



**AGENDA**  
**BERKELEY CITY COUNCIL AGENDA & RULES COMMITTEE**  
**SPECIAL MEETING**

**MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2026**

**2:30 P.M.**

2180 Milvia Street, Berkeley, CA 94704

Teleconference Location: 1027 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, CA 94710

Committee Members:

Mayor Adena Ishii, Councilmembers Terry Taplin and Mark Humbert

Alternate: Ben Bartlett

This meeting will be conducted in a hybrid model with both in-person and virtual attendance. Attend this meeting remotely using [Zoom](#). 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: 161 998 5675**. To provide public comment, Press \*9 and wait to be recognized by the Chair. To submit a written communication for the public record, email [policycommittee@berkeleyca.gov](mailto:policycommittee@berkeleyca.gov). All Committee meetings are recorded.

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.

Pursuant to the City Council Rules of Procedure and State Law, the presiding officer may remove, or cause the removal of, an individual for disrupting the meeting. Prior to removing an individual, the presiding officer shall warn the individual that their behavior is disrupting the meeting and that their failure to cease their behavior may result in their removal. The presiding officer may then remove the individual if they do not promptly cease their disruptive behavior. “Disrupting” means engaging in behavior during a meeting of a legislative body that actually disrupts, disturbs, impedes, or renders infeasible the orderly conduct of the meeting and includes, but is not limited to, a failure to comply with reasonable and lawful regulations adopted by a legislative body, or engaging in behavior that constitutes use of force or a true threat of force.

**California Government Code Section 84308 (Levine Act)** Parties to a proceeding involving a license, permit, or other entitlement for use are required to disclose if they made contributions over \$500 within the prior 12 months to any City employee or officer. Parties and participants with a financial interest are prohibited from making more than \$500 in contributions to a decisionmaker for the 12 months after the final decision is rendered on the proceeding. The above contribution disclosures and restrictions do not apply when the proceeding is competitively bid, or involves a personnel or labor contract. For more information, see Government Code Section 84308.

# **AGENDA**

**Roll Call**

**Public Comment**

## **Review of Agendas**

- 1. Approval of Minutes: April 6, 2026**
- 2. Review and Approve Draft Agenda:**
  - a. 4/28/2026 – Regular City Council Meeting
- 3. Adjournments In Memory**

## **Scheduling**

- 4. Council Worksessions Schedule**
- 5. Council Referrals to Agenda Committee for Scheduling**
- 6. Land Use Calendar**

## **Action Calendar**

- None

## **Unscheduled Items**

- 7. Review Policy Committees Structure**
- 8. Review Boards and Commissions Structure**

## **Items for Future Agendas**

- Requests by Committee Members to add items to the next agenda

**Adjournment – Next Meeting Monday, April 27, 2026**

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**Additional items may be added to the draft agenda per Council Rules of Procedure.**

*Rules of Procedure as adopted by Council resolution, Article III, C3c - Agenda - Submission of Time Critical Items*

*Time Critical Items. A Time Critical item is defined as a matter that is considered urgent by the sponsor and that has a deadline for action that is prior to the next meeting of the Council and for which a report prepared by the City Manager, Auditor, Mayor or council member is received by the City Clerk after established deadlines and is not included on the Agenda Committee’s published agenda.*

*If the Agenda Committee finds the matter to meet the definition of Time Critical, the Agenda Committee may place the matter on the Agenda on either the Consent or Action Calendar.*

*The City Clerk shall not accept any item past the adjournment of the Agenda Committee meeting for which the agenda that the item is requested to appear on has been approved.*

*Written communications addressed to the Agenda Committee and submitted to the City Clerk Department by 5:00 p.m. the Friday before the Committee meeting, will be distributed to the Committee in advance of the meeting and retained as part of the official record.*

*This meeting will be conducted in accordance with the Brown Act, Government Code Section 54953 and applicable Executive Orders as issued by the Governor that are currently in effect. Members of the City Council who are not members of the standing committee may attend a standing committee meeting even if it results in a quorum being present, provided that the non-members only act as observers and do not participate in the meeting. If only one member of the Council who is not a member of the committee is present for the meeting, the member may participate in the meeting because less than a quorum of the full Council is present. Any member of the public may attend this meeting. Questions regarding public participation may be addressed to the City Clerk Department (510) 981-6900.*

**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](mailto: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.

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I hereby certify that the agenda for this special meeting of the Berkeley City Council 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 Thursday, April 9, 2026.



Mark Numainville, City Clerk

**Communications**

*Communications submitted to City Council Policy Committees are on file in the City Clerk Department at 2180 Milvia Street, 1st Floor, Berkeley, CA, and are available upon request by contacting the City Clerk Department at (510) 981-6908 or [policycommittee@berkeleyca.gov](mailto:policycommittee@berkeleyca.gov).*



## BERKELEY CITY COUNCIL AGENDA & RULES COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

MONDAY, APRIL 6, 2026

2:30 P.M.

2180 Milvia Street, Berkeley, CA 94704

Teleconference Location: 1027 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, CA 94710

Committee Members:

Mayor Adena Ishii, Councilmembers Terry Taplin and Mark Humbert

Alternate: Ben Bartlett

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# AGENDA

**Roll Call** 2:33 p.m. All present.

**Public Comment** – 2 speakers.

## Review of Agendas

**1. Approval of Minutes: March 31, 2026**

**Action:** M/S/C (Humbert/Taplin) to approve the minutes of 3/31/2026.

**Vote:** All Ayes.

**2. Review and Approve Draft Agenda:**

a. 4/21/2026 – Regular City Council Meeting

**Action:** M/S/C (Humbert/Taplin) to approve the agenda of the 4/21/2026 regular meeting with the changes noted below.

- *Item Added: Solano Avenue Stroll (O’Keefe) – referred to the Budget & Finance Committee*
- *Item 11 Social Justice Implications - Contracts (Peace & Justice Commission) – City Manager section revised*
- *Item 12 Social Justice Implications – Policing Tools (Peace & Justice Commission) – City Manager section revised*
- *Item 19 goBerkeley Parking Management (City Manager) – removed by the City Manager*

**Vote:** All Ayes.

**3. Adjournments In Memory – None**

## Scheduling

**4. Council Worksessions Schedule** – received and filed

**5. Council Referrals to Agenda Committee for Scheduling** – received and filed

**6. Land Use Calendar** – received and filed

## Action Calendar

- None

## Unscheduled Items

- None

## Items for Future Agendas

- **Review Policy Committees Structure**
- **Review Boards and Commissions Structure**

## Adjournment

**Action:** M/S/C (Humbert/Taplin) to adjourn the meeting.

**Vote:** All Ayes.

Adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct record of the Agenda & Rules Committee meeting held on April 6, 2026.

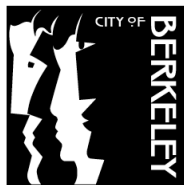
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Rose Thomse, Deputy City Clerk

## Communications

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**DRAFT AGENDA**  
**BERKELEY CITY COUNCIL MEETING**  
**Tuesday, April 28, 2026**  
**6:00 PM**

SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD ROOM - 1231 ADDISON STREET, BERKELEY, CA 94702

ADENA ISHII, MAYOR

COUNCILMEMBERS:

DISTRICT 1 – RASHI KESARWANI  
 DISTRICT 2 – TERRY TAPLIN  
 DISTRICT 3 – BEN BARTLETT  
 DISTRICT 4 – IGOR TREGUB

DISTRICT 5 – SHOSHANA O’KEEFE  
 DISTRICT 6 – BRENT BLACKABY  
 DISTRICT 7 – CECILIA LUNAPARRA  
 DISTRICT 8 – MARK HUMBERT

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*Live captioned broadcasts of Council meetings are available on B-TV (Channel 33) and via [internet video stream](#). All Council meetings are recorded.*

*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. The City Council may take action related to any subject listed on the Agenda.*

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## Preliminary Matters

### Roll Call:

**Land Acknowledgement Statement:** *The City of Berkeley recognizes that the community we live in was built on the territory of xučyun (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 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. As we begin our meeting tonight, 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's 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 Tribe and to create meaningful actions that uphold the intention of this land acknowledgement.*

**Ceremonial Matters:** *In addition to those items listed on the agenda, the Mayor may add additional ceremonial matters.*

**City Manager Comments:** *The City Manager may make announcements or provide information to the City Council in the form of an oral report. The Council will not take action on such items but may request the City Manager place a report on a future agenda for discussion.*

**Public Comment on Non-Agenda Matters:** *Up to ten persons will be selected to address matters not on the Council agenda. If five or fewer persons are identified to provide non-agenda comment, each person selected will be allotted two minutes each. If more than five persons are selected to address matters not on the Council agenda, each person selected will be allotted one minute each.*

*In-person attendees wishing to address the Council on matters not on the Council agenda during the initial ten-minute period for such comment, must submit a speaker card to the City Clerk in person at the meeting location and prior to the moment that the Presiding Officer calls for public comment on non-agenda items. Remote attendees must raise their hand in the videoconference application when the Presiding Officer calls for non-agenda speakers. The first five raised hands on the videoconference application will be selected to speak and the first five cards drawn at the meeting will be selected to speak. The number of in-person and remote speakers selected may be adjusted by the Presiding Officer if fewer than five speakers from either format are identified.*

*The remainder of the speakers wishing to address the Council on non-agenda items will be heard at the end of the agenda.*

**Public Comment by Employee Unions (first regular meeting of the month):** *This period of public comment is reserved for officially designated representatives of City of Berkeley employee unions, with five minutes allocated per union if representatives of three or fewer unions wish to speak and up to three minutes per union if representatives of four or more unions wish to speak.*

## Consent Calendar

*The Council will first determine whether to move items on the agenda for “Action” or “Information” to the “Consent Calendar”, or move “Consent Calendar” items to “Action.” Three members of the City Council must agree to pull an item from the Consent Calendar or Information Calendar for it to move to Action. Items that remain on the “Consent Calendar” are voted on in one motion as a group. “Information” items are not discussed or acted upon at the Council meeting unless they are moved to “Action” or “Consent”.*

*No additional items can be moved onto the Consent Calendar once public comment has commenced. At any time during, or immediately after, public comment on Information and Consent items, any Councilmember may move any Information or Consent item to “Action.” Following this, the Council will vote on the items remaining on the Consent Calendar in one motion.*

*For items moved to the Action Calendar from the Consent Calendar or Information Calendar, persons who spoke on the item during the Consent Calendar public comment period may speak again at the time the matter is taken up during the Action Calendar.*

**Public Comment on Consent Calendar and Information Items Only:** *The Council will take public comment on any items that are either on the amended Consent Calendar or the Information Calendar. If ten or fewer persons are interested in speaking on an individual agenda item, each speaker may speak for two minutes. If there are more than ten persons interested in speaking, the Presiding Officer may limit the public comment for all speakers to one minute per speaker. Speakers are permitted to yield their time to one other speaker, however no one speaker shall have more than four minutes. The Presiding Officer may, with the consent of persons representing both sides of an issue, allocate a block of time to each side to present their issue. A speaker may only speak once during the period for public comment on Consent Calendar and Information items.*

*Additional information regarding public comment by City of Berkeley employees and interns: Employees and interns of the City of Berkeley, although not required, are encouraged to identify themselves as such, the department in which they work and state whether they are speaking as an individual or in their official capacity when addressing the Council in open session or workshops.*

## Consent Calendar

### 1. Minutes for Approval

**From: City Manager**

**Recommendation:** Approve the minutes for the Council meetings of March 2, 2026 (closed), March 6, 2026 (special), March 10, 2026 (special and regular), March 16, 2026 (closed), March 17, 2026 (special), and March 24, 2026 (special and regular).

**Financial Implications:** None

Contact: Mark Numainville, City Clerk, (510) 981-6900

### 2. Police Accountability Board – Appointment of New Member

**From: City Manager**

**Recommendation:** Adopt a Resolution appointing a new member to the Police Accountability Board (PAB) nominated by Councilmember Blackaby.

**Financial Implications:** See report

Contact: Mark Numainville, City Clerk, (510) 981-6900

## Consent Calendar

- 3. Sale of Real Property – 1631 Fifth Street**  
**From: City Manager**  
**Recommendation:** Adopt a Resolution declaring 1631 Fifth Street exempt surplus land. Subsequently, adopt first reading of an Ordinance approving the sale of City property at 1631 Fifth Street and authorizing the City Manager to execute all necessary documents required to sell the property for \$750,000.  
**Financial Implications:** See report  
Contact: Eleanor Hollander, Economic Development, (510) 981-7530
- 4. Rescind Resolution No. 68,099-N.S. and Adopt a Resolution for Continual Participation in the Alameda County Operational Area**  
**From: City Manager**  
**Recommendation:** Rescind Resolution No. 68,099-N.S. and adopt a Resolution authorizing the City Manager to execute an agreement with the Alameda County Operation Area Emergency Management Organization.  
**Financial Implications:** None.  
Contact: David Sprague, Fire, (510) 981-3473
- 5. Contract: GovernmentJobs.com (dba NEOGOV) for Online Data Management Services**  
**From: City Manager**  
**Recommendation:** Adopt a Resolution authorizing the City Manager to execute an amendment to Contract No. 32400192 with GovernmentJobs.com (dba NEOGOV) for online data management services including applicant tracking, onboarding, and learning management to increase the contract by \$190,000 for a total not to exceed amount of \$370,000.  
**Financial Implications:** See report  
Contact: Janelle Rodrigues, Human Resources, (510) 981-6800
- 6. Policy Recommendations for the City of Berkeley Regarding Event Producers and Civic Events**  
**From: Civic Arts Commission**  
**Recommendation:** Adopt the attached City of Berkeley Event Producers and Civic Events Policy Recommendations.  
**Financial Implications:** See report  
Contact: Carianna Arredondo, Commission Secretary, (510) 981-7000

## Consent Calendar

**7. Support Position on SB 894 (Allen) - California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program**

**From: Disaster and Fire Safety Commission**

**Recommendation:** Adopt an official Support position on Senate Bill 894 (Allen), the California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program, and authorize and direct the Mayor or City Manager or designee to send letters of support to Senator Ben Allen, Senator Jesse Arreguín, representing Berkeley in the California State Senate, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks

**Financial Implications:** See report.

Contact: Keith May, Commission Secretary, (510) 981-3473

**8. Support Position on SB 1076 (Pérez) - Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act**

**From: Disaster and Fire Safety Commission**

**Recommendation:** Adopt an official Support position on Senate Bill 1076 (Pérez), the Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act, and authorize and direct the Mayor or City Manager or designee to send letters of support to Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Senator Jesse Arreguín, representing Berkeley in the California State Senate, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks.

**Financial Implications:** See report.

Contact: Keith May, Commission Secretary, (510) 981-3473

**9. Berkeley's Financial Condition (FY 2016-FY 2025): Structural Deficit Poses Risk to Financial Sustainability**

**From: Auditor**

**Recommendation:** We recommend City Council request that the City Manager report back by Fall 2026, and annually thereafter, regarding the status of our audit recommendations until reported fully implemented by the Finance Department, Budget Office, and other relevant departments. This audit includes 9 recommendations to formalize the use of more sustainable budget strategies, ensure funds withdrawn from the Section 115 Trust are replenished, improve financial reporting, and develop a capital financing plan that proposes future funding mechanisms beyond existing sources to help address the City's growing unfunded capital needs. City management agreed or partially agreed to our recommendations. Please see our report for their complete response.

**Financial Implications:** See report

Contact: Jenny Wong, Auditor, (510) 981-6750

## Council Consent Items

- 10. Luna Dance Creativity: Relinquishment of Council Office Budget Funds from General Funds and Grant of Such Funds**  
**From: Councilmember Taplin (Author)**  
**Recommendation:** Adopt a Resolution approving the expenditure of an amount not to exceed \$500 per Councilmember, including \$500 from Councilmember Taplin, to support Luna's May Day Gathering and Bazaar event.  
**Financial Implications:** See report  
Contact: Terry Taplin, Councilmember, District 2, (510) 981-7120
- 11. Resolution Supporting Megafire Prevention Package**  
**From: Councilmember Blackaby (Author), Mayor Ishii (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember O'Keefe (Co-Sponsor)**  
**Recommendation:** Adopt a Resolution supporting the 2026 Joint Megafire Prevention Package in the California Legislature supported by Megafire Action, FireWERX, California Fire Safe Council, and the Karuk Tribe, among others. Send a copy of the Resolution to the six authors, Senator Jesse Arreguín, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, and Governor Gavin Newsom.  
**Financial Implications:** None  
Contact: Brent Blackaby, Councilmember, District 6, (510) 981-7160

## Action Calendar

*The public may comment on each item listed on the agenda for action. For items moved to the Action Calendar from the Consent Calendar or Information Calendar, persons who spoke on the item during the Consent Calendar public comment period may speak again during the Action Calendar public comment period on the item*

*The Presiding Officer will request that persons wishing to speak line up at the podium, or use the "raise hand" function in Zoom, to determine the number of persons interested in speaking at that time. If ten or fewer persons are interested in speaking on an individual agenda item, each speaker may speak for two minutes. If there are more than ten persons interested in speaking, the Presiding Officer may limit the public comment for all speakers to one minute per speaker. Speakers are permitted to yield their time to one other speaker, however no one speaker shall have more than four minutes. The Presiding Officer may, with the consent of persons representing both sides of an issue, allocate a block of time to each side to present their issue.*

*Action items may be reordered at the discretion of the Chair with the consent of Council.*

*The Presiding Officer may open and close an additional comment period for Action items on this agenda (excluding any public hearings, appeals, and/or quasi-judicial matters), at the start of the Action Calendar. Those who speak on an item during this comment period may not speak a second time when the item is taken up by Council.*

## Action Calendar – Public Hearings

*Staff shall introduce the public hearing item and present their comments. For certain hearings, this is followed by five-minute presentations each by first the appellant and then the applicant. The Presiding Officer will request that persons wishing to speak line up at the podium, or use the "raise hand" function in Zoom, to be recognized and to determine the number of persons interested in speaking at that time.*

*If ten or fewer persons are interested in speaking during a public hearing, each speaker may speak for two minutes. If there are more than ten persons interested in speaking, the Presiding Officer may limit the public comment for all speakers to one minute per speaker. Speakers are permitted to yield their time to one other speaker, however no one speaker shall have more than four minutes. The Presiding Officer may*

## Action Calendar – Public Hearings

*with the consent of persons representing both sides of an issue allocate a block of time to each side to present their issue.*

*When applicable, each member of the City Council shall verbally disclose all ex parte contacts concerning the subject of the hearing. Councilmembers shall also submit a report of such contacts in writing prior to the commencement of the hearing. Written reports shall be available for public review in the office of the City Clerk.*

### 12. **Submission of the Program Year 2026 Annual Action Plan Containing Allocations of Federal Funds**

**From: City Manager**

**Recommendation:** Conduct a public hearing on the Program Year (PY) 2026 Annual Action Plan (AAP) and upon conclusion, adopt a Resolution that authorizes the City Manager or his designee to:

1. Execute any resultant agreements and amendments for agencies receiving funding under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), or Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) Program in accordance with the proposal approved hereunder. If the federal government does not allocate sufficient funds to cover the allocations attached to this resolution in this year or subsequent years, the City may either terminate the resultant agreements with agencies without any liability occurring to the City. A record copy of said contracts and any amendments are on file in the Office of the City Clerk; and
2. Adjust reporting due dates for Community Agency grantees for all Program Reports and Statement of Expenses for FY 2027 and FY 2028 contracts. Authorize new dates for Program Reports to be due on October 15, January 15, April 15, and July 15 and Statement of Expenses due on October 15, January 15, April 15, July 31; and
3. Allocate 20% of the PY 2026 (FY 2027) CDBG funds to the Planning and Administration, up to 17.83% for public services, and the remaining to be distributed to Housing Services and Community Facility Improvements as outlined in Exhibit A with the Public Facility Improvements being a flexible line item should the HUD allocation differ than the amount currently allocated; and
4. Allocate the allowable 7.5% of the PY 2026 (FY 2027) ESG to Administration, \$6,676 to the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and the remaining amount to Rapid Re-housing, and shelter activities (not to exceed 60% of PY 2026 ESG entitlement); and
5. Allocate the allowable 10% of PY 2026 (FY 2027) HOME funds for program administration, up to the allowable 5% for Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) operating support, and allocate the remainder to the Housing Trust Fund; and
6. Finalize the PY 2026 Annual Action Plan, including responses to public comments received until May 1, 2026, adding required U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) application forms and certifications, and including other HUD required information, submit it to HUD, and execute all documents necessary to receive the City's entitlement grants under the CDBG, ESG, and HOME Programs.

**Financial Implications:** See report.

Contact: Scott Gilman, Health, Housing, and Community Services, (510) 981-5100

## Action Calendar – Public Hearings

### 13. California Municipal Finance Authority Bond Financing for Ephesian Legacy Court Apartments Project

**From: City Manager**

**Recommendation:** Conduct the public hearing on April 28, 2026, under the requirements of Tax and Equity Fiscal Responsibility Act (“TEFRA”) and the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (the “Code”), and upon conclusion:

Adopt a Resolution approving the issuance of the Bonds by the California Municipal Finance Authority (“CMFA”) for the benefit of Ephesian Legacy Court Limited Partnership, a California limited partnership (the “Borrower”), to provide for the financing of Ephesian Legacy Court (the “Project”). The adoption is intended to solely satisfy the requirements of TEFRA, the Code and the California Government Code Section 6500 (and following).

