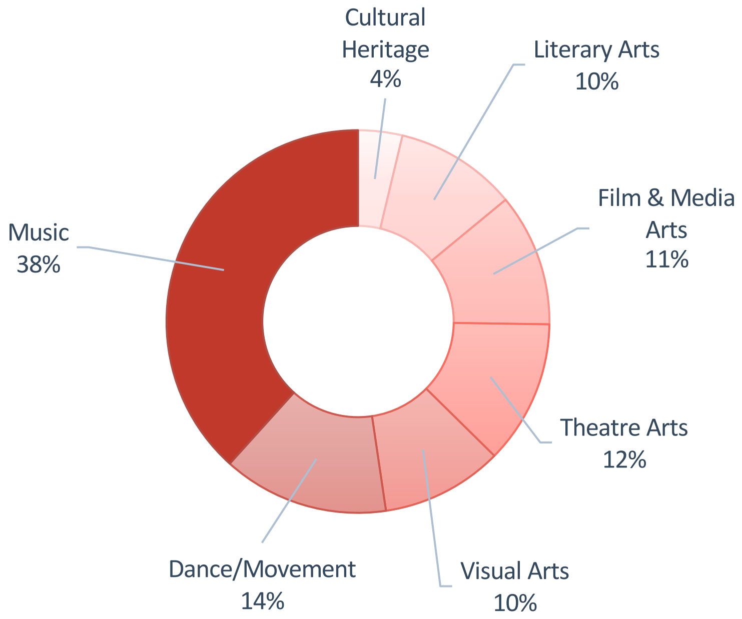
What does this mean for a resilience strategy?

Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

What does the Berkeley arts and culture ecosystem look like?

The ecosystem is diverse but concentrated in a few dominant disciplines.

- Approximately 108 arts and culture organizations operate in Berkeley
- With 108 organizations serving a city of ~120,000 residents — roughly one arts nonprofit per 1,100 residents
- Music represents 38% of organizations, including many education-focused groups
- Dance/Movement, Theatre, Film & Media, Visual Arts, and Literary Arts each represent roughly 10–15% of the ecosystem
- Cultural Heritage (4%) is a smaller but meaningful segment and overlaps with other categories

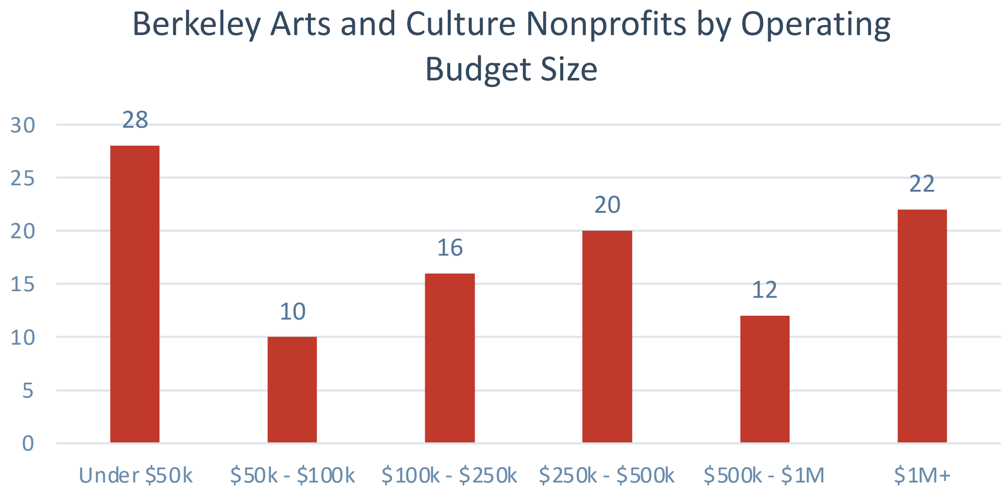


Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

How large are Berkeley's arts and culture nonprofits?

The ecosystem is structurally small-scale, with limited institutional cushion.

- 28 organizations (26%) operate under $50,000 in gross receipts
- 50% operate under $250,000 annually
- Nearly 70% operate under $500,000
- Only 22 organizations (20%) exceed $1 million in annual revenue
- Financial capacity is distributed across many small and mid-sized organizations

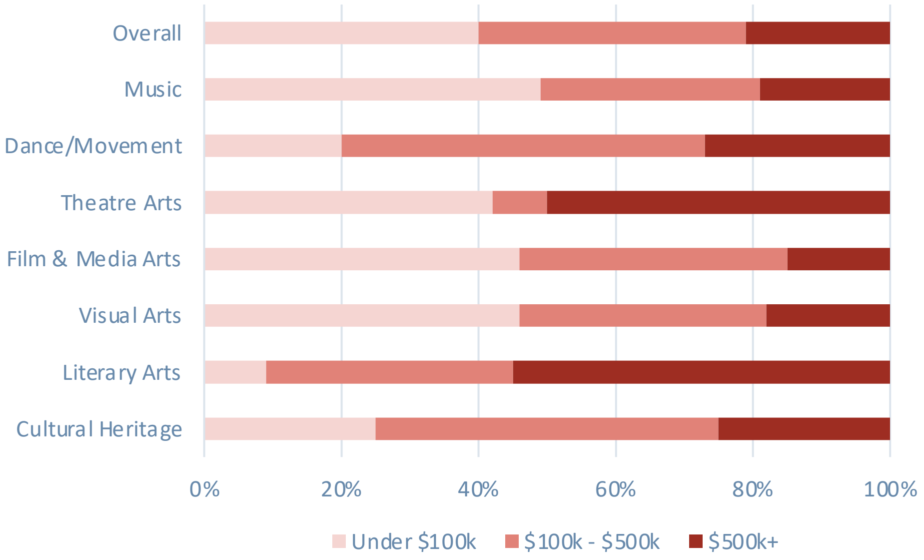


Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

How does organizational size vary by discipline?

Berkeley's arts and culture sector operates at a small financial scale, with significant variation across disciplines.

- 40% of organizations operate under $100K in annual expenses
- Only 21% exceed $500K, indicating limited large-scale institutional capacity
- Music skews small, with nearly half under $100K, reflecting many education-based organizations
- Dance is predominantly mid-sized, with over half between $100K and $500K
- Theatre is polarized, with 42% under $100K and 50% over $500K, with few mid-sized organizations
- Literary Arts skews large, with 55% over $500K

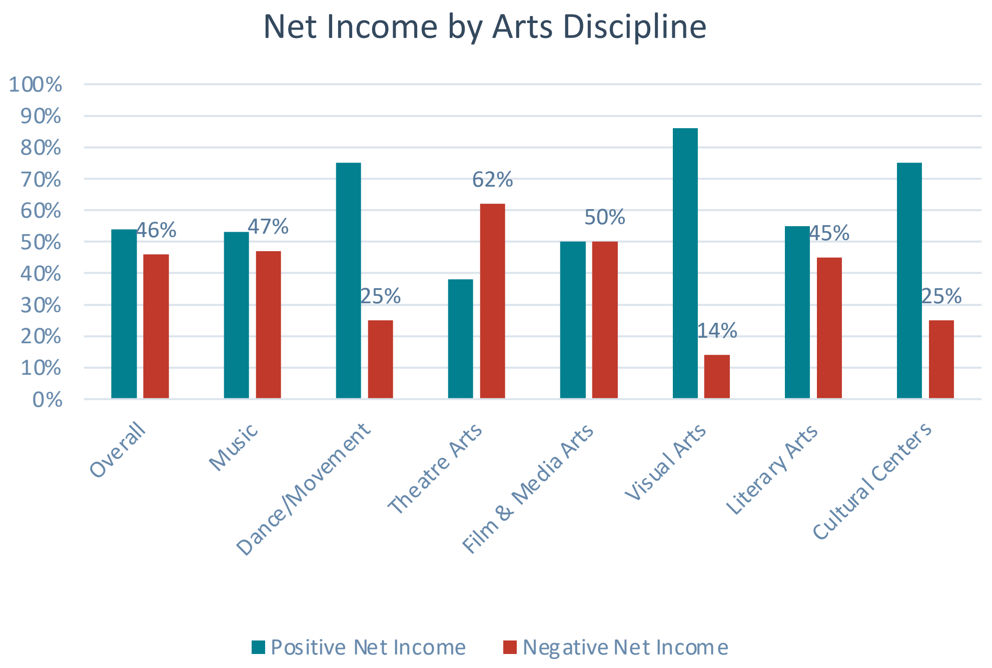


Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

How financially stable are Berkeley's arts and culture nonprofits?