**Financial Implications:** See report.

Contact: Scott Gilman, Health, Housing, and Community Services, (510) 981-5100

### 14. Amendments to Berkeley Municipal Code Title 23 (Zoning) for Consistency with State Law and Technical Edits (SLTE 2026)

**From: City Manager**

**Recommendation:** Conduct a public hearing, and upon conclusion adopt the first reading of an Ordinance amending Berkeley Municipal Code (BMC) Title 23. The proposed changes apply to the sections of the BMC listed below:

- Section 23.202.020 (Residential Districts – Allowed Land Uses)
- Section 23.202.050 (Residential Districts – R-1 Residential Multi-Unit 1 District)
- Section 23.202.080 (Residential Districts – R-2 Residential Multi-Unit 2 District)
- Section 23.202.090 (Residential Districts – R-2A Residential Multi-Unit 2A District)
- Section 23.206.030 (Manufacturing Districts – Additional Permit Requirements)
- Section 23.206.060 (Manufacturing Districts – M Manufacturing District)
- Section 23.206.070 (Manufacturing Districts – MM Mixed Manufacturing District)
- Section 23.206.080 (Manufacturing Districts – MU-LI Mixed Use-Light Industrial District)
- Section 23.206.090 (Manufacturing Districts – MU-R Mixed Use Residential District)
- Section 23.304.100 (General Development Standards – Site Features in Residential)
- Section 23.306.030 (Accessory Dwelling Units – Development Standards)
- Section 23.306.040 (Accessory Dwelling Units – Permit Procedures)
- Section 23.322.040 (Parking and Loading – General Requirements)
- Section 23.322.050 (Parking and Loading – Parking Reductions)
- Section 23.322.100 (Parking and Loading – On-site Loading Spaces)
- Section 23.326.070 (Demolition of Non-Residential Buildings)
- Section 23.330.030 (Density Bonus—Application Requirements)
- Section 23.330.080 (Density Bonus – Regulatory Agreements)
- Section 23.410.020 (Appeals and Certifications – Appeal Subjects and Jurisdiction)
- Section 23.502.020 (Glossary – Defined Terms)

**Financial Implications:** See report

Contact: Jordan Klein, Planning and Development, (510) 981-7400

## Action Calendar – Public Hearings

### 15. 1646 and 1650 Fifth Street Re-Zoning and Associated General Plan Amendments

**From: City Manager**

**Recommendation:** Conduct a public hearing and upon conclusion:

1. Adopt a Resolution to:

a. Amend the General Plan Land Use Map to change the existing Manufacturing (M) and Mixed Use (MU) land use designation to solely Mixed Use and

b. Amend the West Berkeley Plan to include conforming land use district map amendments; and

2. Adopt an Ordinance amending the Zoning Map to rezone portions of 1646 and 1650 Fifth Street from Mixed Use-Light Industrial (MU-LI) to Mixed Use-Residential (MU-R).

**Financial Implications:** See report

Contact: Jordan Klein, Planning and Development, (510) 981-7400

## Information Reports

### 16. UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative's Interim Evaluation of the Berkeley Encampment Resolution/RV Buyback Program

**From: City Manager**

Contact: Peter Radu, City Manager's Office, (510) 981-7000

## Public Comment – Items Not Listed on the Agenda

## Adjournment

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Civic Arts Commission

CONSENT CALENDAR

April 28, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
From: Civic Arts Commission  
Submitted by: Lisa Bullwinkel, Policy Subcommittee Chair  
Subject: Policy Recommendations for the City of Berkeley Regarding Event Producers and Civic Events

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt the attached City of Berkeley Event Producers and Civic Events Policy Recommendations.

SUMMARY

The following ten topics relating to the state of civic events in the City are covered in the attached document:

1. Recognition of Event Producers as Civic Partners
2. Competent and Efficient Municipal Service
3. Clarity, Transparency, and Administrative Efficiency
4. Fair and Proportionate Fees
5. Equitable Access to Public Space
6. Safe, Clean, and Accessible Public Spaces
7. Reliable Public Safety Coordination
8. Marketing and Public Communication Support
9. Predictability and Regulatory Continuity
10. Affirmation of Civic Joy and Cultural Expression

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

Fiscal impacts may include staff time and expenditures for the creation of a comprehensive event guide and permitting platform; creation of a separate Special Events department with adequate staffing; creation of Entertainment Zones. Fiscal impacts may also include income related to increased permit fees; increased efficiency; and a decrease in duplicative services.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Policy Recommendations for the City of Berkeley Regarding Event Producers and Civic Events is a Strategic Plan Priority Project, advancing our goal to be a customer-focused organization that provides excellent, timely, easily-accessible service and information to the community.

BACKGROUND

The City of Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan was adopted at the July 24, 2018 Council meeting (Resolution No: 68,568 N.S.) with the following five goals:

- Goal 1: Increase Access to Affordable Housing and Affordable Spaces for Artists and Arts Organizations
- Goal 2: Increase Investment in a Vibrant Arts Community
- Goal 3: Expand High Quality and Equitable Arts Education
- Goal 4: Produce More Public Art Throughout Berkeley
- Goal 5: Expand the City of Berkeley's Organizational Capacity to Better Serve the Arts Community

Since the adoption of the Plan, the City has made some progress to advance these goals. However, the process of producing civic events in the City of Berkeley has become cumbersome, inequitable, expensive, and frustrating. There is a lack of staffing – only one person oversees all events annually resulting in missed deadlines, inefficiency, and last-minute changes which are untenable. Please note that current staff is doing their absolute best to accommodate these events but more staff is needed.

Recently, two heritage events, the Telegraph Avenue Street Fair and Juneteenth, were told to move from their historic locations due to members of the fire department attempting to institute new but undocumented requirements at the last minute. After an outcry from the producers and the public, the city acquiesced. This is just one example of a problem the city has created concerning events. The public wants more events, the City wants fewer. The event producers came together to attempt to create policy to make events better and less expensive for all concerned that are reflected in the attached document.

On October 14, 2025, Item 14: Changes to Special Events Permitting Fees and Requirements was presented as an Information report to the City Council and received and filed by the City without council discussion and consideration.

On December 2, 2025, Item 44: Economic Impact Study: *Berkeley's Creative Economy and Assessment of Pandemic Relief Investments*

On January 28, 2026, the Civic Arts Commission voted to approve that the Event Producers Policy Recommendations be forwarded to Council by staff as follows:

**M/S/C** (Montgomery/Woo) to approve that the Event Producers Policy Recommendations be forwarded to Council by staff.

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

**Public Comment:** 1

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

There are no identifiable environmental effects, climate impacts, or sustainability opportunities associated with the subject of this report.

#### RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Adopting the Policy Recommendations for the City of Berkeley Regarding Event Producers and Civic Events would allow the City to advance Goal 2 and Goal 5 of Berkeley's Arts and Culture Plan which are to Increase Investment in a Vibrant Arts Community and to Expand the City of Berkeley's Organizational Capacity to Better Serve the Arts Community. Through these investments, the City of Berkeley would be fostering a more positive and supportive culture toward the arts, seeing them as not only an enormous economic driver for the City but fulfilling an outcry from the public which is desperate for more community-building festivals and events (See attached 2025 Economic Impact Report). Rather than see events as a hindrance and drain on the City's economy, they should be welcomed and encouraged.

#### ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

Should the City choose to not adopt the Event Producers and Civic Events Policy Recommendations, organizations and individuals would continue to struggle with navigating the complex and obfuscated departmental requirements, payments, and untimely permitting resulting in fewer events, overlapping expenses by City departments, and distrust and disappointment from the public.

#### CITY MANAGER

See companion report.

CONTACT PERSON

Carianna Arredondo, Assistant to the City Manager, City Manager's Office, (510) 981-7000

Lisa Bullwinkel, Policy Subcommittee Chair, Civic Arts Commission

Attachments:

1. Policy Recommendations for the City of Berkeley Regarding Event Producers and Civic Events
2. City of Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan 2018-2027
3. Changes to Special Events Permitting Fees and Requirements
4. 2025 Economic Impact Study Berkeley's Creative Economy and Assessment of Pandemic Relief Investments



## Policy Recommendations for the City of Berkeley

### Regarding Event Producers and Civic Events

#### Section 1. Recognition of Event Producers as Civic Partners

1.1. The City of Berkeley shall formally recognize Event Producers as essential partners in fostering civic vitality, economic development, and cultural expression within the City.

1.2. The City acknowledges that events of varying scale—including neighborhood gatherings, cultural celebrations, and citywide festivals—activate public spaces, contribute to community cohesion, and enhance the City’s identity.

1.3. In allocating festival grants, permit fees, and related financial requirements, the City shall consider the demonstrable economic and cultural contributions generated by permitted events.

1.4. It shall be the policy of the City to encourage, rather than deter, the production of cultural and civic events and to remain competitive with peer jurisdictions in attracting and retaining such events.

1.5. The City shall identify designated City staff to establish and maintain a quarterly forum through which Event Producers and designated City event staff may engage in structured dialogue regarding policies, procedures, and operational concerns.

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#### Section 2. Competent and Efficient Municipal Service

2.1. The City shall provide adequate staffing levels and professional service standards sufficient to support the timely permitting and coordination of events.

2.2. Consistent with the City of Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan adopted at the July 24, 2018 Council meeting (Resolution No: 68,568 N.S.) the City should pursue expansion of staff capacity related to arts, culture, and special events.

2.3. The City shall evaluate the feasibility of consolidating special event permitting and administration under a centralized Special Events Department within Civic Arts leadership.

2.4. The City shall explore the establishment of district-specific Event Entertainment Zones that incorporate pre-approved requirements from relevant departments, thereby streamlining mapping, review, and permitting processes. These will not be the exclusive locations for events as not every part of the city can create an Event Entertainment Zone.

2.5. City staff shall provide informed, solution-oriented guidance to Event Producers and coordinate internally to deliver unified feedback across departments.

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### Section 3. Clarity, Transparency, and Administrative Efficiency

- 3.1. The City shall maintain a single, publicly accessible online platform detailing all event-related permit requirements, documentation, fees, timelines, and deadlines.
- 3.2. The City shall enable electronic submission and payment of applicable fees, while maintaining in-person payment options at the Permit Center.
- 3.3. To the extent practicable, Park Use Permits and Street Closure Permits shall be consolidated into a unified permitting process.
- 3.4. Each relevant department shall designate a clear point of contact with established response timelines for event-related inquiries and approvals.
- 3.5. The City shall implement a unified workflow designed to minimize duplicative documentation, redundant plan reviews, and inconsistent departmental requirements.
- 3.6. The City shall provide reasonable and predictable planning timelines that reflect the long-range nature of event production.
- 3.7. The City shall implement a standardized post-event feedback mechanism to support continuous improvement of event permitting and coordination processes.

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### Section 4. Fair and Proportionate Fees

- 4.1. Event-related fees shall be transparent, standardized, and equitably applied across event types, scaled proportionately to event size, duration, and demonstrated impact.
- 4.2. Any increase in fees shall correspond to clearly identified and measurable improvements in City services, including processing efficiency, field support, and public communication.
- 4.3. The City shall clearly specify the services and resources covered by each fee assessed.
- 4.4. The City shall periodically benchmark event fees against those of comparably sized municipalities.

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### Section 5. Equitable Access to Public Space

- 5.1. The City shall ensure fair and non-discriminatory access to public spaces for events of all scales, including commercial, nonprofit, neighborhood, and first-time organizers.

5.2. The City shall adopt and publish clear policies governing when and under what conditions admission or entry fees may be charged for permitted events.

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## Section 6. Safe, Clean, and Accessible Public Spaces

6.1. The City shall maintain streets, parks, and plazas intended for events at baseline standards of cleanliness, safety, and accessibility prior to permitted use.

6.2. Event Producers shall be responsible for restoring public spaces to their pre-event condition, absent normal wear.

6.3. The City shall provide clear, written standards for emergency access, electrical infrastructure, ADA compliance, sanitation, and other site-specific requirements applicable to public event spaces.

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## Section 7. Reliable Public Safety Coordination

7.1. Fire, Police, Transportation, Public Works, and other affected departments shall coordinate through standardized protocols for event planning and on-site operations.

7.2. The City shall develop standardized Traffic Management Plans for common event configurations, which shall be provided as part of the permitting process and funded through permit fees.

7.3. Safety requirements related to crowd management, fire prevention, tents, fuel use, and similar concerns shall be clearly documented and uniformly enforced.

7.4. City field staff assigned to events shall be appropriately trained to facilitate safe and efficient event operations in collaboration with the event producer.

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## Section 8. Marketing and Public Communication Support

8.1. The City shall promote permitted events through official City communication channels including using the promotional resources at Visit Berkeley.

8.2. The City shall periodically publish reports in the department under which events are housed by highlighting the economic, cultural, and community benefits generated by permitted events.

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## Section 9. Predictability and Regulatory Continuity

9.1. Where significant changes are proposed to any permitting criteria, fees, or regulatory or procedural modifications the City shall provide written explanations no less than six months in advance of an event to allow for budgeting and planning, particularly for large-scale events requiring six to twelve months of preparation.

9.2. The City shall maintain an annual calendar and planning timeline for citywide events to support coordination and efficient allocation of resources.

9.3. The City shall convene community discussions when proposing major changes to culturally significant and/or historical Berkeley events and celebrations prior to executing such changes.

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## Section 10. Affirmation of Civic Joy and Cultural Expression

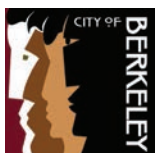
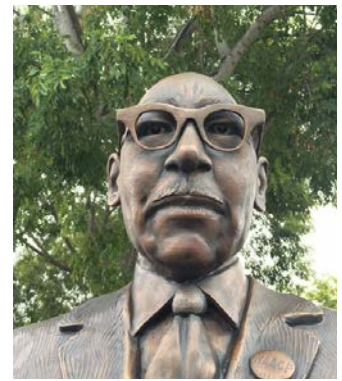
10.1. The City affirms that cultural and community events are a public good and integral to civic life.

10.2. Regulations shall balance public safety and operational needs with the promotion of celebration, artistic expression, community building, and local economic vitality.



# City of Berkeley Arts & Culture Plan

2018-2027 Update



CIVIC ARTS PROGRAM  
CIVIC ARTS COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

"Spectrascape" (Detail) by Ene Osteraas-Constable.  
"William Byron Rumford Memorial Sculpture" (Detail) by Dana King.  
"Mandala Gates" by Eric Powell.  
Photos courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

# Executive Summary

## THE ARTS IN BERKELEY

Berkeley is home to a vibrant and diverse community that strongly values its rich cultural fabric. Characterized by its collective nature, the city is famous for its distinguished university, beautiful natural setting, and its remarkable history as a home for progressive movements. Arts and culture permeate civic life in Berkeley through numerous acclaimed theaters, performing arts spaces, as well as the city’s many artists. Over 150 arts and culture nonprofits operate in Berkeley and together they contribute to a dynamic, continually evolving arts and culture community that interacts closely with other sectors of the city’s economy. The nonprofits that make up the arts community are particularly diverse in terms of their size and their creative disciplines.

Along with the cultural richness the arts infuse into the community, the arts sector is also a significant economic driver, generating an estimated \$165 million in total economic activity. In 2017, Berkeley Mayor Jesse Arreguin stated that “in addition to fostering civic pride, a flourishing arts scene [brings] new visitors to our city and more revenue to local businesses.”

Currently, as the San Francisco Bay Area is experiencing substantial economic growth, rising real estate and living costs have created an especially challenging environment for the arts community in Berkeley. Some artists and arts organizations are leaving the city because they can no longer afford to live and work here. *The Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan Update* provides a framework for supporting the arts within the context of economic growth, and for its inclusion in future City plans.



Portrait of Maudelle Shirek by Mildred Howard and Daniel Galvez. Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

## UPDATING THE BERKELEY ARTS AND CULTURE PLAN

This 2018 Plan Update builds on the goals and objectives developed in the previous *2004 Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan*. The cultural landscape of Berkeley has changed since the 2004 plan was completed, including new funding streams and program initiatives. New legislation and policies have provided additional resources for arts-related organizations, public art, and collaborative partnerships. *The Arts and Culture Plan Update*



Scene from a performance at Shotgun Players. Photo courtesy of Shotgun Players.

(Plan Update or Plan) establishes citywide goals, policy improvements and actions to support and further develop local arts, culture and entertainment.

Characterized by a spirit of collaboration, the planning process reflects the cooperative nature of Berkeley's arts ecosystem. City staff, Civic Arts Commissioners, local consultants and a wide range of community partners worked together to develop the goals, policies and actions in the Plan Update.

This Plan Update, developed with extensive citizen participation, provides an essential tool for the design and implementation of public policies that promote arts and culture. Over 850 community members discussed art-related issues, opportunities and priorities in community meetings, interviews, an online survey, and via an interactive website. In addition, several studies, including an economic impact assessment, provided a detailed portrait of Berkeley's creative sector. Based on this new understanding, the Plan Update identifies strategies to ensure that the city's arts and culture sector will continue to flourish and enhance the quality of life for all residents and visitors.

This Plan Update focuses on three priority areas that align with the Civic Arts Commission's areas of focus: Civic Arts Grants, Public Art, and Arts Education. These three policy areas are key pillars of the local arts ecosystem, and as such require focused attention and targeted resources to successfully achieve the Plan's vision for a vibrant, equitable and creative city. The Plan Update lays out a responsive vision that can be achieved through a series of goals and strategies to be implemented over the next decade.

## VISION

- The City of Berkeley is a place where the arts are fully integrated into civic life and community identity.
- Our public spaces inspire, promote dialogue and serve to engage all who live and work in Berkeley, and all who visit our city.
- The city provides a supportive environment for artists and arts organizations to prosper and thrive. The arts are inclusive and empowering and serve to strengthen collaboration within our community.
- Quality arts education for all ages inspires creativity, builds community and facilitates cross-cultural understanding.
- The economic contributions of local artists and arts organizations of all sizes are valued, prioritized and supported.
- Berkeley is known regionally, nationally and internationally as a place where anyone can experience the transformative power of the arts in a variety of settings and locations.



"Peacewall" (Detail) at Civic Center Park.  
Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

## GOALS

Five strategic goals have been identified to achieve the vision of *Berkeley's Arts and Culture Plan Update*. All five goals are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Taken together, they have great potential to enhance the sustainability and vitality of arts and culture in Berkeley for the long-term.

### Goal 1

#### **Increase Access to Affordable Housing and Affordable Spaces for Artists and Arts Organizations**

Support the long-term sustainability of the arts and culture sector by expanding the availability of affordable housing and spaces for both artists and arts organizations.

### Goal 2

#### **Increase Investment in a Vibrant Arts Community**

Strengthen and support Berkeley's inclusive and culturally rich arts sector by expanding funding and marketing opportunities for a broader array of arts organizations.

### Goal 3

#### **Expand High Quality and Equitable Arts Education**

Support high quality arts education programs to provide all Berkeley students and lifelong learners with equitable access to an enriching and creative education.

### Goal 4

#### **Produce More Public Art Throughout Berkeley**

Enhance the city's visual environment by further infusing the arts into all aspects of civic life and building a rich public art collection.

### Goal 5

#### **Expand the City of Berkeley's Organizational Capacity to Better Serve the Arts Community**

Enhance the City's ability to respond to the evolving needs of the arts community and to ensure all Berkeley residents can participate in a variety of art experiences.

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## CHAPTER 1

# Creating the Arts and Culture Plan Update

## PLAN PURPOSE AND DEVELOPMENT

The City of Berkeley's Arts and Culture Plan aims to identify and articulate a common vision for the arts and establish shared goals that will guide the City over the next decade. The City of Berkeley seeks to make high quality arts and cultural experiences accessible to all members of the community by increasing resources for local artists and arts organizations, integrating public art across the city, and expanding access to quality arts education. The purpose of the *Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan Update* is to guide the efforts of the City – including the City's Civic Arts Program and staff, the Civic Arts Commission, and other Berkeley arts stakeholders – to achieve the community's cultural vision over the next ten years.



Performance at the Freight and Salvage. Photo by Irene Young.

The arts encourage civic participation, give voice to diverse perspectives, promote intercultural communication and enhance Berkeley's economy and physical environment. Currently, the city is experiencing a real estate boom and substantial economic growth. As Berkeley prospers, the City finds itself at a critical juncture where it must ensure that the arts community not only benefits from this growth, but is also able to sustain itself and thrive despite the rising cost of living. The Plan Update provides a framework for supporting the arts within the context of this new development, and for its inclusion in future City plans.

This planning process is sponsored by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, with additional grant funding from the UC Berkeley Chancellor's Community Partnership Fund and matching funds from the City of Berkeley.

To critically examine how the City of Berkeley serves the local arts community, this year-long planning process involved a thorough assessment of current conditions and trends, and included robust community engagement. Key planning activities included:

- Conducting an in-depth economic impact analysis of the local arts and culture sector.
- Conducting a thorough review of past plans, studies and reports.
- Assessing the current conditions of the local arts community.
- Soliciting in-depth input from local stakeholders, including Civic Arts grantees, nonprofit leaders, artists, arts educators, City staff and Civic Arts Commissioners.
- Engaging the public through a wide range of activities including a community workshop and an online survey in order to provide multiple opportunities for the community to share their ideas and concerns.

The active collaboration between the Civic Arts staff, the Civic Arts Commission and the arts community throughout the process helped identify priorities and the direction for the Plan Update, and helped create a common vision for the arts in Berkeley and build community support around this shared vision.