Nearly half of reporting organizations operated at a deficit in 2023.

- 46% of reporting (full-filing) organizations reported deficits in 2023
- Theatre organizations faced the highest financial strain, with 62% reporting a deficit
- Film & Media and Music experienced elevated deficit frequency.
- Dance and Visual Arts appeared comparatively stable, with a lower percentage reporting a deficit



Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

How deep were operating deficits in 2023?

Among organizations operating at a loss, the median deficit was 14% of total expenses.

- Deficit severity varies across disciplines, ranging from ~5% to 23%
- Theatre and Visual Arts show the highest median deficit depth
- Several disciplines report double-digit median deficits
- A 14% median deficit reflects structural imbalance rather than short-term fluctuation

Note: These figures reflect only full FY2023 filers (excludes postcard filers which tend to be smaller budget organizations under $50k)

Median Deficit Severity
(organizations operating with a deficit)

⚖️ Overall	14%
🎭 Theatre	23%
🎨 Visual Arts	18%
🎵 Music	14%
💃 Dance	11%
🎬 Film	9%
📚 Literary	5%

Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

Do operating deficits differ meaningfully by organization size?

Financial stress manifests differently by scale. Mid-sized organizations face the deepest proportional deficits, while large organizations absorb the largest dollar losses.

- Mid-sized organizations have the largest proportional deficits (23%)
- Large organizations have smaller proportional deficits (12%) but extremely large average dollar losses (~$801K)
- Small organizations show meaningful proportional stress (18%) but relatively small absolute dollar gaps (~$3.8K)

Size Tier	Avg Deficit %	Avg Dollar Deficit	# of Orgs	% of Category with Deficits
Under $100K	18%	$3,815	10	50%
$100K–$500K	23%	$63,596	13	34%
$500K+	12%	$801,089	14	48%
All Organizations	18%	$326,000	37	43%

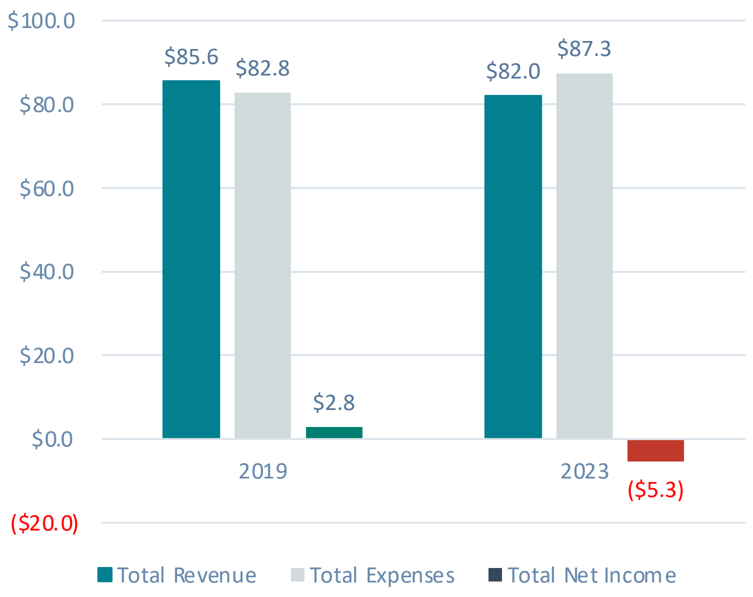
Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

How has overall financial health shifted since pre-pandemic levels?

Revenue softened while costs continued to rise.

- The share of organizations operating at a deficit increased from 40% to 45%
- Total revenue declined 4%, while expenses increased 5%
- The sector shifted from a $2.8M aggregate surplus to a $5.3M deficit
- Median deficit severity increased (9% → 14%)
- A 9-point gap between revenue decline and expense growth drove the sector-wide deficit

Berkeley Arts and Culture Nonprofits: Total Revenue and Expenses, 2019 vs. 2023

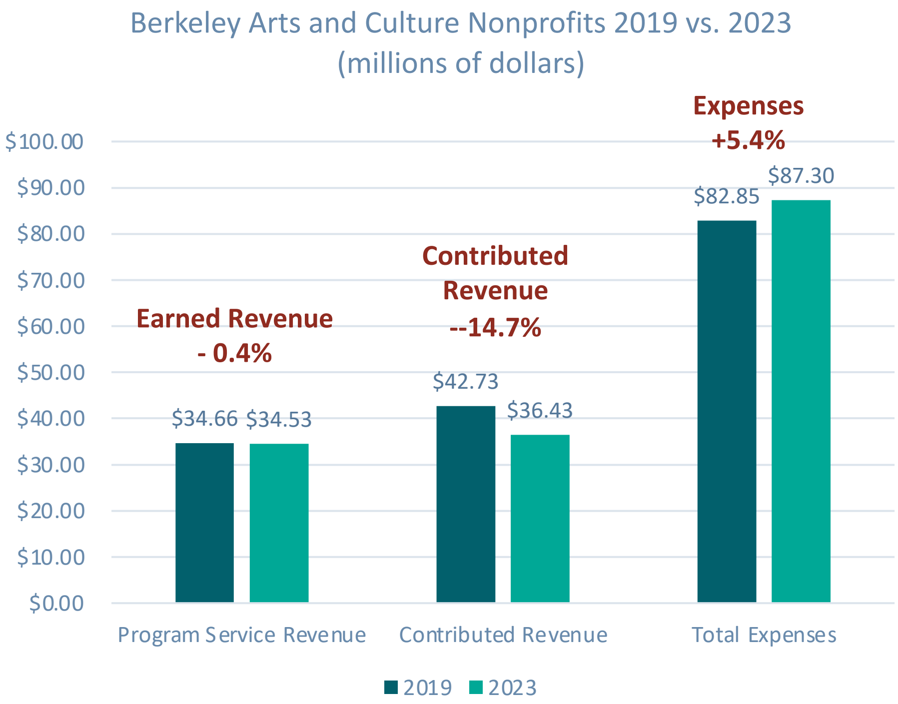


Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

How did different types of revenue and expenses change from 2019 to 2023?

Flat earned revenue and declining contributions, combined with rising expenses, shifted the sector into deficit.

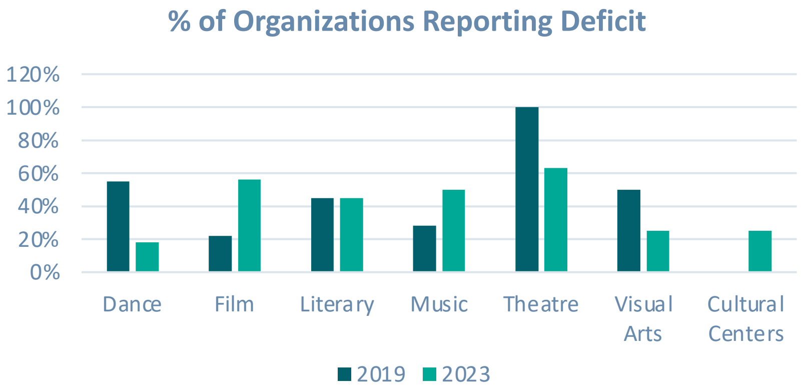
- Earned revenue was essentially flat, and in real dollars has 16% less purchasing power than in 2019 due to inflation
- Flat earned revenue suggests audience, pricing, or capacity pressure
- Contributed revenue declined nearly 15%
- Total revenue declined 4%
- Expenses increased more than 5%
- Revenue did not keep pace with cost growth, creating structural margin compression

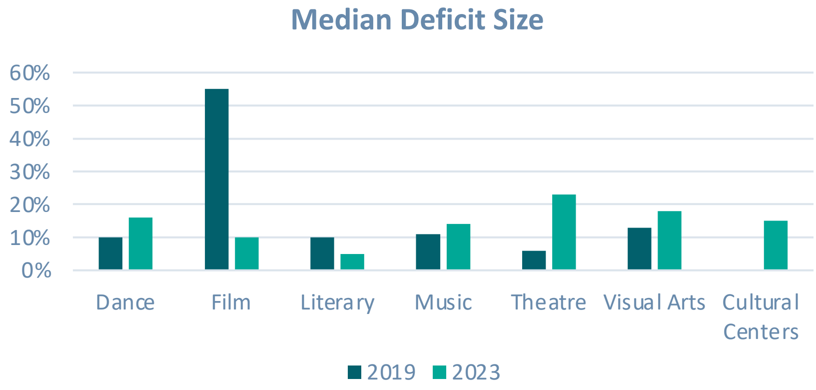


Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

How did financial health by discipline change after the pandemic?