Three policy areas were identified as priorities for the City as it strives to enhance Berkeley as an arts and cultural destination for all: Civic Arts Grants, Public Art, and Arts Education. Innovative policies to guide the programs in these three priority areas have the potential to advance the arts and culture sector toward greater cultural equity. The noteworthy progress that the City has demonstrated in these priority areas has helped lay the foundations for the Plan Update.



Artist John Wehrle's mural "Mak Roote" at the West Berkeley Rail Stop and Transit Plaza.  
Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

## COMMITMENT TO CULTURAL EQUITY

The City of Berkeley commits to supporting equity within the arts and culture sector, and to consistently evaluating its programs and practices. The City recognizes the multiple benefits the arts provide to Berkeley residents at all stages of human development, regardless of race, color, religion, age, disability, national origin, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

All members of the community should have equitable access to a rich, rewarding, and inspiring cultural life. Beyond ensuring access to the arts, the City envisions an arts and culture sector that empowers all members of the community to become leaders and to help steer the arts toward a more equitable future that reflects Berkeley's diverse communities.

The City of Berkeley commits to the support of artists and arts organizations that represent diverse cultures, life experiences and socio-economic backgrounds. The City supports the empowerment and equal representation of cultural perspectives that have been traditionally and historically underrepresented.

## COMMUNITY PROCESS

Developed through a dynamic and community-engaged process, the Plan Update reflects the needs, interests and priorities of a diverse cross-section of Berkeley community members and arts stakeholders. The Civic Arts Commission initiated the planning process by writing a grant through the City of Berkeley to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. This Plan Update will help the City and the arts community build on recent successes and navigate current issues, such as affordability challenges caused by the economic boom and rising cost of living.

In the past year, the arts and culture planning team conducted extensive public engagement. Over 850 community members and local stakeholders representing the diverse arts community participated in the planning process. The Plan Update was informed by the rich input received from community members who participated in a wide range of outreach activities, including but not limited to an online survey, stakeholder interviews and policy working groups.

### Visioning Work Session

The City hosted a visioning work session in February 2017 with Civic Arts Commissioners and local arts stakeholders about the arts and culture plan update process in order to generate ideas for a vision and initiatives to strengthen Berkeley's arts and culture ecosystem. Several key themes emerged from the visioning activity, including the need for centralized communications, affordable art spaces, and further development of the new Public Art on Private Development Program.

### Community Survey

To collect community input on arts and culture needs, priorities and opportunities, the planning team conducted an online questionnaire. Between April and June 2017, a total of 702 surveys were collected. The planning team conducted a robust outreach effort to publicize the survey including e-blasts, targeted flyer distribution, social media posts and outreach to key partners. The survey results were instrumental in developing an actionable plan update that reflects the needs and concerns of the community.

### Community Workshop

The planning team hosted a community workshop at the Kala Art Institute with the purpose of informing the public about the arts and culture plan update process and soliciting further input on ways to strengthen Berkeley's arts and culture community. Over 40 participants attended the workshop and key findings that emerged from participants' responses and comments included the need to prioritize the creation of affordable artist housing and art spaces, as well as a desire to see more public performances across the city.



Participants at the Community Workshop held at the Kala Art Institute. Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.



Community members participating in the Visioning Work Session at the Kala Art Institute. Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

### **Policy Working Group Meetings**

Leaders in the local arts sector were invited to participate in three thematic policy working group meetings and one policy review session. The goal of these policy working groups was to identify potential policy improvements and action steps related to Civic Arts Grants, Public Art, and Arts Education. The participants were then invited to a final review session to review the statements that were developed at these sessions in advance of them being incorporated into the Plan.

### **Civic Arts Commission**

The Civic Arts Commission was the catalyst for the *Arts and Culture Plan Update* and provided leadership throughout the process. The Commission met regularly to receive updates on the planning process and provide direction. Commissioners helped shape and conduct the community outreach program, and provided key insights into the Plan Update framework.

## CHAPTER 2

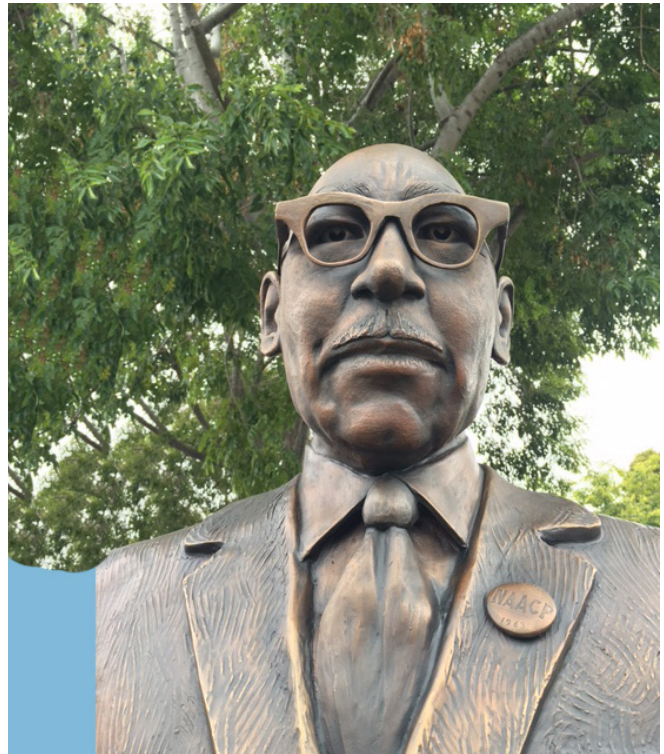
# The Berkeley Arts Community Today

## KEY COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Berkeley's nationally recognized arts scene is home to over 150 active arts and culture nonprofits as well as many local artists. The city is also home to a wide range of artists known regionally, nationally and internationally. These artists and organizations sustain our cultural ecosystem through their contributions of talent, resources and leadership.

The City of Berkeley has long recognized the importance of the arts to the economic health and livability of our city. This understanding is reflected by the financial investments and programmatic commitments the City has undertaken over the years to nurture the growth of arts and culture as a core aspect of life in Berkeley for both residents and visitors.

Founded in 1980, the Civic Arts Commission advises the City Council and is charged with promoting the arts and urban beautification in Berkeley. The nine-member Commission has four subcommittees that address public art, grants, policy, and arts education. Through their work, the Commission has spearheaded changes to the Civic Arts Grant Program, initiated the public art on private development ordinance, and partnered with UC Berkeley to study equitable access to art enrichment in afterschool programs. The Berkeley Civic Arts Commission continues to be a driving force for change and forward-thinking progress for arts and culture in Berkeley.



Statue of Byron Rumford by Dana King, located on Sacramento Avenue in South Berkeley. Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

The Civic Arts Program is housed within the City’s Office of Economic Development and implemented by the City’s Civic Arts staff. The organizational structure and work flow of the Civic Arts Program is included in Figure 1 to illustrate the interrelationship between elected officials, City staff, Civic Arts Commissioners and the various arts programs, activities and policies.



Berkeley Repertory Theatre’s production of “Ain’t Too Proud—The Life and Times of The Temptations.” Photo courtesy of Kevin Berne/Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

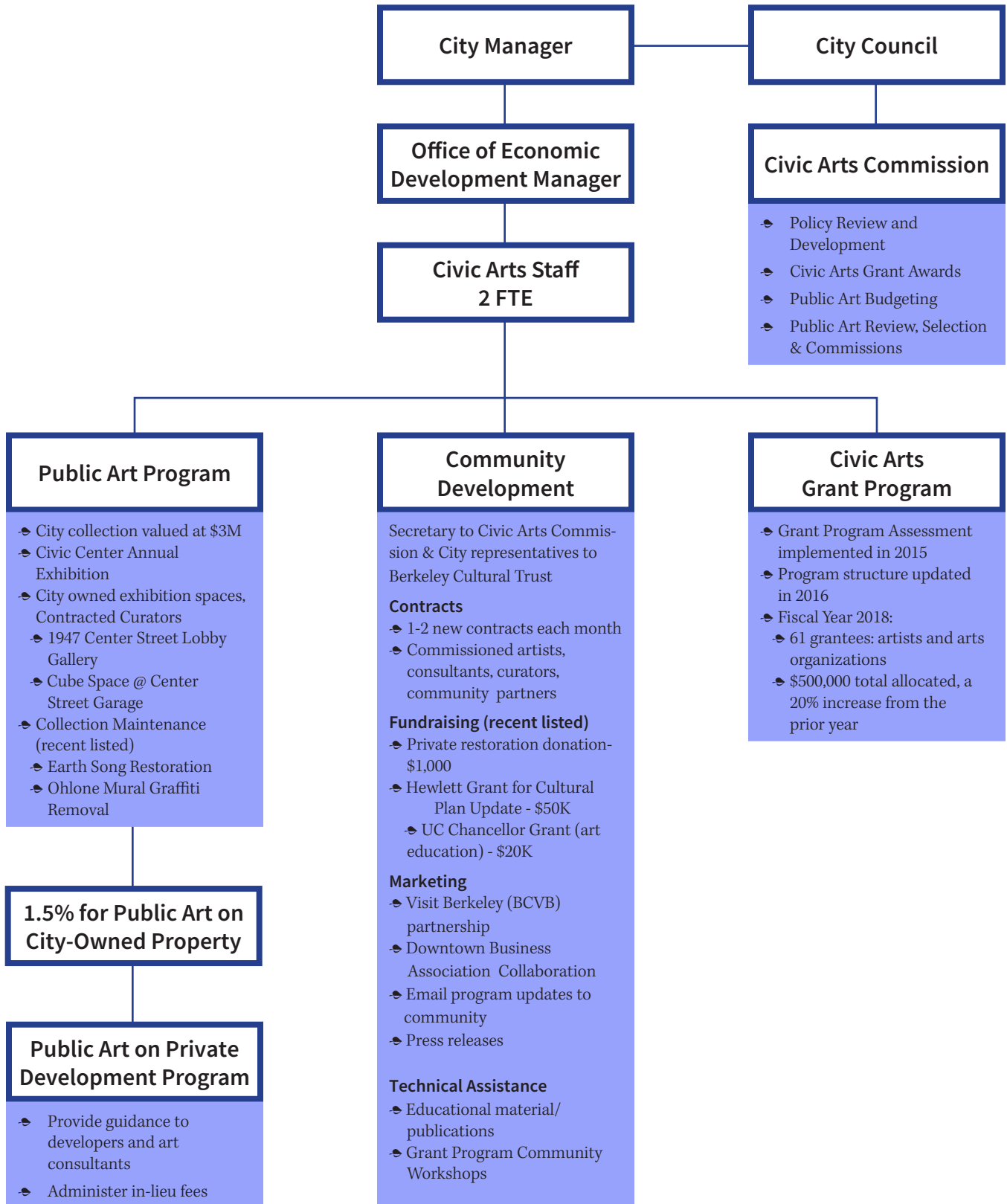
The Berkeley Cultural Trust (BCT), another key player in the local arts community, is a free membership-based organization that represents cultural organizations throughout Berkeley. BCT has helped create a strong, unified voice for artists and cultural organizations to advocate for policies, actions and resources that enhance the well-being of local artists and cultural organizations. The BCT operates in close cooperation with the Civic Arts Commission, demonstrating the collaborative nature of Berkeley’s art community.

Additionally, the University of California, Berkeley is home to several key arts and cultural venues and features world-renown arts programming. For instance, as one of the largest, university-based performing arts presenters in the United States, Cal Performances offers a unique array of world-class cultural experiences to Berkeley residents and visitors from across the Bay Area. Many other campus departments and centers offer regular arts and culture programming, often free or at low cost to students and members of the community.

The expansion of new arts and cultural venues amplifies the richness and diversity of the arts landscape in Berkeley. For example, the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) moved into its new home in downtown Berkeley, offering 25,000 square feet of exhibition space and two theaters. In 2016, Berkeley Repertory Theatre re-opened its signature, 400-seat theatre space after nine months of renovation. In addition, the UC Theatre was refurbished and re-opened in April 2016, offering a large (1,400 capacity), state-of- the-art live music venue in the City of Berkeley.

Local arts events and festivals across the city offer a window into the vibrant style and diverse cultures of Berkeley. Berkeley is host to several annual events and festivals including Solano Stroll, the Cinco de Mayo Festival, and the Bay Area Book Festival.

CIVIC ARTS WORK FLOW 2018



## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ARTS

Economic Impact of the Arts

### BY THE NUMBERS

**\$165 MILLION**

in economic activity generated in Berkeley in 2016 by the arts industry

**2.6 MILLION**

people attended cultural events in Berkeley in 2016

**\$500,000**

from the City of Berkeley allocated to artists and organizations in 2016

**6,783**

jobs provided in Berkeley by the arts sector in 2016

**152**

arts and culture nonprofits exist in Berkeley in 2016

For a city of 118,000, Berkeley offers a remarkably diverse array of arts and cultural opportunities. These cultural assets enrich the lives of individuals, help to build community, and create a positive identity and image for the city as a whole. Along with these social benefits, the arts and cultural assets in Berkeley also spur significant economic growth. As part of the *2018 Arts and Culture Plan Update*, an economic impact report was developed to document the significance of the arts and culture industry to Berkeley's local economy.

Overall, the arts and culture industry in Berkeley generates nearly \$165 million in total economic activity, including both direct and indirect impact of the arts and culture industry. Arts and cultural organizations have a significant direct economic impact on the community. In particular, salaries and benefits, which go to local residents, and physical venue costs which typically go to local businesses, are direct expenditures that benefit the local economy. In Berkeley, total direct expenditures by nonprofit organizations come to nearly \$98 million and the arts industry provides over 6,000 paid positions.

Arts and culture venues and events are popular in Berkeley, attracting a total audience of over 2.6 million in 2016. Audiences, which include both local residents and visitors from neighboring cities and beyond, significantly expand the economic

impact of arts organizations through their spending at nearby restaurants, stores and hotels. This off-site spending may even exceed the direct expenditures of the arts organizations themselves. In particular, cultural events can attract new dollars by drawing visitors to the city who may spend more on average than local residents by paying for lodging and other related services.

## SNAPSHOT OF CURRENT CONDITIONS

Through stakeholder interviews and focus groups, the planning team identified key issues influencing the arts in Berkeley. This assessment explores the current conditions and trends impacting the city's arts and culture sector, focusing on what has changed since the last Arts and Culture Plan in 2004. The key findings and issues that emerged from this assessment are described below.

### Arts Funding and Investment

Art continues to play a critical role in Berkeley's economy, with strong performing and visual arts and new venues attracting visitors from outside the city and region. Even with the increased funding offered through the Civic Arts Grant Program, community arts leaders emphasized the need for additional funding to support the arts across the city.

## Affordability

The issues of housing affordability and artist space affordability in Berkeley and the Bay Area are central concerns for artists and arts organizations in Berkeley. With rising real estate costs, many artists, even teaching artists, can no longer afford to live or rent artist spaces within Berkeley city limits. Artists living outside of Berkeley are struggling with the region's soaring cost of living and the cost of transportation to Berkeley. Local arts leaders noted that young artists are moving to Oakland and other cities where they can live more affordably. The interviews surfaced the need for an ongoing discussion on the role of the City and other large institutions in supporting the development of affordable housing and work spaces for artists and arts organizations.

## Geography

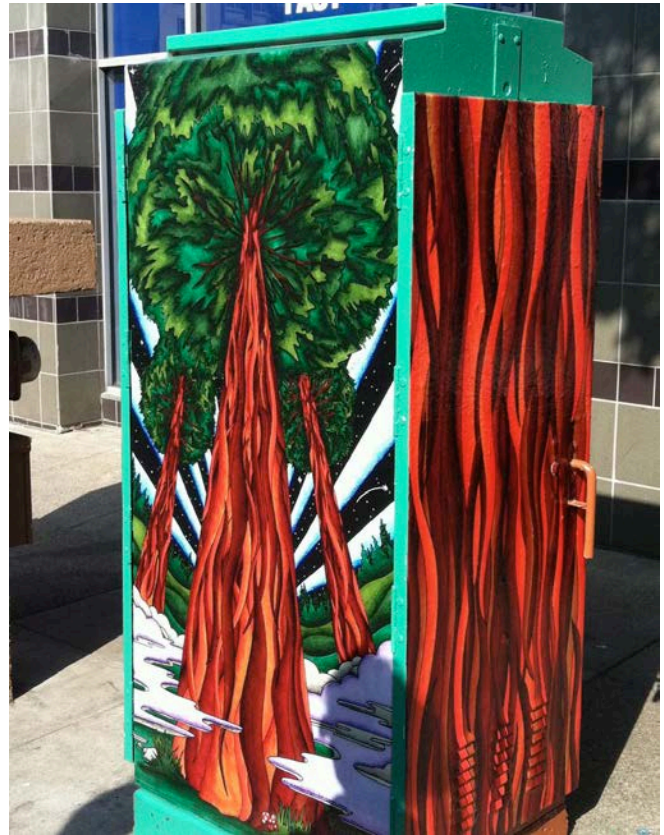
Downtown Berkeley's successful "Addison Street Arts District" is well-established as a popular hub of arts and cultural activities. A key theme emerging from discussions with arts and cultural leaders is a desire to identify and establish art districts beyond the Downtown, in, for example, West and South Berkeley. The "Arts and Artisans District" in West Berkeley and the "Ashby Arts District" in South Berkeley are prime candidates for additional, neighborhood-specific City investment.

## Partnerships

Many arts and cultural leaders and organizations highlighted the desire to create more partnership opportunities with lynchpin institutions to leverage funding and increase operational capacity. While there are several strong connections existing between the City, UC Berkeley and arts organizations, leaders in the arts community expressed the need for more information-sharing and formalized structures to forge new relationships across sectors.

## Arts in Education

Berkeley is working to address the role of schools and nonprofits in providing students with a high quality, equitable arts education. While BUSD has an exemplary music program district-wide, visual arts and other performing arts such as dance and theatre are not as consistently taught or widely available to all students. Some interviewees expressed that students who attend public school have less exposure to the arts, which makes them less familiar and invested in the arts as adults. Research by UC Berkeley through the Chancellor's Community Partnership funded study indicated that disparities in arts programming exist within the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) K-8 afterschool programs. Based on this understanding, the community dialogue on the role of public institutions and arts organizations in providing and supplementing arts education is a key issue in the Berkeley arts community.



Utility box mural on Shattuck Avenue. Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

## Marketing and Promotion

Many arts institutions host shows, events and programs in Berkeley, however, stakeholders expressed a need to better market and promote their work and related activities. Since the 2004 Plan, the City has initiated a partnership with Visit Berkeley, which serves as a consolidated, online resource to promote upcoming arts and cultural events. Some interviewees suggested that the City and its arts partners work together to better leverage Visit Berkeley and expand marketing efforts.

### Recent Arts Awards for Berkeley

In 2016, the *Diablo Magazine* named Berkeley's Arts District the "Best Renovated Arts District in the East Bay" citing the new UC Berkeley Art Museum, the new UC Theatre, Taube Family Music Hall, and the Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

The City of Berkeley hosted the "Meeting of Mayors" event as part of the Mayors Innovation Project in 2016. The arts sector's contributions to the city's economy were highlighted in a presentation to mayors from over twenty cities from across the country.

## CHAPTER 3

## Priority Planning Areas

Since the adoption of the last Arts and Culture Plan in 2004, the City and the Civic Arts Commission have prioritized three policy areas: Civic Arts Grants, Public Art, and Arts Education. This Plan Update takes an in-depth look at the development of each area in recent years, evaluating the City’s investment of resources and making recommendations for further policy improvements in alignment with the vision articulated in this Plan.

The City’s commitment to these three priority areas is exemplified by initiatives led by the City in recent years, which include the UC Chancellor’s grant-funded initiatives to enhance arts education, the development and implementation of the Public Art on Private Development ordinance, and revisions to the Civic Arts Grants guidelines for increased efficiency and equity. The progress that the City has demonstrated in these priority areas has helped lay the foundations for the Arts and Culture Plan Update and has equipped the City with the tools necessary to further strengthen its programs and address new challenges.



Alicia Little Tree Bales and Ed Berkeley in “When Briseis Met Chryseis” at the Metal Shop Theater in Berkeley. Photo by W. Newton.

### CIVIC ARTS GRANTS

#### Background and Current Conditions

The City of Berkeley provides financial support to the local arts community through the Civic Arts Grant program. The Berkeley Civic Arts Commission utilizes its grant-making to strengthen Berkeley’s arts landscape in order to enrich the city as a whole. Grant funds are strategically targeted to continue building a vibrant arts ecosystem. The Civic Arts Commission makes funding recommendations to the City Council after a review panel evaluates the proposals and gives recommendations to the Commission.

The Civic Arts Grant Program is unlike other funding streams in that it allows organizations to utilize the funds for core operational activities rather than restricting expenditures to programming and projects. Over the last 15 years, the Civic Arts Grant Program has pursued a consistent grant-making approach, providing general operating support to arts groups, service organizations, and arts programs within larger institutions, and project support to individual artists. The amount of funding available for arts grants varies each fiscal year depending on the allocation from the City’s General Fund approved by the City Council. The Civic Arts Commission and its Grants Subcommittee disburse the yearly allocation to a broad and diverse range of applicants, serving the widest audience possible.

### Recent Developments and Accomplishments

In 2015, the City of Berkeley engaged an independent consultant to evaluate the Civic Arts Grant Program and identify strategies to improve the program. One of the key findings from the assessment was that the “formula-based approach and lack of grantee categories resulted in low grant amounts and was perceived as fostering inequitable distribution of resources that put small arts groups at a disadvantage.”<sup>1</sup> The assessment also revealed the need to promote art nodes in neighborhoods throughout the city, as opposed to concentrating funding in established districts (such as the Downtown Berkeley Arts District).