Financial stress remains elevated across multiple disciplines, with deeper deficits emerging in some performing arts fields.





- Film and Music experienced substantial increases in deficit frequency
- Theatre reduced the # of organizations in deficit, but median deficit depth increased sharply (6% → 23%)
- Even where frequency improved (e.g., Dance, Visual Arts), median deficit levels remain significant

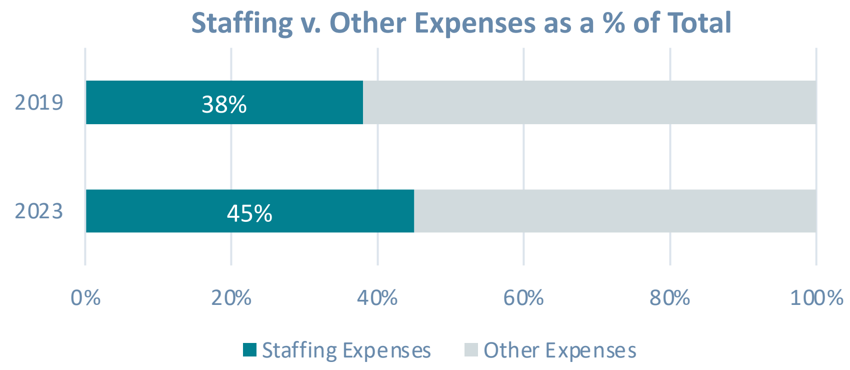
Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

What is driving cost growth post-pandemic?

Staffing costs have increased significantly and now consume a larger share of operating budgets, reducing financial flexibility and leaving less funding for audience rebuilding.

- Total staffing costs increased 22% since 2019 and represent 45% of total expenses, up from 39%
- Personnel growth outpaced overall expense growth (+5%)
- A larger staffing share limits flexibility for marketing, programming, and audience rebuilding

Cost Category	2019	2023	Change
Staffing	$31.9M	$38.9M	21.90%
Other	$50.9M	$48.4M	-4.5%
Total	**$82.8M**	**$87.3M**	**5.40%**



Financial Analysis Preliminary Insights

Key Findings

Berkeley's arts ecosystem is experiencing structural margin compression driven by flat earned revenue, declining contributions, and rising staffing costs.

- 45% of organizations operated at a deficit in 2023
- Median deficit severity reached 14%, indicating meaningful structural strain
- Total revenue declined 4% while expenses increased 5%
- Earned revenue has 16% less purchasing power than in 2019
- Contributed revenue declined nearly 15%
- Staffing now represents 45% of operating budgets, reducing financial flexibility

Funding Needs

How Much General Operating Support Would be Meaningful for Your Organization?

Small Organizations

Annually (25% of budget)

Under $100k budgets

Grant range of $5K-$10K per

Mid-Size Organizations

Annually (5-10% of budget)

$500k-$1M budgets

Grant range of $30K - $50K per

Larger Organizations

Annually (5-10% of budget)

$1.5M-$2M+ budgets

Grant range of $100K - $300K per

Consensus: General operating support of approximately 5-10% of organizational budgets provided on a consistent basis would be most meaningful and sustainable.

Possible Strategies

Funding is important, but financial intervention alone will not address structural pressures. Resilience requires coordinated financial, operational, and ecosystem strategies.

Funding Mechanisms

Berkeley Arts Measure

Multi-year general operating support

Reserve and liquidity strengthening

Space

Citywide arts space directory

City-owned real estate and vacant storefronts

Capital matching grants

TIF mechanisms

Audience and Market Recovery

Reinvestment in program and risk capital

Marketing and programming

Downtown activation strategies

Capacity Building

Convening and coordination

Technical assistance and capacity building

Shared services and efficient permitting

Table Discussions

- 30 minutes for discussion at your tables
- Request one person serve as a notetaker at each table
- 3-minute debrief per table
- Consolidate notes and review next steps

Discussion Questions

- What are your questions and observations on the process and findings to-date?
  - What resonates the most?
  - What’s missing?
- What are (additional) potential strategies for arts and culture resiliency?
- martin@culturalplanning.com

Discussion Group Participants, October 2025

Participants in the small group discussion sessions held October 22–24, 2025, as part of the Berkeley Arts and Culture Sector Resiliency Plan stakeholder engagement process.