Subsequently, the City changed its grants guidelines and discontinued the use of the formula in grant allocations. In place of the formula-based approach, the City created three separate competitive grant pools for a) large and mid-size arts organizations, b) small arts organizations, and c) individual artists. In addition, the City simplified the application guidelines, form, and process, with separate application processes for organizations and individual artists.

The City Council also adopted the following changes to improve the Civic Arts Grant Program and ensure it is accessible to a wider diversity of local artists and arts organizations:

- Increased annual allocation to the Civic Arts Grants Program to a total budget of \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2018. (Table 1)
- Shifted from a two-year grant cycle to an annual cycle to allow arts organizations and artists an annual opportunity to apply for funding rather than having to wait every other year to apply.

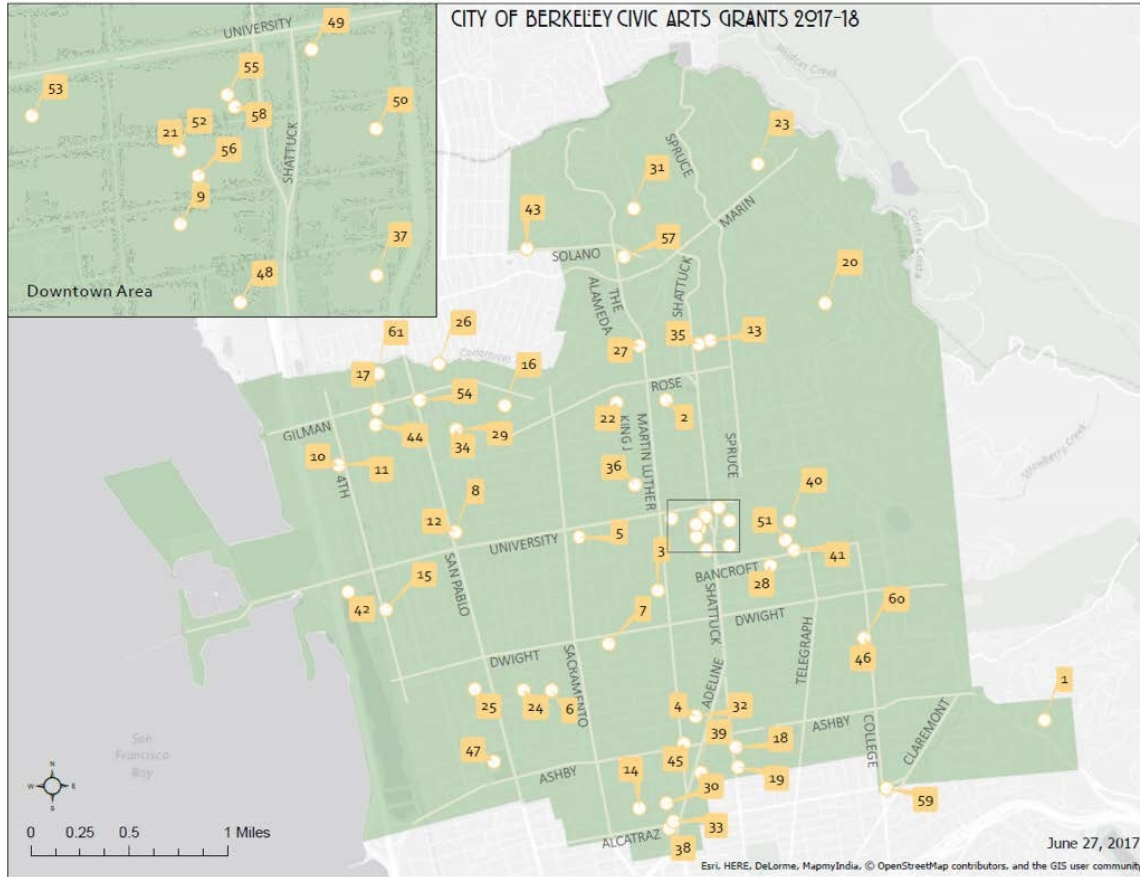
**Table 1: Civic Arts Grant Program Funding (2015 — 2018)**

|                                     | 2015-16   | 2016-17   | 2017-18   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Civic Arts Grant Funding Allocation | \$229,100 | \$378,850 | \$497,510 |

A map of the 2017-2018 grant recipients (see Figure 2) demonstrates that grantees are spread across the city, creating art and programming in every district. Using an equity lens, the Civic Arts Grant Program is continually analyzing its practices and operations to ensure it reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Berkeley, the array of artistic disciplines practiced, geographic reach, and the current needs of the arts sector in Berkeley.

<sup>1</sup> City of Berkeley Office of Economic Development, Civic Arts Grants Program. “Grants Program Assessment and Recommendations.” October 2015.

Figure 2: Map of Civic Arts Grants



## 2017-18 CIVIC ARTS GRANT AWARD RECIPIENTS

### Individual Artists

- 1 Christy Chan
- 2 Christopher (Kit) Young
- 3 Richard Silberg
- 4 Bruce Coughran
- 5 Todd Gilens

*Funding dependent on increase in Civic Arts Program funds*

- 6 Sheila MetcalfTobin
- 7 Ben Goldberg

### Small and Mid-Size Organizations

- 8 BrasArte The Damasceno Brazilian Cultural Exchange
- 9 Berkeley City College - Milvia Street Art and Literary Journal
- 10 Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival
- 11 Poetry Flash
- 12 Capoeira Arts Foundation
- 13 Berkeley Art Center
- 14 Actors Ensemble
- 15 CODEX Foundation
- 16 Berkeley Juneteenth Association, Inc.
- 17 Alternative Music Foundation
- 18 Gamelan Sekar Jaya
- 19 La Peña Cultural Center
- 20 Berkeley Community Chorus & Orchestra

- 21 Berkeley Old Time Music Convention
- 22 Junior Bach Festival Association, Inc.
- 23 Chora Nova
- 24 Pacific Edge Voices
- 25 Berkeley FILM Foundation
- 26 Sacred and Profane: A Chamber Chorus
- 27 Veretski Pass
- 28 Central Works
- 29 Play Cafe, Inc.
- 30 Creative Wellness Center/Bonita House, Inc.
- 31 Youth Musical Theater Company
- 32 Indra's Net Theater
- 33 PlayGround
- 34 Inferno Theatre
- 35 TheatreFIRST
- 36 Those Women Productions
- 37 David Brower Center
- 38 Youth Spirit Artworks
- 39 New Space Studio

*Funding dependent on increase*

- 40 UC Jazz
- 41 Creative Residencies for Emerging Artists Teaching Empowerment

### Large Organizations

- 42 Luna Dance Institute
- 43 Foundation for the Future of Literature and Literacy, dba the Bay Area Book Festival
- 44 Small Press Distribution
- 45 Shotgun Players
- 46 Berkeley Ballet Theater
- 47 Kala Art Institute
- 48 Habitot Children's Museum
- 49 Heyday
- 50 UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA)
- 51 Regents of the University of California/Cal Performances
- 52 Berkeley Society for the Preservation of Traditional Music, dba: Freight & Salvage
- 53 Berkeley Symphony
- 54 Ashkenaz Music & Dance Community Center
- 55 Aurora Theatre Company
- 56 Bay Area Children's Theatre
- 57 Cazadero Performing Arts Camp
- 58 California Jazz Conservatory
- 59 Shawl-Anderson Dance Center
- 60 Julia Morgan Center for the Arts, Inc. DBA: Berkeley Playhouse
- 61 Berkeley Repertory Theatre

Another recent development is the establishment of a festivals grant program. Historically, Berkeley's grants to cultural festivals and special events have been allocated to specific recipients via the City's annual budget process, rather than through a competitive application process. In 2017, the Civic Arts Commission partnered with members of the Berkeley Cultural Trust, including a producer of many of Berkeley's most successful arts and culture festivals, to advocate and develop a framework for a transparent, competitive, public process for the allocation of those funds, so that more organizations would have the opportunity to benefit from that financial support. In early 2018, the Berkeley City Council adopted a resolution committing the City to proceed with that policy. City staff plans to work with the Civic Arts Commission to establish the program for implementation early 2019, in advance of the 2019-2020 grant cycle.

## Recommended Improvements

The Civic Arts Grant Program is a clear articulation of the City's commitment to sustaining and celebrating the arts and creative expression within its borders. Arts stakeholders and community members that participated in this planning process identified a number of strategies for building on existing assets to increase investment in a vibrant arts community (with additional detail in Chapter 4):

### Policy 2.1

#### **Expand the Civic Arts Grants Program by increasing funding and technical assistance for grantees.**

Arts advocates seek an ongoing commitment from local government to fund grants programs, and to explore funding increases that can be sustained by new revenue streams. Beyond funding, the City can increase the impact of the program by bolstering technical assistance for artists and arts organizations, particularly in regards to fiscal sponsorship and management, and organizational development.

### Policy 2.2

#### **Promote an equitable grant-making process and reduce application barriers.**

The Civic Arts Commission and other arts stakeholders commit to pursuing additional enhancements to the City's arts funding programs to expand access for individuals and organizations from cultural communities and geographical areas that have been historically underrepresented and underfunded.

### Policy 2.3

#### **Promote the Civic Arts Grants Program to offer funding opportunities to a wider array of arts organizations and artists.**

The City, the Commission and arts partners can expand the network of funding recipients by enhancing communications, establishing an organizational mentorship program, and pursuing other creative strategies to increase inclusiveness and build capacity.

### Policy 2.4

#### **Increase marketing of the arts among Berkeley residents, regional audiences and tourists.**

There's a clear need and opportunity to leverage the community's investments in the arts by increasing marketing activities and strengthening connections between organizations and their audiences.



Berkeley Repertory Theatre production of "Ain't Too Proud - The Life and Times of The Temptations." Photo by Kevin Berne.

## ARTS EDUCATION

### Background and Current Conditions

Art practice and creative expression are crucial to the education and development of young people and people of all ages. Arts education provides opportunities for participants to build skills, solve problems, express themselves, and create something new. The City of Berkeley and its partners offer a wide range of high quality arts education experiences, available to an intergenerational Berkeley community in a variety of settings. The Berkeley arts and culture education system consists of a network of organizations including departments of the City of Berkeley, the Berkeley Unified School District, arts programs within higher education institutions, and educational programs within non-profit and community-based organizations.



Crowden Music School Students at Civic Center Exhibition Opening.  
Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

### Berkeley Unified School District programming

Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD or the District) consists of 11 public elementary schools, 3 middle schools, a high school, and an alternative school serving over 9,400 students in the BUSD. In addition, the District has 3 preschool facilities and an Adult School serving several thousand students each year. Programming in the curricular day includes:

- Music at all levels: BUSD's exemplary music program, funded by a recently renewed parcel tax, begins with recorder lessons for third grade classes, instrumental music for upper elementary, and then band, jazz band and orchestra at every middle school and Berkeley High (BHS). Alumni of BHS's award winning jazz ensembles have achieved recognition and awards in the national and international jazz scene.
- Other arts at all elementary and middle schools: Offerings of dance, theater and visual arts classes vary from site to site at elementary and middle school level. In elementary school, each principal works with stakeholders at their site to decide what kind of arts education is offered during the school day and how much.
- Arts at the high school level: The quantity and quality of arts programming at Berkeley High is superior by national standards for high schools of its size. All disciplines are represented, and performances and exhibitions are of very high quality. Serious artist students graduating from BHS are accepted at conservatories and professional arts preparation programs and go on to professional arts careers. That said, the resources offered in each field vary from year to year depending upon county/state support, philanthropic and PTA support, and BHS leadership.

### Afterschool programming

Afterschool programming provides arts learning opportunities and enrichment for students at all levels. These opportunities are programmed as outreach opportunities within arts non-profit organizations, by the schools, and by school PTAs. As a result, the overall landscape for afterschool arts programs varies in both quality and access from school to school. Within the BUSD elementary school program, the complex afterschool ecosystem involves two different afterschool programs: LEARNS, a program that charges a sliding scale according to family income and BEARS, a subsidized program offering low or no-cost care to low-income families. The two programs offer markedly different levels of access to the arts and vary widely in quality and innovation from site to site. Each school's PTA offers a unique menu of programming that overlaps with both programs somewhat, but also serves students who participate in

neither afterschool program. The PTA classes typically charge a fixed amount per class, with limited scholarships, thereby offering high quality arts access to the children of better-resourced families. The dependence on differentiated models of funding – parental and governmental – can create inequity in access to arts programming.

### City of Berkeley Programming

The City of Berkeley offers arts education classes through the Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Department that complement the Berkeley Unified School District’s afterschool arts and culture activities and summer activities. Summer offerings include Cazadero Music Camp, which serves 1,400 students age 10 through 18 each summer; JumpStart in Music; Echo Lake Camp’s artist-in-residence program; and Arts Discovery Camp serving children ages 5-12. Many classes are available at subsidized prices for Berkeley residents. Scholarships are sometimes available for low-income individuals and families. Afterschool classes take place at three park campuses.



“All The Right Moves” students with teacher Yukie Fujimoto performing at Luna Dance Institute’s 20 Points of View open studio showing. Photo courtesy of Luna Dance Institute

### Non-Profit and Community-based Providers

Many of the 150+ arts organizations in Berkeley are fully dedicated to arts education, or have educational components integrated into their core programming. Berkeley enjoys high-caliber arts education providers in visual art, theater, dance, music, film, and other forms of fine art and creative expression. Many of these organizations partner with BUSD. While such partnerships increase students’ access to arts education, the quality, accessibility, consistency, depth, and breadth of such partnerships vary, creating inequity in access.

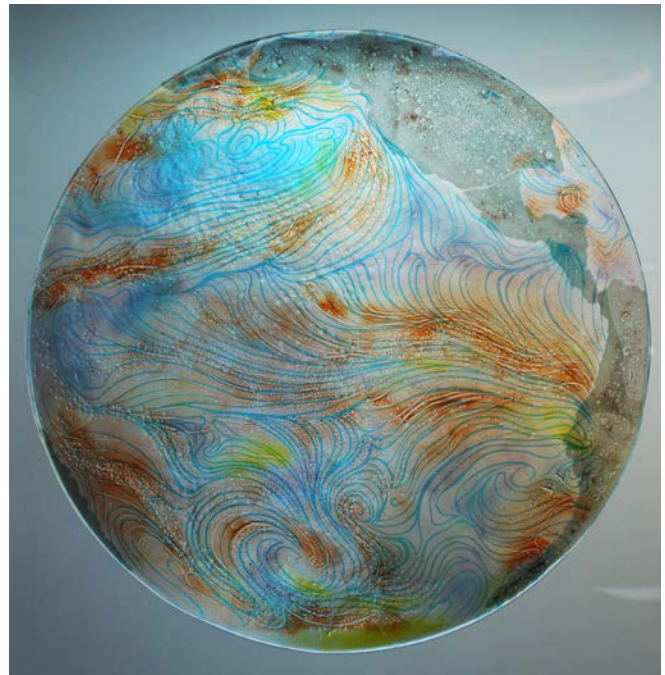
### Higher Education and the Arts

Berkeley’s institutions of higher education feature robust offerings in the arts, design, culture and creativity. At Berkeley City College, the Visual Art Department features studio classes, art history classes, certificates of achievement in Public Art, Figure Drawing and Art History, and AA Transfer Degree in Studio Art. The University of California at Berkeley houses a range of educational departments, student groups, and presenting organizations that teach the arts to college students, life-long learners, and youth across all disciplines in the visual arts, the performing arts, film and media, literary arts, and all design fields.

Educational offerings include free and accessible public programming, courses and degrees for UC Berkeley students, courses and certificates for concurrent enrollment students and life-long learners, educational programming from museums and presenting organizations, internships in arts administration, and student clubs devoted to community arts. The recent creation of the Office for Berkeley Arts + Design seeks to aggregate this rich and varied landscape across the campus, collaboratively fundraise, and strengthen community partnership in all creative fields. While the impulse to institutional and individual collaboration runs deep, the ongoing state and federal cuts to public higher education imperil the capacity to leverage and expand higher education programs on behalf of arts education in the city of Berkeley.

### **Advocacy organizations**

The City of Berkeley, Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust, and arts nonprofits in Berkeley are engaged in efforts to improve the access and quality of arts education opportunities for students. Drawing from each of these entities, the Berkeley Arts Education Steering Committee (BAESC) is a collaborative group dedicated to promoting and enhancing arts education in Berkeley. BAESC was founded in 1998 as a collaboration between local arts organizations, parents, teachers and administrators. BAESC is a committee of Berkeley Cultural Trust and over the past 19 years has been led by local leaders in partnership with BUSD. The goal of BAESC has consistently been to bring a variety of strong arts programming to students in the Berkeley schools.



“Spectrascape” by Wowhaus at Berkeley’s West Branch Library. Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

### **Recent Developments and Accomplishments**

Despite the challenges of an under-resourced and under-coordinated arts education environment in the City of Berkeley, there has been continuous improvement as well as promising pilot projects that test new partnerships and create coalitions for advocacy. Most of the pilots described below depend entirely on volunteer labor and need stable funding and staffing to continue implementation.

### **UC Berkeley Arts Administration Internship Program**

Funded for two years by a Chancellor’s grant from UC Berkeley, the Arts Research Center (ARC) at UC Berkeley collaborated with the Berkeley Cultural Trust to establish internships programs for Cal students within ten to twelve arts organizations. Students received Independent Study or Field Study credit with then ARC Director (now Associate Vice Chancellor) Shannon Jackson while volunteering in the administrative offices of BCT member institutions. BCT staff received modest stipends in exchange for mentorship and a modest fund supported programming and teaching in the field of arts administration. This model was a win-win for Berkeley students and the Berkeley Cultural Trust, but it requires sustained funding to continue.

### **Equity in Access to Afterschool Arts Program Study**

Funded for two years by another Chancellor’s grant from UC Berkeley, the City of Berkeley and the Berkeley Civic Arts Commission partnered in 2017 with the Principal Leadership Institute in the Education Department at the University of California at Berkeley to study arts education at BUSD afterschool programs. The study identified issues of unequal access to arts education at various afterschool

program sites–sited above–and made recommendations to address these equity issues. The project also resulted in the creation of a draft *Art Education Handbook* for after school programing at BUSD. The project sponsors and partners hope to build on this progress by enhancing partnerships between arts nonprofits and BUSD afterschool programming.

### **Creative Residencies for Artists Teaching Empowerment (CREATE)**

Amongst the many arts providers identified in the Afterschool Program Study, UC Berkeley’s network of student volunteers are a key source of supplemental arts education at BUSD and other schools. The C.R.E.A.T.E. program within the Public Service Center (PSC) places around 40 students in local schools as volunteer arts teachers, though PSC cannot afford to hire staff dedicated to coordination and mentorship. With their own initiative, Berkeley students applied for and received a one-time Civic Arts grant to hire experienced teaching artists to train them as assistant arts teachers. Once again, this was a win-win for many schools, Berkeley students, and Berkeley-based teaching artists, but it requires sustained staffing and funding to continue.

### **The Berkeley Arts Education Steering Committee (BAESC)**

The Berkeley Arts Education Steering Committee (BAESC) is comprised of staff from local arts organizations, parents, teachers and administrators. Coming out of an effort to apply for a Kennedy Center grant for arts education, BAESC’s goal is to bring a variety of strong arts programming to students in Berkeley’s schools. While they did not receive the grant, the coalition remained. BAESC was inspired by the arts education meeting held in the fall of 2015 at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to continue working for quality arts education in both the school day offerings and in afterschool programs. BAESC has identified two near-term goals:

1. Enriching afterschool programs with the arts using the afterschool arts assessment conducted by the Berkeley Civic Arts Commission and the UC Berkeley’s Principal’s Leadership Institute under the sponsorship of the UC Berkeley Chancellor’s grants.
2. Exploring what resources are available outside the district to facilitate an arts education strategic plan.

### **Recommended Improvements**

Arts education advocates and service providers should build on these recent accomplishments and strengthen partnerships with BUSD and other educational institutions to expand high quality and equitable arts education in Berkeley. This community planning process identified the following policy goals and actions steps to pursue this goal (with additional detail in Chapter 4):

#### **Policy 3.1**

**Advocate on local, state and national levels to further incorporate arts education into the curricular day and enhance equitable access to arts in extended learning programs.**

Berkeley’s community leaders in the arts have established clear advocacy goals related to addressing inequities in access to arts education, increasing the offerings of stand-alone arts instruction, and better integrating the visual and performing arts in other curricular areas such as math, language arts, science and social studies. Advocates are committed to organizing persistent efforts in pursuit of those goals.

#### **Policy 3.2**

**Create innovative learning opportunities that connect students and young adults with career pathways in the arts.**

Berkeley can build upon the pilot projects described above to create and fund innovative learning opportunities that connect college students and young adults with career pathways in the arts–whether as

community arts practitioners, as arts teachers, or as arts administration internships. Such win-win partnerships create a virtuous circle that fortifies the public schools and arts organizations of the city while providing career-building opportunities for students and young adults with a passion for the arts, community, and cultural leadership.