Name	Organization
Marion Atherton	Berkeley Symphony
Sharmi Basu	
Jennifer Boesing	Korsamt
Inge Bruggeman	Codex Foundation
MK Chavez	Ouroboros Coaching
Kimberly Dooley	Berkeley Playhouse
Shiree Dyson	
Bobbi Fabian	Berkeley Potters' Studio
Erik Ferry	
David Flores	BETV
Capoeira Arts Foundation	
J. K. Fowler	Bay Book Fest
Veronika Fukson	
Jamie Greenblatt	
Ali Griffin	Berkeley Ballet
Nicholas Harvey	
Maria Schell Hassid	Brower Center
Julie Humphrey	UCSD?
Gisela Insuaste	Berkeley Art Center
Joyce Jenkins	Poetry Flash
Jim Kleinmann	Playground SF
Sherri Kronfeld	Sacred Music Fellowship
Ellen Lake	Kala
Jane Lenoir	
Ashley Levy	Transit Books
Ari Lipsky	Berkeley Rep
Liz Lisle	Shotgun Players
Marty McCutcheon	Berkeley Commonplace

Name	Organization
Isabella Miller	Berkeley Film Foundation
Niloo Nouri	
Shawn Oda	
Giulio Perrone	Inferno Theatre
Joanne De Phillips	
Elise Proulx	
Jill Randall	Shawl Anderson?
Danae Rees	Axis Dance
Yano Rivera	
David Roderick	Left Margin Lit
John-Mario Sevilla	Luna Dance
Porter Sexton	Options Recovery?
Clayton Shelvin	The Freight
Meg Shiffler	Artist Space Trust
Vicki Siegel	
Lawrence Silva	Makers Paradise
Mark Streshinsky	West Edge Opera
Derek Tam	
Suzy Thompson	
David Wagner	Lark Traditional Arts
Emily Wainacht	Cazadero
Steve Wasserman	Heyday Books
Emilie Whelan	West Edge Opera
Mary White	
Miriam Wolodarski	Sense Object
Nur Yavuz	Anatolian Arts
Jan Zvaifler	Central Works

Appendix: Workshop Attendee List

Arts and culture community representatives attending the Arts and Culture Sustainability Workshop at Kala Institute on February 25, 2026.

Name	Organization
Alex Acuña	Artist Space Trust
Esailama Artry-Diouf	San Francisco Foundation
Marion Atherton	Berkeley Symphony
Christina Azahar	La Peña Cultural Center
Gino Barichello	Indigenous Peoples Day Committee
Devi Dutta-Choudhury	Devi Dutta Architecture
Shiree Dyson	Sage & Needles
Qiana Ellis	Artist Space Trust
Erik Ferry	Representing Kairos Music Academy and 2 other E. Bay arts organizations
David Flores	Berkeley Community Media
Veronika Fukson	Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra
Sara Gambina	Gamelan Sekar Jaya
Jamie Greenblatt	Play Cafe
Claire Greensfelder	California Institute for Community, Art & Nature
Nick Harvey	BrasArte
Mary Jo Hudgel	Four Seasons Arts
Julie Humphrey	Bella Musica Chorus
Jim Kleinmann	PlayGround
Sherri Kronfeld	Sacred Music Fellowship
Ellen Lake	Kala Art Institute
Ashley Levy	Transit Books
Laura Margulius	Capoeira Arts Foundation
Elizabeth Meyer	Cal Performances
Lisa Mezzacappa	The Jazzschool
Isabella Sanders Miller	The Berkeley Film Foundation
Katelyn Nomura-Weingrow	BAMPFA
Stephanie Nusmen	—

Name	Organization
Shawn Oda	Theatre Lunatico
Tom Parrish	Berkeley Rep
Giulio Cesare Perrone	Inferno Theatre
Eduardo Pineda	—
Elise Proulx	Mahea Uchiyama Center for International Dance
Jill Randall	Shawl-Anderson Dance Center
Danae Rees	AXIS Dance Company
Suhaila Salimpur	SADC
Terry Sullivan	Inferno Theatre
John-Mario Suvilla	Luna Dance
Allegra Thompson	Berkeley Old Time Music Convention
Sarah Torres	Ashkanaz
Consuelo Tupper	La Peña Cultural Center
Steve Wasserman	Heyday Books
Mary White	WEAD Women Eco Artists Dialog
Cameron Woo	Berkeley Civic Arts Commission
Yano	Muraldoctor

44 attendees listed, alphabetically by last name. Some attendees may not be listed. This list is based on those who registered in advance and indicated checked in upon arrival.

Civic Arts Division

To: Civic Arts Commission

Date: September 15, 2026

From: Carianna Arredondo, Assistant to the City Manager

Subject: Mokhtar Paki's Sinbad Voyage Mural — Background and Restoration Update

Purpose

This memorandum provides background on Mokhtar Paki's Sinbad Voyage mural, the damage caused by vandalism in August 2026, and efforts to support its restoration. Staff have authorized a $1,000 emergency grant and obtained an updated permission letter from the property owner. Councilmember Igor Tregub has also put forward an item for the September 29, 2026 City Council meeting requesting Council discretionary funds for restoration.

Mural History and Significance

Sinbad Voyage was created in 2023 by Berkeley-based Iranian immigrant artist Mokhtar Paki. The approximately 28-by-14-foot mural is located on private property at the corner of Dwight Way and Sacramento Street.

The mural's creation was supported through Berkeley Art Works Projects, a Civic Arts grant program developed to fund visual and performing artists implementing temporary projects in Berkeley's public realm and to contribute to the community's resilience and recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Projects were intended to address public health and well-being, economic recovery and resilience, or community connection and belonging.

In April 2021, a grant review panel recommended awarding Mr. Paki $10,000 for a project addressing the theme of community connection and belonging[1]. On April 28, 2021, the Civic Arts Commission approved the recommended slate of Berkeley Art Works Projects grants, including Mr. Paki's award[2].

The mural depicts the experiences of immigrants, refugees, and displaced people seeking safety and a better life. Inspired by the story of Sinbad and real experiences of migration, it contains more than 450 figures, including approximately 90 clearly visible faces. Many represent actual people and immigrant stories, including members of Berkeley's diverse

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[1] https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/legislative-body-meeting-attachments/04.28.2021Civic%20Arts%20Commission%20Agenda%20and%20Attachments.pdf

[2] https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/legislative-body-meeting-minutes/04.28.2021%20Civic%20Arts%20Commission%20Minutes.pdf

communities. Among them is Paki's niece, Sanaz, who died at age five while attempting to flee Iran by boat with her father. Paki has described the work as his "love letter to Berkeley."

Vandalism and Community Response

The mural was vandalized with white paint on the night of August 19, 2026, causing significant damage. The Berkeley Police Department are actively investigating and currently a motive had not been established.

Following the incident, community members expressed support for the artist and interest in helping restore the mural through donations, volunteer participation, and in-kind assistance. Paki established a community fundraising campaign to help cover restoration costs. Staff participated in a site visit with Councilmember Tregub and his staff to hear from the artist and discuss options for City support.

Staff Response and Emergency Grant

Consistent with the Berkeley Municipal Code's public art funding framework—70 percent for projects, 10 percent for conservation, and 20 percent for administration—the Civic Arts Division provided Mr. Paki a one-time $1,000 emergency conservation grant to restore the mural to its condition as originally approved by the Civic Arts Commission.

Because the mural is located on private property, staff also reviewed the available property authorization documentation. An original property owner agreement was not located in the City's available records. Staff worked with the property manager, Gordon Realty, to obtain an updated permission letter documenting authorization for the mural to remain on the property for an additional two years.

Any additional Civic Arts funding beyond the authorized $1,000 will require identification of an available and eligible funding source, and a vote from the Civic Arts Commission for approval. No additional Civic Arts funding is committed through the emergency grant authorization.

September 29 Council Item

Councilmember Tregub has put forward an item for the September 29, 2026 consent calendar to support restoration through Councilmembers' D13 discretionary accounts[3]. The proposed contributions are $500 from Councilmember Tregub, $250 from Councilmember Taplin, $100 from Mayor Ishii, and $100 from Councilmember Bartlett, totaling $950. The item invites all Councilmembers to contribute and proposes a limit of $1,000 per participating Councilmember. These funds would be additional to the $1,000 emergency grant authorized by staff and remain subject to Council approval.