### Policy 3.3

#### **Bolster arts education programming that complements the public school (K-12) context and lifelong learners.**

BAESC and the Civic Arts Commission are committed to planning and implementing a key recommendation of the recently completed research on afterschool programming: a summer arts enrichment pilot to BEARS students. Working with the BEARS administrator, this coalition is developing a series of field trips to Berkeley arts providers to provide students with several hand-on arts experiences in the visual and performing arts. Input will be sought from both students and staff after each arts field trip to inform next steps, and possible areas of arts focus for the subsequent school year.

## PUBLIC ART

### Background and Existing Conditions



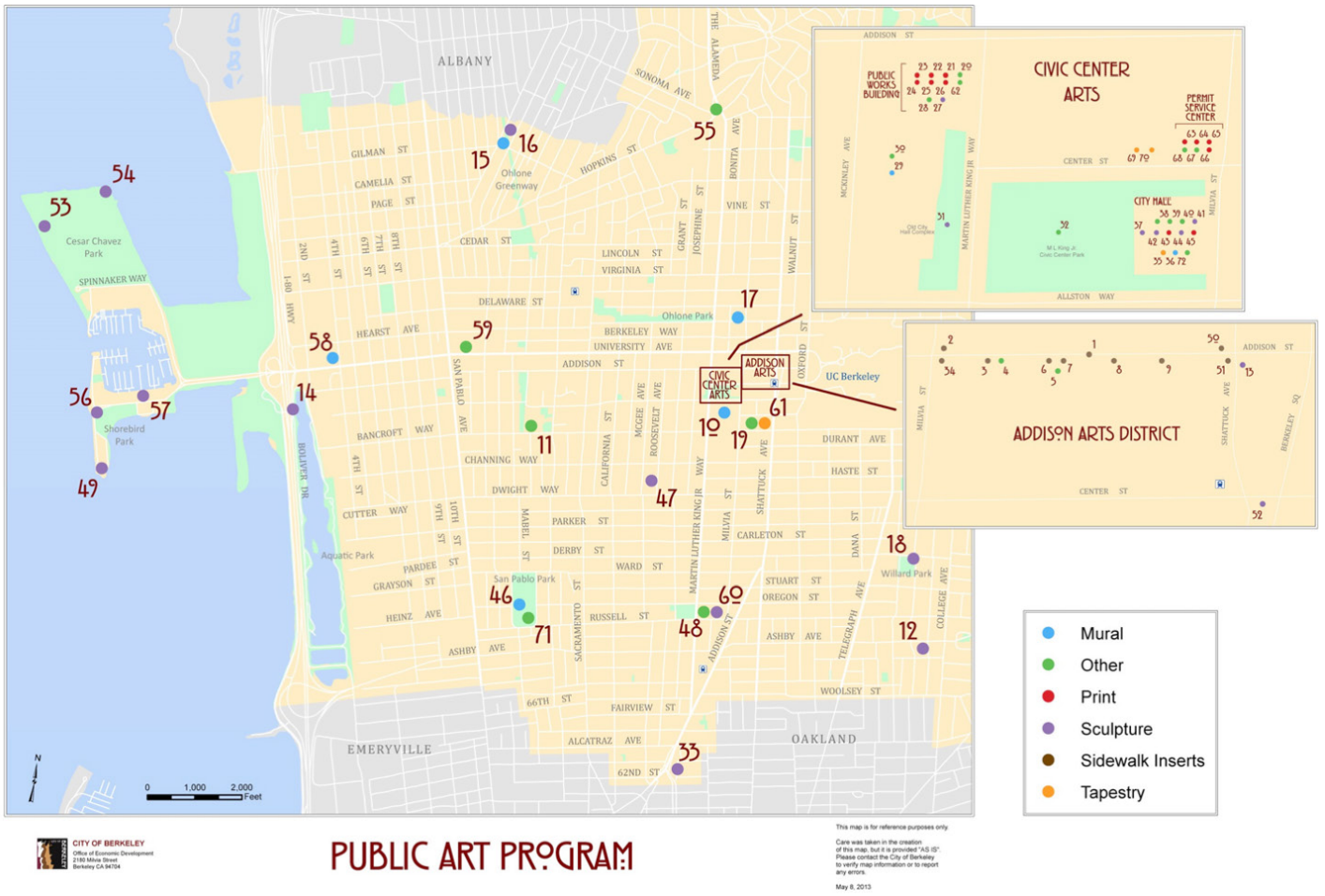
"Calliope" by Joseph Slusky, located in the Berkeley Marina.  
Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

Across the City of Berkeley, creative and unique works of public art enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Public art breathes life into the built environment and open spaces by engaging artists to create works that reflect the unique character of our city. According to a 2015 study conducted by Americans for the Arts, titled "Americans Speak Out about the Arts," approximately 78% of Americans experienced the arts at a "non-arts" venue, such as a park, airport, shopping mall or civic building. This finding indicates that efforts of local arts organizations and arts agencies to "integrate the arts deeper into the fabric of their communities are having measurable impacts."<sup>1</sup>

Public art is integrated in a number of Berkeley's parks, civic buildings, private developments, streetscapes, and other public spaces (see Figure 3 Map of Berkeley's Public Art). The City's longstanding Public Art Program includes a City collection valued at \$3 million dollars, numerous public artworks installed throughout the city, and three City-owned galleries which house a series of rotating exhibitions. The City has completed 82 public art projects since its inception in 1967, with many of the early works commissioned through the City's own voluntary contributions, philanthropic donations and grant funding.

<sup>1</sup> Americans Speak Out about the Arts, [https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/POP\\_FullReport\\_July11-1.pdf](https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/POP_FullReport_July11-1.pdf)

Figure 3: Map of City of Berkeley's Public Art



In 1999 the City of Berkeley adopted the Percent for Art Ordinance, requiring all public improvements and bond measures to allocate 1.5% of the capital budget for public art. This ordinance established a program to fund the development of visual art in public places, including art developed in conjunction with municipal construction projects.

In 2001, the City of Berkeley developed “Guidelines for Public Art” designed to support legislation and staff responsibilities. As part of these guidelines, the following mission statement was articulated for the Public Art Program:

*The City of Berkeley’s Public Art Program will enliven and beautify the City’s environment. The program will encourage and promote awareness of the City’s rich ethnic, social, and cultural diversity as expressed through visual and design arts. The Public Art Program will enhance the visual environment for the citizens of Berkeley, integrate the design work of artists into the development of City public works projects, and promote tourism and economic vitality of the City through the enhancement of public spaces.<sup>1</sup>*



“Expanse” by Carolyn Hayduk at the Center Street Garage. Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

The City of Berkeley has also programmed various publicly accessible exhibition spaces providing local and regional artists the opportunity to show their work in highly visible locations. These include:

1. The Civic Center Art Exhibition, located in the public spaces of the Martin Luther King Civic Center (2180 Milvia Street), provides artists who either live or work in Berkeley with a way to share their art with City staff and the public.
2. The Lobby Gallery at 1947 Center Street serves as a curated gallery that provides visitors and staff an opportunity to see art produced locally in the Bay Area region.
3. Addison Street Windows Gallery, at the Center Street Garage, for decades incorporated a visual artwork into Downtown Berkeley’s award-winning Addison Street Arts District. As of publication, the garage is currently being reconstructed; the new garage will include an exhibition space called “Cube Space” that hosts audio-visual art installations.

<sup>1</sup> City of Berkeley. Public Art for the City of Berkeley: A Guide to the Public Art Process. (2001)

### Romare Bearden's Mural: "Berkeley - The City and Its People" (1973)

"The City and Its People" was one of the first public art commissions of the renowned African-American artist, the late Romare Bearden. The Civic Arts Commission of the City of Berkeley commissioned this mural to be placed in the City Council Chambers as an active and accessible part of the city and its civic life.

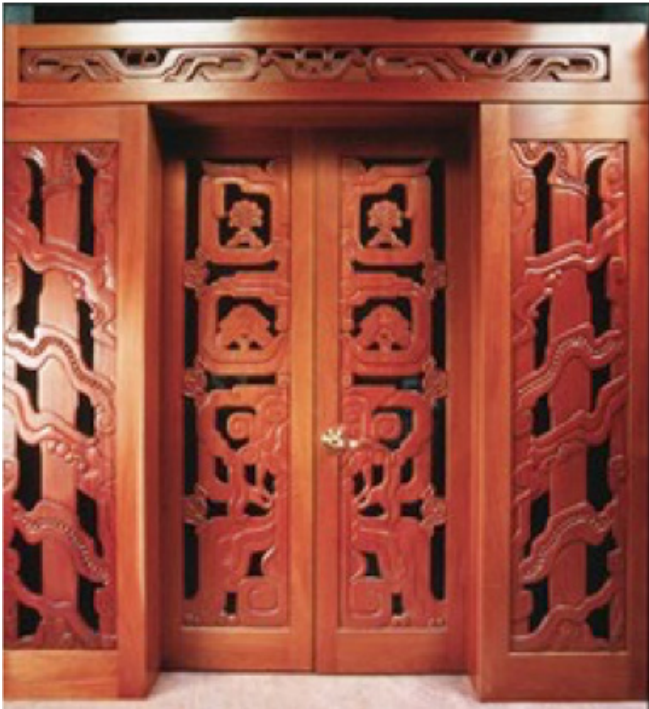
The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. presented a retrospective of Romare Bearden's life work and borrowed this piece for their national exhibition of his work in 2003. The exhibition toured around the country, including stops at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Dallas Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art.



Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

In accordance with the placement of the mural in an open and well-used civic area, the logo of the City of Berkeley contains a multicultural design derived from a segment of this mural's imagery. Until 2003, the mural hung in the City Council area of Berkeley's previous City Hall building where public meetings were held. However, as public meetings were moved to other civic buildings, the mural was placed in storage for safe-keeping until a new location is identified to display this beautiful work of art.

### Recent Developments and Accomplishments



Main Library Gates by Miles Karpilow. Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

Significant policy achievements in recent years have advanced public art on a number of fronts within the City of Berkeley. Some of the policy improvements will generate new sources of funding for public art, making this an ideal time to conduct a citywide community-engaged planning process to inform how these resources will be allocated, ensuring that new public art opportunities are aligned with Berkeley's values and vision.

#### Public Art in Private Development

After years of community deliberation, City Council adopted the Public Art on Private Development Ordinance in July 2016 to support publicly accessible on-site artwork valued at 1% of the cost of construction of new commercial, industrial, and multi-unit residential buildings. As an alternative to commissioning on-site artwork, the Ordinance allows the developer to pay an in-lieu fee of 0.8% of the cost of construction to support publicly accessible arts and cultural

programming anywhere within Berkeley. In October 2017, City Council revised the Public Art on Private Development Ordinance, expanding the applicability and increasing the budget requirement for on-site artwork to 1.75% of construction costs. The Public Art on Private Development Program Guidelines call for an annual budgeting process to allocate any funds accrued in the "in-lieu" fund, referred to in the

Guidelines as “The Private Percent Art Fund.” The purpose of this fund is “to provide arts and cultural services to the community at large by funding implementation of the Arts and Cultural Plan.” Pursuant to the Guidelines, the Civic Arts Commission will develop specific protocols for funding arts and culture programming, public art commissions, and other arts and cultural initiatives.

### Telegraph District Public Art Plan

The Telegraph District Public Art Plan was developed through a series of meetings and conversations with the local community, UC Berkeley, the Telegraph Business Improvement District (TBID), the City of Berkeley, the Civic Art Commission, the Berkeley Police and Fire Departments, AC Transit and other stakeholders. The Plan, completed in 2015, developed a unifying vision for how a range of temporary installations, permanent public art, and a variety of other contemporary forms of cultural programming could be integrated more substantially into any future construction along the Avenue. The plan highlights potential locations for public art in the Telegraph District to “strengthen the sense of community (and connections between various communities), enliven the streetscape and improve the character and quality of the public realm along this unique and important cultural corridor.”<sup>2</sup> This district-specific art plan was a model for how the Civic Art Program could plan for public art within the other “nodes” of the city.

Figure 4. Types of Art as Highlighted in the Telegraph District Public Art Plan (2015)



Photo courtesy of the City of Berkeley.

### Significant Community Benefits

Through the advocacy efforts of the Civic Arts Commission, City Council approved a significant community benefits package for the Harold Way development which included \$750,000 for the arts. The policy for how those funds are to be allocated will be determined by the Civic Arts Commission in alignment with the vision, values and goals articulated in this Cultural Plan.

<sup>2</sup> Passmore, M. The Telegraph District Public Art Plan, 2015. [https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/City\\_Manager/Level\\_3\\_-\\_Civic\\_Arts/Telegraph%20Public%20Art%20Plan-small.pdf](https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/City_Manager/Level_3_-_Civic_Arts/Telegraph%20Public%20Art%20Plan-small.pdf)

## South Berkeley Artwork Commission Honoring William Byron Rumford

Taking an initial step to address the geographic disparity in public art investments in Berkeley, the Civic Arts Commission worked with community members from South Berkeley to commission an artwork honoring the contributions of Assemblyman William Byron Rumford who authored the California Fair Housing Act of 1963. The artwork was installed on the grassy median on Sacramento Street at Julia Street in 2016.

## Measure T1 Funding for Public Art

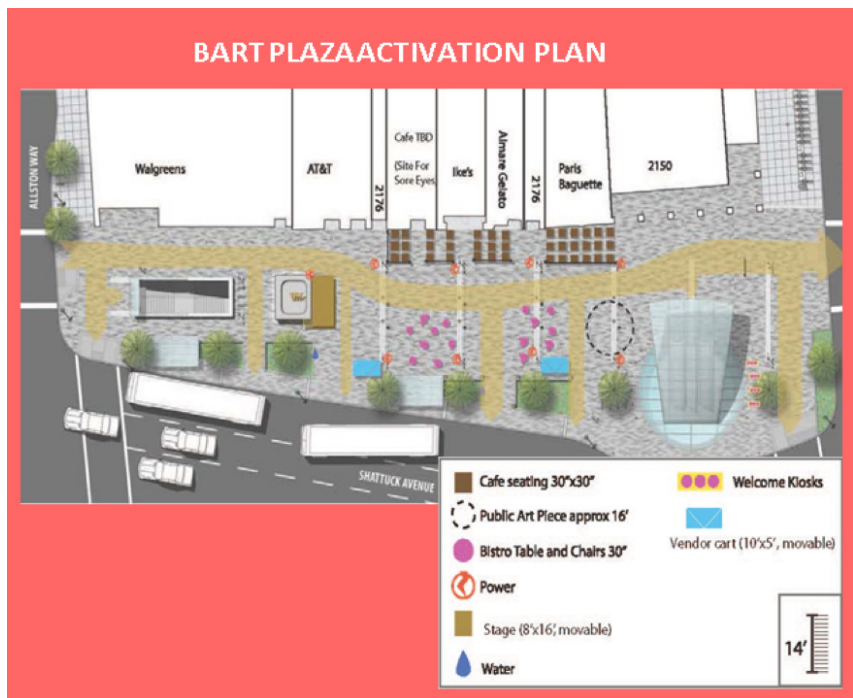
In November 2016, City of Berkeley residents voted to approve Measure T1, which “authorizes the City to sell \$100 million of General Obligation Bonds (GO Bonds) to repair, renovate, replace, or reconstruct the City’s aging infrastructure and facilities, including sidewalks, storm drains, parks, streets, senior and recreation centers, and other important City facilities and buildings.” One percent was set aside for functional public art. The Civic Arts Commission will designate sites for functional public art in three phases for a total of one million dollars.

## Center Street Garage Public Art

The Civic Arts Commission dedicated a large portion of the public art funds generated by the Center Street Garage construction project to create an exhibition space called the “Cube Gallery.” This display space located at the ground level of the new garage structure in the heart of the Downtown Arts District, with an expected opening in mid-2018, will provide a venue to showcase new media and film and video 24/7 facing the street and sidewalk.

## Downtown Berkeley BART Plaza

Downtown Berkeley BART Plaza serves dual civic purposes as the City’s most critical transportation hub and also its central community plaza. In 2017, the Civic Arts Commission partnered with the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA) to develop a plan to activate the plaza with art, performances, community activities, and other cultural programming. This plan envisions the plaza as the heart of Berkeley, where residents and visitors will be invited to linger, listen to music, read a paper or be inspired by art and creativity. The newly renovated plaza will feature a programmable sound and lighting system to facilitate ambient sound installations and public performance. The plaza will also host a temporary, large-scale sculpture for approximately one year; as funding allows, this large-scale sculpture will change annually, providing a unique, highly-visible and ongoing opportunity for sculptors from the Bay Area and beyond to display their work.



Downtown Berkeley BART Plaza Plan. Drawing Courtesy of City of Berkeley.

## **Recommended Improvements**

The civic, social and economic value of Berkeley's public art is difficult to overstate. The City of Berkeley and its partners aim to produce more public art throughout Berkeley by pursuing the following policies and actions (with additional detail in Chapter 4):

### **Policy 4.1**

#### **Enhance Berkeley's environment by placing temporary and permanent public art in public spaces throughout the City.**

In the near-term, staff and community partners will assess the conservation needs of the existing public art collection, implement a suite of arts and cultural programming in Downtown Berkeley BART Plaza and other locations, and conduct technical assistance and fundraising activities to facilitate more new community-led and City-commissioned public art installations.

### **Policy 4.2**

#### **Allocate City funds for public art citywide to ensure equity and access.**

Respondents to the survey conducted for this plan update (see Appendix B) identified numerous potential locations for public art. Survey participants indicated a desire for more public art on major corridors, parks, BART stations, the marina and traffic circles on residential streets. Civic Arts staff and the Commission will identify segments of the community that currently have limited access to public art, in order to identify priority locations for future commissions.

### **Policy 4.3**

#### **Implement the recently established the Public Art on Private Development Ordinance and program.**

A number of on-site public art projects in private buildings are currently in development. In the near-term, the Commission will implement a transparent public process to allocate in-lieu funds in pursuit of the goals and values articulated in this plan.

### **Policy 4.4**

#### **Promote the City's public art collection.**

Stakeholders identified opportunities to leverage the City's existing collection via marketing and digital media to increase artwork exposure.

## CHAPTER 4

# Policy Improvements and Action Steps

This chapter outlines specific policy improvements and action steps for the City of Berkeley, the Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust, other arts partners and the broader community to implement over the next ten years.

One of the most persistent themes of this cultural planning process is the pressure that artists and arts organizations are feeling as a result of increasing costs—of housing, performance and workspaces, and living—in the Bay Area. Goal 1 of this plan outlines a series of policies and actions designed to counter this trend by increasing stability and sustainability for Berkeley’s arts community.

Goals 2 through 4 relate to the three priority planning areas considered in the previous chapter: Civic Arts Grants, Arts Education, and Public Art.

It should also be noted that current staff capacity and administrative resources are limited, making it challenging to accomplish the numerous actions identified through this planning process. Currently, the City of Berkeley and its partners lack resources to implement many of the specific action steps identified through this community planning process. There is a clear need for additional staff capacity and continued collaboration among arts partners to support and implement the growing number of art-related programs, policies and desired actions in the City of Berkeley. Goal 5 of this Plan identifies strategies and specific action items to help expand the capacity of the Civic Arts Program staff.

The policies and action items laid out on the following pages represent an ambitious effort to build on and expand the existing work of the Civic Arts Program. For each action item, the matrix indicates whether funding or staffing resources are currently available to support implementation.

In addition, the matrix indicates the proposed lead and support roles, and lays out general timeframes for implementation. The timeframes include short-term (1-3 years), mid-term (3-6 years) and long-term (6-10 years). These timeframes should be re-evaluated as new funding streams and priorities emerge.