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[3] https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/legislative-body-meeting-attachments/Draft%20Item%2025%20Relinquishment%20of%20Council%20Office%20Budget%20Funds%20-%20Revised%20Material%20-%20Mural%20D13.pdf

Mokhtar Paki

As a celebration of diversity and a commemoration of the struggles of immigrants who survive the hard journey towards a better life, the city of Berkeley has approved work on "**Sinbad's Voyage**," a mural at the intersection of Dwight and Sacramento. This mural deals in particular with the plight of the Middle Easterners, North Africans, and others who have fled war and devastation and tried to make their way across the Mediterranean Sea in our own time. The characters in the image are mostly based on real individuals who either perished in their journeys or survived. The painting's name, "Sinbad's Voyage," refers to one of the mythical heroes of The One Thousand and One Nights, who fearlessly led a group of sailors in their search for happiness.

Dwight Way and Sacramento Street, Berkeley
Completed May 2023

DRAFT MINUTES
CIVIC ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, August 26, 2026
6:00 PM

Meeting Location: Tarea Hall Pittman South Branch Library

1901 Russell St, Berkeley, CA 94703

Commission Members:

Chair Montgomery, Vice Chair Bachrach, Commissioner Woo, Commissioner Vaughn Scott, Commissioner Bullwinkel, Commissioner Pineda, Commissioner Blecher, Commissioner Truc-Dao Kramer, Commissioner Dutta- Choudhury

Call to Order: 6:02 PM

Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Bachrach, Blecher, Bullwinkel, Dutta-Choudhury, Montgomery, Scott, Kramer, Woo
Staff Present: Carianna Arredondo, Assistant to the City Manager, Mark Salinas, Public Art Program Lead
General Public Present: 2 in-person | 2 online

Land Acknowledgement, led by Commissioner Pineda

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Matters: 2

Chairperson's Report, discussed that they were briefed by the Secretary on subcommittee meetings

Commission Action Items

1. **Action Item: City of Berkeley Arts Resiliency Study and Plan t**
   M/S/C (Montgomery/ Bullwinkel) to synthesize commissioner feedback and work with staff to update the plan, highlight any updates made, and have updated plan for review at the next commission meeting
   Vote: Ayes — Bachrach, Blecher, Bullwinkel, Dutta-Choudhury, Kramer, Montgomery, Scott, Woo; Nays — None; Abstain — None

Public Comment: 2

2. **Cube Space Exhibition October 2026 to January 2027: Lena Coletto**
M/S/C (Blecher/Woo) to approve the Cube Space Exhibition featuring Lena Coletto on display from October 2026 to January 2027
Vote: Ayes — Bachrach, Blecher, Bullwinkel, Dutta-Choudhury, Kramer, Montgomery, Pineda, Scott, Woo; Nays — None; Abstain — None
Public Comment: 0

Presentations and Discussion Items

Presentation Items Held:

3. **Update on 2403 San Pablo Avenue Public Art on Private Development**
Public Comment: 0
4. **Looking Forward at the Civic Arts programs in Berkeley**
Public Comment: 0

Information Items and Updates

5. **Grants, Public Art and Civic Arts Programs Updates Received:**
   a) Grants Program Updates, Carianna Arredondo (on behalf of staff)
   b) Public Art Program Updates, Mark Salinas
   c) Civic Arts Program Updates, Carianna Arredondo

Committee Updates

6. **Grants, Public Art, and Policy Subcommittee Updates Received:**
   a) Grants – Added Commissioner Kramer to Grants Subcommittee
   b) Public Art –No Major Updates
   c) Policy Subcommittee – No Major Updates
   d) Representative on Design Review Committee – No Major Updates

Items for Future Agendas

These items are not scheduled for discussion or action at this meeting. The Commission may schedule these items to the Action Calendar of a future Commission meeting.

- Adding an Action item to put together an Artist Housing Subcommittee
- Adding a standing discussion item for Looking Forward at the Civic Arts programs in Berkeley

Minutes for Approval

Draft minutes for the Commissions consideration and approval.

7. **Minutes of June 24, 2026**
M/S/C (Montgomery/ Blecher) to approve Draft Minutes of July 22, 2026, Meeting

Vote: Ayes — Bachrach, Blecher, Bullwinkel, Dutta-Choudhury, Kramer, Pineda, Montgomery, Woo; Nays — None; Abstain — Scott.
Public Comment: 0

Commissioner Announcements

- None

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 PM by unanimous consent.
Vote: Ayes — Bachrach, Blecher, Bullwinkel, Dutta-Choudhury, Kramer, Montgomery, Scott, Woo; Nays — None; Abstain — None

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