- Goal 1: Increase Access to Affordable Housing and Affordable Spaces for Artists and Arts Organizations
- Goal 2: Increase Investment in a Vibrant Arts Community
- Goal 3: Expand High Quality and Equitable Arts Education
- Goal 4: Produce More Public Art Throughout Berkeley
- Goal 5: Expand the City of Berkeley’s Organizational Capacity to Better Serve the Arts Community

## GOAL 1: INCREASE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND AFFORDABLE SPACES FOR ARTISTS AND ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

| Policy Statement                                                                                                  | Action Items                                                                                                                                                                           | Resources      | Proposed Implementation Team                                                                                                            | Timeframe |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Policy 1.1</b><br>Increase the availability of affordable performance and exhibition venues and studio spaces. | a. Facilitate partnerships and space sharing agreements among arts organizations and others.                                                                                           | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Berkeley Cultural Trust, Arts Organizations                                                          | Mid-term  |
|                                                                                                                   | b. Support the creation of a centralized community arts center for performances, classes, art exhibitions and other activities.                                                        | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff, Berkeley Cultural Trust, Public Works Department                              | Mid-term  |
|                                                                                                                   | c. Facilitate the creation of artist workspaces through land use policy changes, such as encouraging use of ground-floor commercial spaces by individual artists and arts non-profits. | Not Identified | Lead: Berkeley City Council<br>Support: Planning & Development Department, Planning Commission, Civic Arts Commission, Civic Arts Staff | Mid-term  |
| <b>Policy 1.2</b><br>Increase and protect permanently affordable housing for artists.                             | a. Conduct an inventory of existing housing for artists.                                                                                                                               | Not Identified | Lead: Not Identified<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff, Civic Arts Commission, Housing Advisory Commission                                   | Mid-term  |
|                                                                                                                   | b. Identify vacant and underutilized buildings that could be converted for use as artist housing and workspaces.                                                                       | Not Identified | Lead: Not Identified<br>Support: Office of Economic Development, Planning & Development Department                                      | Mid-term  |

| Policy Statement                                                                                                                                              | Action Items                                                                                                                                                                              | Resources      | Proposed Implementation Team                                                                                                                                                                   | Timeframe  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
|                                                                                                                                                               | c. Partner with housing advocates to explore and secure new funding sources for affordable artist housing.                                                                                | Not Identified | Lead: Not Identified<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust, Housing Division, Affordable Housing Advocates, Rent Board                                                    | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                                                               | d. Modify MULI, MUR Districts to incentivize development of affordable housing and live/work spaces for artists that are compatible with existing artisan and industrial uses.            | Not Identified | Lead: Berkeley City Council<br>Support: Planning & Development Department, Planning Commission, West Berkeley Artisans & Industrial Companies (WBAIC), Civic Arts Commission, Civic Arts Staff | Long-term  |
| <b>Policy 1.3</b><br>Enhance and support equity among artists and arts organizations in Berkeley, with a focus on race, gender, and socioeconomic conditions. | a. Map the demographics of Berkeley's arts ecosystem to provide a basis for economic support for culturally and racially diverse organizations and artists.                               | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust                                                                                                              | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                                                               | b. Identify and evaluate the barriers that limit the ability of culturally and racially diverse artists and arts organizations to sustain and grow their creative activities in Berkeley. | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts Staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust                                                                                                              | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                                                               | c. Invest in arts programming and public art in underserved areas of Berkeley.                                                                                                            | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts staff, Berkeley Cultural Trust, Berkeley City Council                                                                                       | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                                                               | d. Develop a new generation of culturally and racially diverse leaders in the arts community.                                                                                             | Not Identified | Lead: Civic Arts staff and Berkeley Cultural Trust<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Bay Area Service Organizations on Non-Profit Development                                                 | Mid-term   |

**GOAL 2: INCREASE INVESTMENT IN A VIBRANT ARTS COMMUNITY**

| Policy Statement                                                                                                      | Action Items                                                                                                                                                         | Resources | Proposed Implementation Team                                                                             | Timeframe  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Policy 2.1</b><br>Expand the Civic Arts Grant program by increasing funding and technical assistance for grantees. | a. Evaluate and pursue new revenue streams, such as a Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) increase, short-term rental tax, cannabis tax etc.                               | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Berkeley City Council, Civic Arts staff, Berkeley Cultural Trust | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                       | b. Pursue corporate sponsorships and other fundraising strategies for community festivals and other arts and cultural programming and events.                        | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                                 | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                       | c. Explore the feasibility of a program that would allow residents to donate funds directly to the Civic Arts Program.                                               | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Finance Department, Civic Arts Commission                             | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                       | d. Identify and pursue local, state, and federal funds with projects aimed at promoting equitable access to the arts.                                                | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                                 | Short-term |
| <b>Policy 2.2</b><br>Promote an equitable grant-making process and reduce application barriers.                       | a. Create a streamlined portal for arts and cultural grants to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the grant-making process and reduce application barriers. | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                                 | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                       | b. Review and evaluate the annual results of the Civic Arts Grant Program to ensure an equitable grant-making process.                                               | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff                                                 | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                       | c. Prioritize investments in arts organizations and artists outside of Berkeley's downtown to ensure broad, citywide participation in funding opportunities.         | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff, Arts Community                                 | Short-term |

| Policy Statement                                                                                                                             | Action Items                                                                                                                                                | Resources      | Proposed Implementation Team                                                                                      | Timeframe  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
|                                                                                                                                              | d. Develop a festival grants policy to increase the transparency and equitable distribution of festival funding.                                            | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts staff, Office of Neighborhood Services                         | Short-term |
| <b>Policy 2.3</b><br>Promote the Civic Arts Grant Program to offer funding opportunities to a wider array of arts organizations and artists. | a. Create a stand-alone Civic Arts webpage to increase the visibility of Civic Arts programs and to promote grant recipients.                               | Not Identified | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, IT Department                                           | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                                              | b. Produce videos that promote the Grants Program, including examples of current projects.                                                                  | Not Identified | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                                          | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                                              | c. Create networking opportunities for grant awardees to market the Civic Arts Grants Program and provide additional incentives for artists to participate. | Not Identified | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust                                 | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                                              | d. Develop a mentorship program to support small arts organizations.                                                                                        | Not Identified | Lead: Berkeley Cultural Trust<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Civic Arts Staff                                 | Mid-term   |
| <b>Policy 2.4</b><br>Increase marketing of the arts among Berkeley residents, regional audiences and tourists.                               | a. Evaluate how to improve marketing of Berkeley's cultural offerings to residents and audiences regionally.                                                | Existing       | Lead: Berkeley Cultural Trust<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff, Visit Berkeley, Downtown Berkeley Association         | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                                              | b. Conduct marketing efforts Citywide to raise public awareness of the diverse art community in Berkeley.                                                   | Not Identified | Lead: Not Identified<br>Support: Civic Arts staff, Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust, Visit Berkeley | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                                              | c. Increase audience diversity through meaningful engagement with young people, seniors, people with disabilities, low-income people, and people of color.  | Not Identified | Lead: Not Identified<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Civic Arts Staff, Berkeley Cultural Trust                 | Mid-term   |

### GOAL 3: EXPAND HIGH QUALITY AND EQUITABLE ARTS EDUCATION

| Policy Statement                                                                                                                                                                                    | Action Items                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Resources      | Proposed Implementation Team                                                                                                     | Timeframe  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Policy 3.1</b><br>Advocate on local, state and national levels to further incorporate arts education into the curricular day and enhance equitable access to arts in extended learning programs. | a. Build coalition of stakeholders to advocate for change to California state law which dictates structural features in the BEARS program, creating barriers to integration with students in the LEARNS program.            | Not Identified | Lead: BAESC<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                                                                    | Long-term  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | b. Support and strengthen the partnership between BAESC, BCAC, BUSD, and Berkeley Cultural Trust.                                                                                                                           | Not Identified | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: BAESC, Berkeley Cultural Trust, Berkeley Unified School District                         | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | c. Advocate to BUSD to provide theater, dance and visual arts education comparable to the district's successful music instruction program.                                                                                  | Existing       | Lead: BAESC<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust                                                           | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | d. Advocate for improved arts opportunities for populations such as low-income families, English learners, people with special needs/disabilities, disconnected transitional age youth, and early childhood (0-5) students. | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Berkeley Cultural Trust, BAESC                                                           | Mid-term   |
| <b>Policy 3.2</b><br>Create innovative learning opportunities that connect students and young adults with career pathways in the arts.                                                              | a. Develop and/or deepen existing partnerships for college students to receive training and supervision to mentor youth in the visual and performing arts during the curricular day and/or in extended learning settings.   | Not Identified | Lead: BAESC<br>Support: UC Berkeley, Berkeley City College, Other academic institutions, Civic Arts Staff, Civic Arts Commission | Mid-term   |

| Policy Statement                                                                                                                  | Action Items                                                                                                                                           | Resources      | Proposed Implementation Team                                                                            | Timeframe  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
|                                                                                                                                   | b. Create fellowships, internships, professional mentorships, or other programs to train the next generation of arts educators and arts professionals. | Not Identified | Lead: BAESC, Berkeley Cultural Trust<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                  | Mid-term   |
| <b>Policy 3.3</b><br>Bolster arts education programming that complements the public school (K-12) context and lifelong education. | a. Raise funds to develop a pilot arts education program in the BEARS summer session.                                                                  | Not Identified | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: BAESC, Berkeley Cultural Trust, Civic Arts Staff                | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                                   | b. Identify innovative strategies to improve outreach to special programming for teens and at-risk youth.                                              | Not Identified | Lead: BAESC<br>Support: Civic Arts staff, Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust, Berkeley High | Long-term  |
|                                                                                                                                   | c. Explore changes to the Civic Arts Grants Program to increase grantee participation in afterschool arts programs.                                    | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff, Berkeley Cultural Trust                       | Short-term |

#### GOAL 4: PRODUCE MORE PUBLIC ART THROUGHOUT BERKELEY

| Policy Statement                                                                                                                        | Action Items                                                                                                  | Resources | Proposed Implementation Team                                                            | Timeframe  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Policy 4.1</b><br>Enhance Berkeley's environment by placing temporary and permanent public art in public spaces throughout the city. | a. Conduct site/condition assessments of current public art collection                                        | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                                         | b. Activate the newly renovated Downtown Berkeley BART Plaza with public art in a variety of media and forms. | Existing  | Lead: Downtown Berkeley Association, Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                                         | c. Dedicate funding for performing arts, interactive, and participatory public art installations.             | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff                                | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                                         | d. Provide technical assistance for community-created art projects throughout the city.                       | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                | Short-term |

| Policy Statement                                                                                                 | Action Items                                                                                                                          | Resources      | Proposed Implementation Team                                                                           | Timeframe  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
|                                                                                                                  | e. Fundraise for new public art throughout the city.                                                                                  | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Business Improvement Districts, Civic Arts Commission, City Council | Mid-term   |
| <b>Policy 4.2</b><br>Allocate City funds for public art citywide to ensure equity and access.                    | a. Identify priority locations for public art in communities with limited access to public art.                                       | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                               | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                  | b. Develop program practices that will encourage participation by Berkeley artists.                                                   | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                               | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                  | c. Dedicate 1.5 % of all future public construction bonds and capital projects to public art, in compliance with existing City policy | Existing       | Lead: Berkeley City Council<br>Support: City Manager's Office                                          | Short-term |
| <b>Policy 4.3</b><br>Implement the recently established Public Art on Private Development Ordinance and program. | a. Develop tools and implement outreach activities to increase awareness of the program, and celebrate its successes.                 | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Planning & Development Department            | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                  | b. Implement a transparent and regular public process (annually or as-needed) for allocating in-lieu funds.                           | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff                                               | Short-term |
| <b>Policy 4.4</b><br>Promote the City's public art collection.                                                   | a. Showcase the existing collection of public art and identify public art pieces that need targeted promotion.                        | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Historical Society                  | Long-term  |
|                                                                                                                  | b. Utilize social media to promote the City's public art.                                                                             | Not Identified | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Visit Berkeley                               | Long-term  |

## GOAL 5: EXPAND THE CITY OF BERKELEY'S ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO BETTER SERVE THE ARTS COMMUNITY

| Policy Statement                                                                                                      | Action Items                                                                                                                                                                                      | Resources      | Proposed Implementation Team                                                                                      | Timeframe  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Policy 5.1</b><br>Increase the capacity of Civic Arts staff.                                                       | a. Identify resources to increase staff capacity to administer, publicize and provide accountability for the increased arts investments being made in the city.                                   | Not Identified | Lead: Berkeley City Council<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff and Civic Arts Commission                                | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                       | b. Dedicate 20% of all new funding for the arts towards administrative needs for these programs.                                                                                                  | Existing       | Lead: Berkeley City Council<br>Support: Office of Economic Development, Civic Arts Commission                     | Short-term |
|                                                                                                                       | c. Expand staff and data systems capacity support and analyze the Grants Program with on-the-ground technical assistance, data collection, and more robust administrative and logistical support. | Not Identified | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission                                                          | Mid-term   |
| <b>Policy 5.2</b><br>Evaluate the reach and impact of each Civic Arts Program.                                        | a. Establish performance measures and a systematic data collection process.                                                                                                                       | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust                                 | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                       | b. Conduct an annual evaluation of progress of implementation of the Arts & Culture Plan.                                                                                                         | Existing       | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Office of Economic Development, Civic Arts Commission, Berkeley Cultural Trust | Short-term |
| <b>Policy 5.3</b><br>Use data to inform policy and raise public awareness of the economic benefit of the arts sector. | a. Update the Economic Impact Report every 5 years to regularly evaluate the economic stimulus that the arts industry provides to Berkeley's economy.                                             | Not Identified | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Office of Economic Development                                                 | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                       | b. Educate decision-makers on the art sector's contribution to Berkeley's economy.                                                                                                                | Existing       | Lead: Berkeley Cultural Trust, Civic Arts Commission<br>Support: Civic Arts Staff                                 | Short-term |

| Policy Statement                                                                                                       | Action Items                                                                                                                                             | Resources | Proposed Implementation Team                             | Timeframe  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------|
|                                                                                                                        | c. Create an annual arts dashboard to educate and engage business owners and the general public about the benefits of having a thriving local art scene. | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts staff<br>Support: Civic Arts Commission | Short-term |
| <b>Policy 5.4</b><br>Promote collaboration among City Departments to better integrate arts into the City's operations. | a. Coordinate communication about City art programs across departments.                                                                                  | Existing  | Lead: Civic Arts staff                                   | Mid-term   |
|                                                                                                                        | b. Integrate culture and the arts into Berkeley's citywide economic development strategies.                                                              | Existing  | Lead: Office of Economic Development, Civic Arts staff   | Mid-term   |

# Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the many arts leaders, artists, organizational partners, and community members who contributed so much of their valuable insight and energy to this planning process.

## CIVIC ARTS COMMISSIONERS, 2016-2018

*\*former Commissioners not currently serving*

|                     |                     |                            |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Kim Anno, Chair     | Robbin Henderson*   | Elizabeth Ozol, Vice-Chair | Miriam Klein Stahl* |
| Dana Brooke Blecher | Dr. Shannon Jackson | Matthew Passmore           | Hiroko Tamano       |
| Lisa Bullwinkel     | Kevan Jenson*       | Julia Robertson*           | Terry Taplin*       |
| Aida Gamez          | Jennifer Lovvorn*   | John Slattery              | Weston Teruya*      |

## CITY OF BERKELEY

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This Arts and Culture Plan Update was made possible through the generous financial support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the UC Berkeley Chancellor's Community Partnership Fund.



Office of the City Manager

## INFORMATION CALENDAR

October 14, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Submitted by: Peter Radu, Assistant to the City Manager

Subject: Changes to Special Events Permitting Fees and Requirements

### SUMMARY

The City of Berkeley has long had a reputation for being a city that is a destination – for culture, for food, and for a vibrant street scene. The City’s Special Events Team is a critical component of the vibrancy, as it is responsible for reviewing, approving, permitting, and overseeing all gatherings and events of 50 or more people on City property (in City parks and on City streets). However, the number of permitted special events (185 in 2024, not including the City’s three weekly farmers’ markets) now surpasses pre-pandemic levels, with this trend driven by a 27% increase in street closures since before the pandemic. The Special Events Team consists of staff from multiple departments, none of whom work solely on special events and many of whom also work on priority issues like encampment operations.

The impact of this increase in the number of requested and ultimately permitted special events has placed great strain on key participating departments (mainly Neighborhood Services, Public Works, Fire, and Health, Housing, and Community Services). As a result, the Fire, Public Works and Health, Housing, and Community Services Departments have recently proposed or will soon propose a range of fee increases to better recover costs for the increased staff time spent on events. In addition, recent accelerating changes in Berkeley’s built environment, with growing numbers of taller buildings and a multitude of street construction and redesign projects, has required staff to newly examine the regulatory framework (i.e., applicable state and local codes; traffic control requirements) for special events in order to ensure uniformity and rigor in its application, so that public safety can be upheld while also ensuring a vibrant events calendar.

Because such changes are usually proposed by individual departments in isolation, considered by Council individually, and paid by customers individually, it can be hard to understand the holistic impact that the sum total of concurrent changes across multiple departments will have on organizers wishing to host special events in Berkeley. The purpose of this report is to compile the changes that will have the greatest impact on event organizers (from a time and budget perspective) into one document. These include:

- **Fire Code compliance** for use of tents, canopies and other membrane structures; use and storage of propane; fire watch requirements; minimum fire lane width requirements; and others.
- **Proposed (forthcoming) Fire Inspector fees** to recover Fire Inspector costs associated with event plan check and event staffing.
- **Proposed (forthcoming) changes to Public Works street closure fees** to better recover staff costs associated with street closures and to make Berkeley's pricing more consistent with those of neighboring jurisdictions.
- **Forthcoming changes to traffic control plan (TCP) requirements** to ensure that all events are held to the same standards for rigorous traffic control planning.
- **Forthcoming transition of costs for street closures** (message board and traffic control device costs as well as Public Works staff time) to event organizers.
- **Changes to Environmental Health food vendor fees** for compact mobile food operations to comply with recent changes to State law.
- **Proposed (forthcoming) changes to Environmental Health's fee structure for food permits and amplified sound permits**, again with the goal of recovering staff costs for reviewing, inspecting, and staffing special events.

Staff will delay implementation of any new fees and regulatory requirements not already in place but highlighted in this report until January 1, 2026, to minimize impacts on remaining 2025 events and help ensure 2026 event organizers can better work with the Special Events Team in planning ahead for fun, safe, and successful future events. For some planned events, it is too late to include the proposed special event fees, requirements, and equipment costs outlined in this report in the current (FY26) Civic Arts Grants cycle.

## CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

### *Overview of the Special Events Team*

The Special Events Team, which is managed by the Special Events Coordinator (1 FTE Program Manager II) in the Neighborhood Services Division of the City Manager's Office, consists of representatives from the Public Works Department, Fire Department, Health, Housing and Community Services Department, Police Department, and Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Department. The involvement of particular staff from each

department in the review and approval of any given event depends on the nature of the event itself. For example, low-impact events (like small block parties) usually create minimal impacts to City operations and require comparably little staff review for a permit to be issued. Conversely, high-impact events (those with higher anticipated turnout and requiring a traffic detour from a major street, collector street, or scenic route and/or requiring the rerouting of any public transportation buses or shuttles) can be complex and require the issuance of multiple permits. Consider the following two examples:

1. Small event. An example includes the closure of a single block of a residential street in which the applicants plan to close the street to through-traffic for a community gathering with carnival games. This event usually creates no major traffic impacts and can be reviewed and permitted with minimal review by participating departments.
2. Large event. An example includes an event in a major commercial corridor, showcasing live music on an event stage that offers a variety of food options from food trucks and canopied tents to several thousand anticipated attendees over two weekend days.

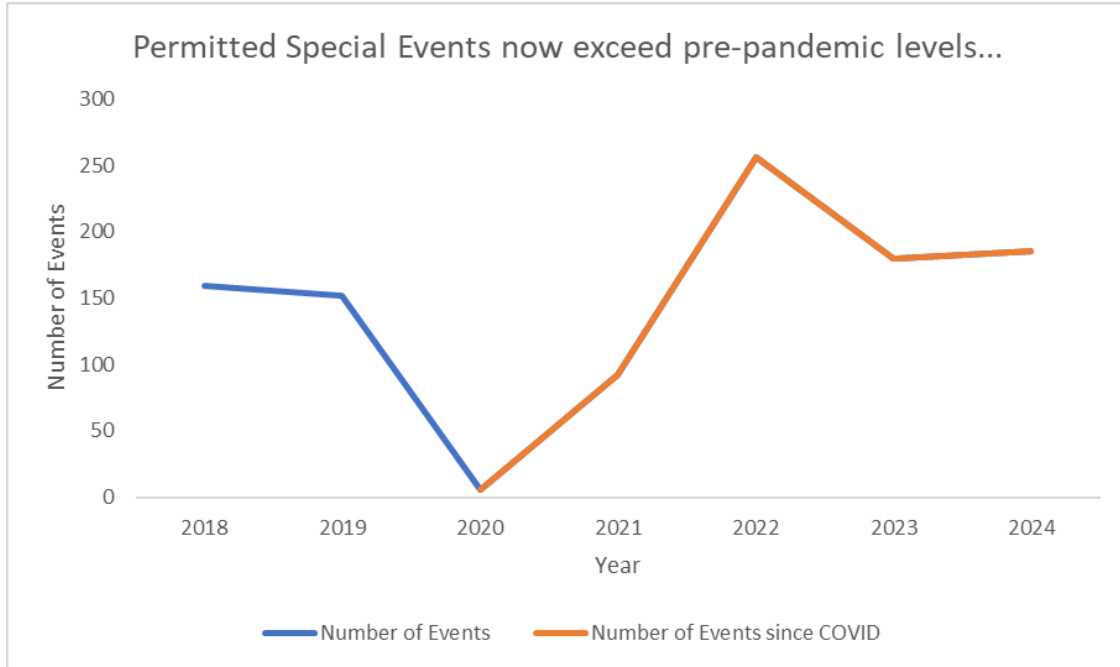
This event requires extensive review, permitting, and staffing from a number of City divisions, including:

- Environmental Health (for food and amplified sound permitting);
- Public Works Transportation (for traffic control and street closure) and Zero Waste (for waste, compost, and recycling management and compliance);
- Fire (for compliance with medical and life safety requirements as well as Fire Code regulations); and
- Police (for public safety review and overtime staffing).

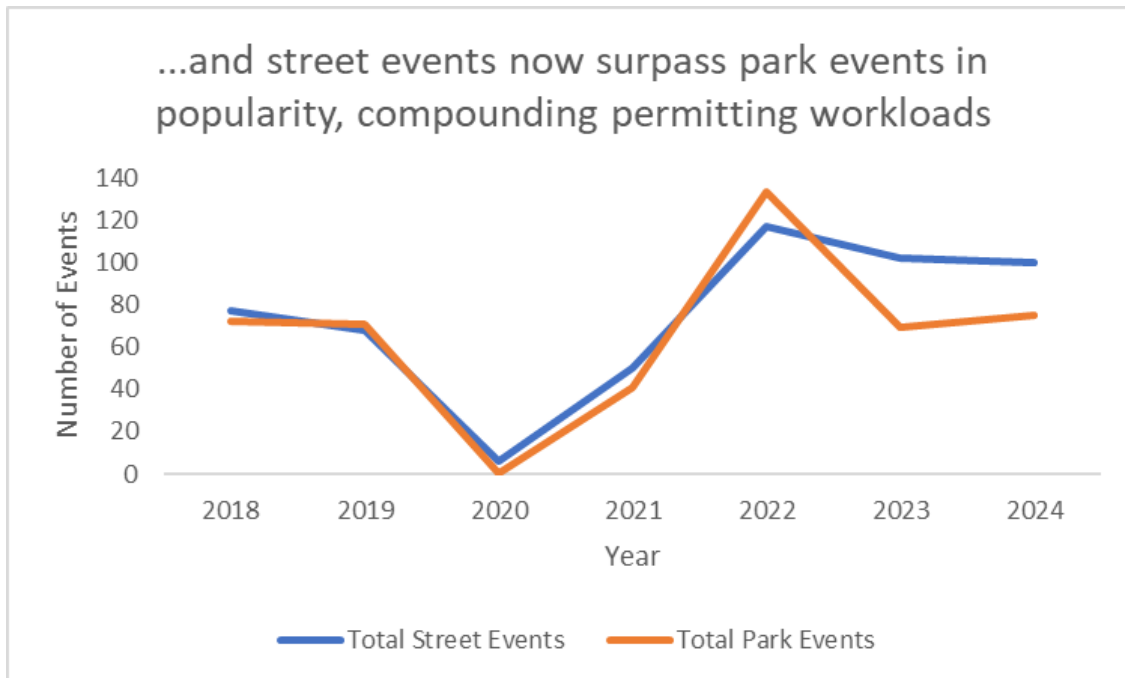
The Special Events Coordinator is responsible for coordinating and synchronizing the many staff involved in the plan check process, liaising with event organizers, ensuring plan compliance, coordinating with other affected agencies (such as AC Transit for bus re-routing), and more before issuing the final permit.

### *Increased Special Event Demand and the Impact on City Operations*

Over the past several years, the number of permitted events in the City has now surpassed pre-pandemic levels: not including the anomaly year of 2020, when many events were canceled due to pandemic lockdowns, the average number of events post-pandemic (2021-2024) increased 15% from before the pandemic (2018 – 2019).



Importantly, data suggest that the increase has been largely driven by an increase in popularity for street closure events: while the average number of post-pandemic (2021-2024) park events increased 11% over pre-pandemic (2018-2019) averages, average street events increased significantly more (27%) over the same period.



Special Events Team staff believe that, in addition to Berkeley’s enduring regional reputation as a cultural destination, this increase in demand for outdoor events, and in particular street events, in Berkeley can be attributed to two other phenomena:

1. When the early days of the pandemic closed down indoor entertainment and gathering opportunities and business operations, many community members and event organizers sought outdoor spaces (in parks and on streets). This trend has not reversed.
2. The City of Berkeley is a relatively inexpensive destination for special events, and in particular street closure events. Filing fees for street events are significantly lower than nearby jurisdictions. The following table summarizes the fees for a high-impact event (i.e., a large event as described above) in Berkeley and surrounding cities:

| <b>Jurisdiction</b> | <b>Fee</b>   |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Alameda             | \$750        |
| <b>Berkeley</b>     | <b>\$250</b> |
| Oakland             | \$4,935      |
| San Francisco       | \$2,283      |

Similarly, the City's Block Party Permit fee is significantly lower than neighboring cities:

| <b>Jurisdiction</b> | <b>Fee</b>  |
|---------------------|-------------|
| <b>Berkeley</b>     | <b>\$15</b> |
| Oakland             | \$81        |
| San Francisco       | \$278       |

The City Council last adjusted filing fees for street events on July 8, 2014 (Resolution No. 66,725-N.S. Establishing Permit Filing Fees for Street Events and Certified Farmers' Markets, and Rescinding Resolution No. 66-662-N.S.).

Irrespective of the reasons behind this trend, however, the effect has had material impacts on City staffing and budgets. With the exception of the Special Events Coordinator, none of the staff on the multi-departmental Special Events Team are dedicated to working full-time on special events. These are the same City staff who (for example) engage in community policing, citywide fire inspections, street closures for construction projects, encampment clean-up and closure operations, restaurant inspections and vector management, and much more. An increasingly demanding special events calendar, for example, has significantly impacted the Homeless Response Team's ability to schedule more citywide encampment clean-ups due to staff scheduling and equipment availability challenges.

## *Current and Impending Departmental Changes Affecting Special Events*

Because the Special Events Team consists of staff from multiple departments, each with their own mission and competing priorities, individual participating departments in the Special Events Team have proposed or are beginning to implement changes to fee structures and regulatory requirements, partly in an effort to address the increasingly unsustainable budgetary and staffing demands placed on their teams by City priorities, such as the Special Events calendar. However, because such changes are usually proposed by individual departments in isolation, considered by Council individually, and paid by customers individually, it can be hard to understand the holistic impact that the sum total of concurrent changes across multiple departments will have on organizers wishing to host special events in Berkeley. The purpose of this report is to communicate clearly to the City Council the anticipated impacts that recent or proposed changes in the Fire Department, Health, Housing, and Community Services Department, and Public Works Department is anticipated to have on the Special Events landscape. An overview of each department's changes is summarized below.

### **Fire Department**

#### *California Fire Code Compliance*

A number of recent changes to the California Fire Code (CFC), as well as a renewed focus within the Fire Department on equitable compliance with the CFC across all events, means that these standards will be more uniformly applied during the Special Events application review process. The Fire Prevention Division is in the process of creating approximately six documents for placement on the City website that detail specific requirements for vendors to help ensure alignment with the CFC. This will include diagrams as well as code sections for event applicants to reference. Additionally, the Fire Department will offer a more comprehensive document with general fire safety information that applies to all special events that occur within the City. Content areas of particular focus, which will be detailed in the documents on the city website, include:

- Tent, Canopy and Temporary Structure Standards – these include standards for spacing, anchoring/bracing, and ingress/egress, as well as fire safety standards that require flame-resistant materials, availability of fire suppression devices, and govern the use of open flames within or near tents and other membrane structures.
- Fire Watch Guidelines – A fire watch is a temporary measure intended to ensure that a building or a space is surveilled by qualified individual(s) for the purpose of identifying and controlling fire hazards, detecting early signs of fire, and notifying the fire department in the event of a fire. This document includes the types of events/situations in which a fire watch would be mandated, the event organizer's responsibilities and obligations, and requirements for watch personnel, patrols,

and record keeping. For outdoor special events, a fire watch protocol would typically be mandated if the Fire Marshal notes potentially hazardous conditions and would be at the Marshal's discretion.

- Use and Storage of Propane – this includes requirements for propane container storage, positioning, security, and inspections prior to and during the event.

Uniform enforcement of these standards for special events will begin on January 1, 2026, aligning with the implementation of the 2025 updated CFC.

Additionally, Berkeley's increasing density has placed renewed focus on existing CFC standards such as minimum acceptable widths for fire lanes (26' where adjacent buildings exceed 30' in height), as well as street closure layouts that do not in any way impede public safety vehicle access and critical mutual aid pathways. Unfortunately, this will have the effect of rendering some popular destinations for special events in the past – including Telegraph Avenue and stretches of Adeline Street in South Berkeley – unavailable for future street closures. Special Events staff are committed to working closely with all event applicants to ensure any impacted event proposal is offered an alternative that meets the needs of the event as best as possible. To this end, Special Events staff are excited about the possible creation of Entertainment Zones in select areas throughout the city, discussed in more detail later in this report.

### *Fees and Costs*

The Fire Department currently charges special events organizers for staff overtime expenses when performing fire watch for special events (at a cost of approximately \$100 per hour). The City Council adopted a new Fire Fee schedule on June 24, 2025 that adjusted existing fees for the first time in nine years. The new/increased fees that will impact certain special events include:

- Increased fee for using parking facilities, from \$196 to \$250 for fewer than 15 spaces and from \$250 to \$500 for 15 or more spaces.
- Large temporary membrane structures (larger than 400 sq ft) require a permit with a fee that increased from \$392 to \$500.
- Other fees at increased rates may apply in unique circumstances.

The Fire Department estimates that special events account for approximately 30% of a Fire Inspector's total hours completing event plan checks, corrections, inspections, and event staffing. There is currently no cost recovery for staff time required to process a special event permit. Accordingly, the Fire Department plans to create a fee structure for consultation for special events, subject to Council approval. There are currently a small number of specific events occurring each year that require on-site Fire Inspectors to be present either during setup and/or layout or throughout the duration of the event.

Under a special events fee structure for Fire consultation, such complex events would incur higher fees, which would raise the cost of hosting such events.

**Public Works Transportation Division**

Street closures and block parties are an important part of the Special Events landscape in Berkeley. People who organize events on City streets are required to obtain a City-approved Special Event Permit or Block Party Permit and to pay a filing fee to the City. Fees vary depending on the degree of the event’s impact on the city (for example, traffic impacts). All requests for street closures, except block parties, must submit a traffic control plan as part of the permitting process.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the Public Works Department alone spent almost \$1.5 million to staff special events. But in FY24, the City only received approximately \$31,798 from street closure and block party fees -- \$29,158 in event filing fees from 151 low-impact and 82 high-impact events, and about \$2,640 in fees from 176 block party permit applications. To help address this gap, Public Works is working on a revised fee structure, subject to Council approval, that will bring street closure fees – particularly those for complex, high-impact events – more in line with those of Berkeley’s neighboring cities and cover the costs incurred by the City for reviewing and processing applications and supporting events. The proposed changes to the fee structure are detailed below.

*Permit Fees for Block Parties*

Block parties are street events that occur on a single residential block only and are only eligible to be hosted by the people who live there. A business, nonprofit, or other entity wishing to close this same block for an event would not be eligible for a block party permit and would instead be considered a Tier 1 event. These purely residential events do not require a traffic control plan nor specialized equipment, as described below.

Public Works staff will recommend increasing the Block Party Permit fee from \$15 to \$60 per event to better recover the cost of administering the block party program. This includes staff time to review applications, work with residents to approve them, and administer the permits.

*Permit Fees for Street Closures*

Any street event that is not a block party is considered a street closure. The current fee structure for street closures, which makes little distinction between the complexity of street closures and their impacts on City staff and operations, is in the table below:

| <b>Filing Date</b>                    | <b>Current Fee for Low Impact Events</b> | <b>Current Fee for High Impact Events</b> |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| At least 60 weekdays before the event | \$128                                    | \$250                                     |

|                                         |       |                           |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| 30-59 weekdays before the event         | \$150 | \$350                     |
| 20-29 weekdays before the event         | \$175 | \$450                     |
| Fewer than 20 weekdays before the event | \$200 | N/A: Will not be approved |

The proposed, revised fee structure establishes tiered event fees based on event size, impact, and timing and establishes Transportation Support Service fees for special events to reduce the operational deficit and recover costs associated with special events:

| <b>Tier</b> | <b>Proposed Fee</b> | <b>Filing Deadline</b>      | <b>Definition</b>                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1           | \$205               | 21 days in advance of event | No more than a one (1) block closure, no transit detour, and minor cross-departmental coordination                                                                           |
| 2           | \$540               | 30 days in advance of event | No more than a one (1) block closure, transit detour, or moderate cross-departmental coordination                                                                            |
| 3           | \$805               | 60 days in advance of event | Two (2) or more block closure, transit detour, or major cross-departmental coordination                                                                                      |
| 4           | \$1,545             | 90 days in advance of event | Multiple block closure of major arterial streets, major cross-departmental coordination, or consists of a marathon, parade, active attendee participation, or similar events |

Each tier has different fees and submittal deadlines, as the amount of staff time required to review applications can vary substantially depending on the complexity of a particular event.

*Transportation Support Service Fees*

As authorized under Resolution No. 66,725-N.S., the City also proposes event fees for signage, traffic control or diversion, loss of parking meter revenue or other conditions specific to the designated location. On average, traffic control setup for special street events (not including block parties) requires two (2) Traffic Maintenance Workers I and two (2) Traffic Maintenance Workers II, each working at roughly \$200 per hour for eight (8) hours. Based on this, it costs the City a minimum of \$6,160 for Public Works Maintenance staff to work each special event. In the past, applicants have not been invoiced for Traffic Maintenance Support, but it is the City’s intention to begin invoicing

for these services as appropriate, starting January 1, 2026. This will help cover existing City expenses to support special events in Berkeley.

### *Safety Barricades, Cones, and Changeable Message Boards*

City staff work with event applicants to develop staffing, traffic control and other safety plans. Due to the growing and unbudgeted demands on city resources such activities impose, Public Works will implement the following changes effective January 1, 2026:

- Special barricades are used for all road closures, typically four barricades per block. Beginning January 1, 2026, if a special event is so large that it requires more barricades than the City is able to provide, event organizers can either purchase their own barricades that meet the City's requirements or the City can bill the organizers for additional barricades (approximately \$100 per barricade and \$25 per traffic cone).
- Additionally, beginning January 1, 2026, staff will uniformly direct all special event organizers to outsource changeable message boards from third parties that provide traffic control services and to coordinate with Public Works' Traffic Maintenance unit when such equipment is needed. Staff anticipate that typically, the event organizer will order and pay for the boards, and Traffic Maintenance staff pick up, deploy and return them. Most events require 2 – 4 message boards, totaling \$720 - \$1,440 per day. Large events will need more boards.

Moving forward, these changes—while necessary for the City to recover its costs—may mean event organizers must rent special equipment to support their activities or pay the City to cover its costs to do so.

### *Traffic Control Plans*

For years, the City of Berkeley has accepted traffic control plans from event organizers that do not meet traffic engineering standards. Beginning January 1, 2026, engineered and stamped traffic control plans (TCPs) will be required at time of filing, similar to filing requirements for adjacent jurisdictions. In the Bay Area, the costs of such TCPs can range up to \$5,000 depending on factors including the complexity of the street closure and duration of the event. While Public Works recognizes the cost burden that this places on some events' budgets, failure to obtain an engineered TCP places the City at great liability – and its residents at risk – in the event of an emergency. The Special Events Team is committed to working with long-time event organizers to navigate this process, and TCPs may be reusable for multiple years if street conditions and event parameters do not change.

## HHCS Environmental Health Division

The Environmental Health (EH) Division within HHCS is responsible for reviewing applications and issuing permits for event participants who wish to sell or provide prepared food and/or propose to have amplified sound (i.e., a musical stage).

### *Compact Mobile Food Operators*

Passed in 2022, California SB 972 established a new type of retail food facility called a “compact mobile food operation” (CMFO) as a subcategory of mobile food facility that is nonmotorized and operates from a pushcart or stand, and exempted CMFOs from various provisions of the retail food code law, including certain sink requirements. This bill has affected Environmental Health’s Temporary / Special Events program in two ways:

- Environmental Health (EH) is now issuing “**Known Vendor Letters**” (**KVLs**), an exemption that allows booth operators to sell pre-packaged, Non-Potentially Hazardous Food (i.e. non-perishable food that does not require temperature control, under 25 sq. ft. with no open food sampling). Beginning with the Council’s passage of EH’s revised fee structure in 2024, EH charges a one-time fee of \$44 to obtain this letter, plus \$44 for any changes to the vendor’s list of food items. This is the lowest listed fee for Temporary Food Facilities (or more commonly known as “food booths”).
- In addition, in 2024 EH established the **Compact Mobile Food Operation (CMFO) Annual Permit**. This category is the newest category of a food facility, which is a limited-service operation as defined in the California Retail Food Code to include service from an individual, or from a pushcart, food stand, display table, pedal-driven cart, wagon, showcase, rack, or other non-motorized conveyance. CMFOs can now qualify for annual permits that allow them to vend in multiple locations similar to a Mobile Food Facility (MFF, or more commonly referred to as a food truck). For example, vendors that had operated at three of Berkeley’s farmers markets at \$546/yr per permit, now qualify for just one permit at \$704/yr. For operators, this means just two inspections per year vs. six inspections previously for a limited-risk operation. While this changes event planning and increases up-front costs, it reduces burden on both EH staff and food vendors as well.

### *Fees*

Consistent with other Bay Area Temporary Food Facility programs, EH instituted a “late submittal fee” of \$170, passed by Council in 2024. This fee is collected at application submittal with less than 14 days prior to an event with guarantee of permit approval. The purpose of this fee is to:

1. Cover overtime often required with last-minute applications;
2. Discourage vendors who use last-minute tactics to try to get applications through without proper vetting and application review (which was a common practice prior to the new fee);
3. Discourage event coordinators from waiting until the last minute (often a day before the event) to invite additional vendors; and
4. Ensure fairness to vendors who submit their application on time, only to see vendors who “sneak” into an event with no ramifications.

EH has experienced an almost 70% increase in the number of temporary food permits over the last year (272 in 2024 vs. a projected number of approximately 400 by the end of 2025). In part to help recover the costs associated with this increased workload, in late 2025, EH plans to introduce a revised fee structure. The goal is to cover operating costs and reduce dependence on the City’s General Fund.

The proposed changes will increase the fees for food and amplified sound permits, which will more accurately reflect the true costs of providing these services, including reviewing, inspecting, and staffing special events. If approved by the City Council, these changes would increase the cost of certain special events in Berkeley.

More information will be shared with the public when the proposed fee revisions are presented to the City Council for consideration.

### **Civic Arts Grants**

Some Berkeley-based festivals (which are considered special events) receive monetary support from the Civic Arts Grants Program (Community Festival category). Grants in this category are up to \$7,000 per applicant and are awarded annually. Grant-funded events must be open to the entire public and have a free component. Festival Grant applications typically open in January and are due by March, with a grant activity period of July to the following June (a fiscal year cycle). The Civic Arts Grant Program (Festival category) requires organizers to submit an itemized budget as part of the application process. For some planned events, it is too late to include the proposed special event fees, requirements, and equipment costs, outlined in this report for events supported in the current (FY26) grant cycle.

### **Conclusion**

Taken together, these changes are anticipated to result in nearly all events in Berkeley being more expensive and demanding to plan and host. In turn, and all things equal, it is also expected that the number of event requests on an annual basis will decrease given

this rise in cost. The Special Events Team is committed and works tirelessly to support the vibrancy of Berkeley's street and park events scene and does not take this outcome lightly. Staff are committed to working with all event applicants, especially those of long-standing and beloved events in the community, to understand these requirements and evaluate all options for compliance. In addition, the City has the opportunity to streamline the permitting process for events by adopting one or more Entertainment Zones, discussed in more detail in the Possible Future Action section below.

### POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

With the passage of California Senate Bill 969, which took effect January 1, 2025, the State of California, cities across the state now have the option of creating "entertainment zones," where bars and restaurants can sell alcoholic beverages for people to drink on designated public streets and sidewalks. Cities wishing to implement entertainment zones (EZs) need to adopt an ordinance to regulate the time, place, and manner of the zones. Staff from the Special Events Team recently met with the Downtown Berkeley Association about the possibility of creating one or more EZs in the downtown and in other designated areas around the city and have heard interest expressed by other members of the community as well. EZs have been reported to stimulate economic activity and foot traffic for brick-and-mortar establishments in existing areas, and some cities (such as Sacramento and San Francisco) tie the activation of EZs to special events held in the EZ footprint.

On July 29, City Council voted to create the Berkeley Nightlife Council, with the goal of supporting nighttime economic activity, cultural programming, and community safety in city commercial districts. The creation of one or more EZs by Council ordinance is one potential future action of that process. City staff look forward to participating in these forthcoming discussions to shape an effective event-based entertainment zone model that benefits event organizers and festival producers.

### FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

An increase in event fees may lead to a decrease in the annual number of event applications in Berkeley. The increase in event fees might also cover the true cost of staff time and materials spent on supporting special event programming annually.

However, by adopting an event-based entertainment zone model in Berkeley, Special Events staff believe that the creation of one or more EZs could also create efficiencies for event applicants. For example, when designating EZs in the City, City staff could create a "common application" for events, that might include a principal traffic control plan; pre-approved event layout template(s) that meet Fire Code standards; streamlined approvals for amplified sound; and priority access to existing City materials such as street closure barricades for event organizers that opt to host their event within the EZ. While prospective event organizers would not be required to host events in a pre-

existing EZ, opting to host within an EZ would allow them to benefit from these existing templates, reducing costs and burden both for event planners and City staff alike.

### BACKGROUND

On July 8, 2014, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 66,725-N.S., which is the most recent update to the Public Works Department's filing fee structure for street events/street closures.

On May 21, 2024, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 69,891-N.S., which is the most recent update to the Environmental Health Division fee schedule.

On June 24, 2025, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 71,837-N.S., which is the most recent update to the Fire Department's permit fees, inspection fees, and billing rates.

### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

Special events and the traffic they create into and out of Berkeley, as well as the traffic impacts they create when certain streets are closed and traffic is redirected, creates carbon emissions, waste generation, and other impacts, but quantifying the effects of the fee and regulatory changes on these impacts is not possible at this time.

### CONTACT PERSON

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Office of the City Manager

## INFORMATION CALENDAR

December 2, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Submitted by: Eleanor Hollander, Economic Development Manager

Subject: Economic Impact Study: *Berkeley's Creative Economy and Assessment of Pandemic Relief Investments*

### SUMMARY

This report transmits two economic analyses commissioned by the City of Berkeley and conducted by CVL Economics: (1) *Berkeley Creative Economy Economic Impact Analysis*, which examines the current state and contributions of Berkeley's arts sector, and (2) an *Assessment of Berkeley Arts & Culture Pandemic Relief and Recovery Funding*, which evaluates the City's investments in the cultural sector from 2020 to 2022 (Attachments 1 and 2).

The creative economy refers to industries whose primary purpose is cultural expression, artistic content, design, and creativity, such as visual and performing arts; architecture and design; entertainment and digital media; publishing and printing; communication design; arts education; and other creative fields. The City's \$3 million pandemic relief investment during the years of 2020-2022 was essential, as organizations reported that these funds prevented closures and layoffs during the crisis, **it is estimated that every dollar of pandemic relief funding distributed leveraged approximately \$5.64 in sustained economic activity for arts and culture in Berkeley.**

### CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Supporting Berkeley's creative economy advances our Strategic Plan goals to foster a dynamic, sustainable, locally based economy, and champion and demonstrate social and racial equity. The City of Berkeley is home to over 150 active arts and culture *nonprofits* offering diverse theater, music, festivals, dance, visual arts, and more. These nonprofits vary significantly in size, educational offerings, and creative disciplines, and include nationally recognized theaters, music venues, galleries, dance studios, and maker spaces. The City of Berkeley is also home to a wide range of independent artists and artisans operating on smaller scales, producing fine arts and crafts. Berkeley has long recognized the importance of arts and culture to the economic health, vitality, and diversity of the local economy and commercial districts, as local arts and cultural organizations generate revenue, create jobs, and improve quality of life, which in turn generates business revenue and tourism.

From 2020 to 2024, Berkeley's cultural sector was severely impacted by the pandemic. The creative economy, which grew 16% from 2014 to 2018 (outpacing San Francisco and Oakland), contracted sharply during the pandemic. In response to the pandemic, the City of Berkeley provided more than \$3 million in relief and recovery grants for arts organizations, festivals, and artists. These funds helped prevent permanent venue closures, sustained creative practices, and ultimately helped Berkeley's cultural sector weather the acute impacts of the pandemic. However, of the 88 arts organizations that received relief funding from the City of Berkeley between 2020 and 2022, 17 have since closed, including two major institutions with budgets over \$3 million.

Despite these losses, the arts sector remains important to Berkeley's economic vitality and civic identity today. **Berkeley's creative economy accounts for 7.6% of total city employment and when multiplier effects are included, is much higher than Oakland (4.2%), San Jose (2.5%), and the statewide average (4.8%).** The sector's structure reflects both its social benefit orientation and economic vulnerability: about 30% of Berkeley's 650 creative economy businesses are nonprofits (compared to 11% across all industries), and nearly 70% of the creative workforce is self-employed or gig workers.

## BACKGROUND

In December 2024, Council authorized a contract with CVL Economics in an amount not to exceed \$119,300 for analysis of pandemic arts recovery investments and the economic impact of the arts in Berkeley (Resolution No. 71,612-N.S.). CVL Economics was selected through a competitive Request for Proposals process, and the contract was funded entirely with a portion of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that Council had designated for the arts in 2021.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic's economic impacts on the arts sector, the City of Berkeley made two substantial funding allocations totaling \$3 million dollars:

1. **Arts Continuity Grants** (April 2020): The City allocated \$1 million from the catastrophic reserve fund to create the *Arts Continuity Grant Program*, awarding emergency relief grants to arts organizations whose revenues were significantly impacted by the pandemic.
2. **Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants** (December 2021-February 2022): Council allocated \$2 million in ARPA dollars to support Berkeley's arts sector recovery, with the *Berkeley Arts Recovery Grant Program (BARG)* distributing grants to organizations, festivals, and individual artists to help them sustainably recover from negative economic impacts of the pandemic.

### *Economic Impact Study Findings*

In 2025, CVL Economics conducted a comprehensive economic impact analysis of Berkeley's creative economy, updating the 2017 *Economic Impact Report* that was developed in conjunction with the *Arts and Culture Plan Update 2018-2027*. The current

study examines the economic impact of Berkeley's "creative economy" comprising eight creative subsectors: Visual & Performing Arts (56% of creative jobs), Architecture & Design (11%), Entertainment & Digital Media (10%), Publishing & Printing (7%), Communication Design (6%), Post-Secondary Arts Education (5%), Creative Goods & Decorative Arts (4%), and Fashion (2%).

Key findings include:

- **Direct employment:** Berkeley's creative economy directly employs 8,186 workers, accounting for 7.3% of its total workforce of 111,640 jobs
- **Visitor spending:** A sample of 37 Berkeley arts organizations attracting 1.4 million annual visitors generates an estimated \$56 million in ancillary spending at local businesses (\$30 million at food and drink establishments, \$7.6 million at retail, \$7.2 million on transportation, \$3.5 million on lodging)

The study also shows that Berkeley's creative economy declined year-over-year since 2020, despite pre-pandemic growth. Berkeley's arts sector is especially vulnerable due to its high concentration of Visual & Performing Arts organizations and gig workers and hosting a larger share of nonprofits than other industries in Berkeley.

#### *Pandemic Relief Assessment Findings*

Between 2020 and 2022, the City of Berkeley awarded over \$3 million in pandemic relief and recovery grants through five distinct programs: two rounds for organizations (Arts Continuity Grants 2020: \$954,543 to 63 organizations; Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants (BARG) 2022: \$1,532,345 to 74 organizations) and three rounds for artists (East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund 2020: \$64,500 to 47 Berkeley artists; Berkeley Art Works Projects 2021: \$182,339 to 32 artists; BARG for Artists 2022: \$276,250 to 114 artists).

Key findings include:

- **Critical funding:** Nearly 90% of BARG and 83% of Arts Continuity Grant recipients rated Berkeley pandemic relief and recovery grants as either "very helpful" or "essential."
- **Critical timing:** Arts Continuity Grants served as an immediate lifeline in April 2020, often arriving before federal, state, or county programs, helping organizations avoid layoffs (85%) and closures (84%) and BARG offered stabilization helping organizations with longer-term planning and adaptation with (48%) crediting the funds with helping them stabilize and make strategic changes.
- **Equity outcomes:** These grants not only addressed economic precarity, but also advanced racial and cultural equity by centering investments in artists and organizations that have been historically excluded from opportunities and are working with communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

- **Economic preservation:** Every \$1 of pandemic relief leveraged at least \$5.64 in sustained arts and culture economic activity locally, helping safeguard local economic activity that otherwise would have been lost.

In 2025, surviving arts organizations in Berkeley continue to face challenges five years after the start of the pandemic. Median revenue is 9% below pre-pandemic levels and larger institutions report revenues that are 33% below 2019 benchmarks. Financial sustainability, rising costs, and competition for limited funding remain top concerns of Berkeley's arts organizations. Of the 17 arts organizations that closed between 2020 and 2025, both small and large budget organizations were affected, indicating no segment was fully insulated from pandemic impacts. Currently, Berkeley's arts and culture sector faces higher costs and reduced audiences, with some nonprofits operating at a loss. Ongoing challenges include inflation, decreased subscription sales, and continued audience reluctance to return to venues due to COVID-19 concerns.

#### *Additional City Support for Art*

Beyond Civic Arts Grants, the City provides substantial investment in the arts through its Public Art Program, funded mainly through "Percent for Art" or Public Art ordinances that dedicate portions of capital project budgets and in-lieu fees from private developers to public art in Berkeley. Annual expenditures on public art projects funded in this manner have ranged from \$276,656 to \$923,475 per year over the past five years. Because these allocations are tied to specific artworks and capital improvements rather than flexible operating support, they are not included in the return on investment analyses presented in Attachments 1 and 2 of this report.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

No environmental or climate impacts were identified in these studies.

#### POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

These analyses offer evidence to inform future policy decisions regarding but not limited to:

- **Sustained investment:** Recognizing the creative economy as essential economic sector requiring ongoing support, not just emergency intervention
- **Structural vulnerability mitigation:** Addressing affordability challenges, gig workforce precarity, and declining audiences
- **Program Allocations:** Leveraging past demonstrated return on investment to inform resource allocation decisions in the future

The results of these studies will guide Berkeley's future investments and program design for artistic and cultural support in the years to come.

#### FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

This is an informational report with no immediate fiscal impact. Future policy actions based on these studies will likely require further detailed fiscal analysis.

CONTACT PERSON

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Attachments:

1. *Berkeley Creative Economy Economic Impact Analysis* (CVL Economics, 2025)
2. *Assessment of Berkeley Arts & Culture Pandemic Relief and Recovery Funding* (CVL Economics, 2025)

# Berkeley Creative Economy Economic Impact Analysis

DECEMBER 2025





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# KEY FINDINGS

The City of Berkeley's creative economy represents a vital economic force that extends far beyond traditional notions of arts and culture. The creative economy consists of industries whose primary purpose is to produce or enable cultural expression, artistic content, design, and other creative goods and services.

It spans across eight distinct subsectors: Visual & Performing Arts, Architecture & Design, Entertainment & Digital Media, Publishing & Printing, Communication Design, Post-Secondary Arts Education, Creative Goods & Decorative Arts, and Fashion. Despite facing significant pandemic-related challenges, these subsectors continue to generate substantial economic activity, support thousands of jobs, and contribute meaningfully to Berkeley's fiscal health. This analysis examines how the sector has weathered the pandemic's disruptions and quantifies its current economic contributions. The findings summarized below provide essential data for policymakers, arts organizations, and community stakeholders working to chart a sustainable path forward for the arts and culture sector in Berkeley.

## BUSINESS COUNTS

**As of 2025, there are approximately 650 creative economy businesses in Berkeley (out of 12,800 total businesses), about 30% of which are nonprofit organizations.**

There are 193 creative economy nonprofit organizations in the City of Berkeley. This share is notably high compared to the share of nonprofits across all industries (11%) in the city.

## EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

**In 2024, Berkeley's creative economy directly employed 8,186 workers, accounting for 7.3% of its total workforce of 111,640 jobs.<sup>1</sup>**

Visual & Performing Arts is by far the largest subsector, accounting for more than half of all jobs (4,567 jobs, or 55.8% of the creative economy workforce). Other significant subsectors include Architecture & Design (908 jobs; 11.1%), Entertainment & Digital Media (791 jobs; 9.7%), and Publishing & Printing (562 jobs; 6.9%). Communication Design (495 jobs; 6.0%), Post-Secondary Arts Education (377 jobs; 4.6%), Creative Goods & Decorative Arts (325 jobs; 4.0%), and Fashion (161 jobs; 2.0%), comprise smaller shares but are still notable.

**Nearly 70% of Berkeley's 8,186 creative economy workers are self-employed or gig-based, underscoring the sector's reliance on non-traditional work arrangements.**

While project-based creative work fosters innovation and independence, it also often comes with irregular income and limited protections. This pattern is most pronounced in the Visual & Performing Arts subsector, where 84% of jobs are self-employed or gig-based, while fields like Architecture & Design and Entertainment & Digital Media lean more on salaried roles with more dependable hours and predictable schedules.

**Berkeley's creative economy employment surged in the years before the pandemic, but current employment levels remain 17% below the 2018 peak. Berkeley's creative economy employment has declined year after year, while other neighboring cities have regained some ground.**

After peaking with 9,850 creative economy jobs in 2018, Berkeley's 2024 total of 8,186 jobs has fallen back to roughly its 2013 level of 8,160 jobs.

Between 2014 and 2018, Berkeley's creative economy employment grew 16%, outpacing industry growth in San Francisco (12%), San Jose (10%), and Oakland (4%). That momentum, however, was abruptly cut short in early 2020. While all Bay Area creative economies contracted with the onset of the pandemic, Berkeley's downturn has proven far more persistent. San Francisco and San Jose have since regained some of their losses, but Berkeley's creative economy employment has continued to decline through 2024.

<sup>1</sup> Job count includes salaried (full- and part-time), self-employed, and gig workers. Within this, Berkeley's salaried workforce accounted for 2,574 jobs in the creative economy and 68,126 jobs across the overall economy in 2024.

**Berkeley's creative economy decline also sits in contrast to the city's overall economy, which, on average, has mostly recovered from the pandemic.**

The city's overall economy sits about 3% above its 2019 employment level. By contrast, the city's creative economy remains 13% below its pre-pandemic baseline.

**This divergence reflects the unique composition of Berkeley's creative economy, which comprises a relatively high concentration of Visual & Performing Arts employment, a sector that relies heavily on live, in-person activity, gig and contract work, and nonprofit structures—factors that made it more vulnerable to prolonged disruption.**

Berkeley's creative sector is heavily concentrated in Visual & Performing Arts (56%), reflecting a reliance on live, in-person activity and gig or contract work within a nonprofit-heavy structure. By contrast, San Francisco leans more toward Entertainment & Digital Media (38%), driven by streaming, software publishing, and broadcasting.

**Still, today, Berkeley maintains a greater share of creative economy employment relative to its total workforce than Oakland, San Jose, and California overall, and is only slightly below San Francisco.**

Berkeley's 7.3% creative economy share of its total workforce is a higher concentration than in Oakland (4.2%), San Jose (2.5%), and California overall (4.8%), but trails San Francisco (7.6%).

## THE ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT OF BERKELEY'S CREATIVE ECONOMY

**Berkeley's creative economy is an essential part of the city's economy.**

Even in a weakened state, Berkeley's creative economy remains a critical driver of the City's economic activity. Its impact ripples throughout the economy as arts organizations purchase goods and services, and workers spend their earnings locally, sustaining activity across many industries (**multiplier effect**). Some of this spending "leaks" beyond city borders to suppliers and markets in other parts of the East Bay (Alameda and Contra Costa Counties), where the total impact grows even larger (**regional spillover effect**). Together, these multiplier and spillover effects underscore the creative sector's role as both a local driver and a regional economic force.

**In 2024, including multiplier effects in other industries, Berkeley's creative economy generated a total impact of 8,437 jobs (7.6% of total jobs), \$537.5 million in labor income (5.7% of total labor income), and \$1.0 billion in contributions to city gross regional product (value added), or approximately 7.9% of the total citywide.**

In other words, each creative job in Berkeley generated about \$66,000 in labor income, and \$125,000 in value added (contributions to Berkeley's gross regional product) citywide.

An additional 5,605 jobs were supported by Berkeley's creative economy in other parts of the East Bay beyond city limits. This represents the spillover effect of Berkeley's creative economy—spending that originates in Berkeley but flows outward to suppliers, contractors, and consumer markets elsewhere in the region.

**In 2024, every \$1 of Civic Arts Grant funding to Berkeley’s organizations, festivals, and individual artists catalyzed \$197 in total economic activity across the city.**

In FY2024, the City of Berkeley awarded \$698,782 to 97 Berkeley arts and culture organizations, festivals, and individuals. This support underpinned the operations of 86 organizations and festivals (collectively generating over \$130 million in operating revenue), as well as 11 artists through arts works projects.

Overall, the City’s investments helped drive about 7.5% of the total economic activity (\$1.8 billion) generated by Berkeley’s creative economy.

**Based on data from 37 Berkeley arts and culture nonprofit organizations, visitors to these institutions generate approximately \$56 million in additional local spending each year across other sectors of the city’s economy.**

These 37 arts and culture organizations collectively attract about 1.4 million attendees annually, whose event-related spending extends well beyond tickets to these institutions—including nearly \$30 million at nearby food and drink establishments, \$7.6 million at retail stores, \$7.2 million on local transportation, and \$3.5 million on lodging.

**In 2024, Berkeley’s creative economy had a hand in generating \$10.7 million in tax revenues, representing 3.9% of the City’s tax base.**

In FY2024, Berkeley’s creative economy, including the impact of multiplier effects, contributed \$4.6 million in property taxes, \$2.9 million in sales taxes, and \$3.2 million in various other taxes to the City.



# INTRODUCTION

Berkeley's creative economy is central to local prosperity, but it also stands at a critical juncture. While creative industries nationwide continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and growth, Berkeley's own arts and culture sector faces significant headwinds that threaten its role as both an economic driver and a cornerstone of the city's cultural identity.

The COVID-19 pandemic took a significant toll on Berkeley's creative economy, and its recovery has diverged from the growth patterns that once positioned Berkeley as a regional creative economy leader. Understanding both the current contributions and the emerging challenges facing this sector is essential for arts administrators, policymakers, arts organizations, and community stakeholders working to chart a sustainable path forward.





## DEFINING THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

The creative economy refers to the industries whose primary purpose is to produce or enable cultural expression, artistic content, design, and other creative goods and services. The creative economy encompasses a wide range of industries that fall within eight subsectors where cultural expression, design, and creative innovation are central to economic value. As defined in Figure 1, these subsectors are Visual & Performing Arts, Architecture & Design, Entertainment & Digital Media, Publishing & Printing, Communication Design, Post-Secondary Arts Education, Creative Goods & Decorative Arts, and Fashion.<sup>2</sup>

FIGURE 1: CREATIVE ECONOMY SUBSECTORS

| SUBSECTOR                        | DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS         | Entities engaged in services such as dance and theater companies, art dealers, museums, and activities involving independent artists, writers, and performers.   |
| ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN            | Entities providing architectural, drafting, interior design, industrial design, and landscape design services.                                                   |
| ENTERTAINMENT & DIGITAL MEDIA    | Entities engaged in motion picture and video production, post-production services, sound recording studios, radio broadcasting, and digital streaming platforms. |
| PUBLISHING & PRINTING            | Entities producing commercial printing, book printing, and publishing of books, periodicals, newspapers, directories, and mailing lists.                         |
| COMMUNICATION DESIGN             | Entities engaged in graphic design, advertising agencies, photography studios, and commercial photography services.                                              |
| POST-SECONDARY ARTS EDUCATION    | Entities providing arts instruction in dance, drama, music, and visual arts (excluding institutions that grant diplomas or degrees).                             |
| CREATIVE GOODS & DECORATIVE ARTS | Entities producing ceramics, household furniture, rugs, decorative objects, toys, and games.                                                                     |
| FASHION                          | Entities engaged in textile and apparel manufacturing, jewelry and silverware production, and related fashion goods and services.                                |

Source: CVL Economics.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A.1 for detailed list of industry classification codes.



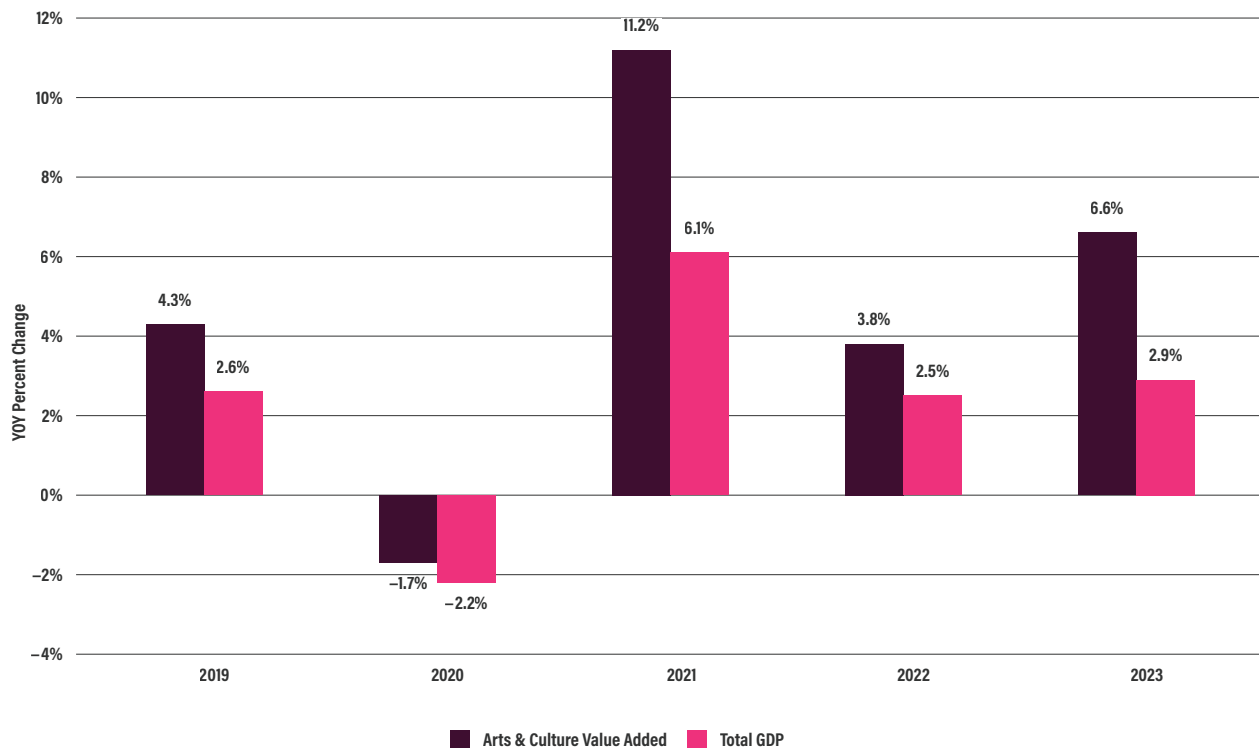
## ECONOMIC CONTEXT: THE NATIONAL AND STATE PICTURE OF THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

The creative economy has emerged as one of the most dynamic and resilient sectors in the U.S. economy, consistently demonstrating its capacity to drive growth and innovation. Far from being peripheral to economic development, the creative industries have proven themselves to be fundamental engines of prosperity, generating substantial employment, income, and economic output across communities nationwide—often outpacing the broader economy.

In fact, nationwide growth of real value added (contribution to gross domestic product) generated by the Arts & Culture sector<sup>3</sup> has consistently outperformed that of the overall U.S. economy each year since 2019 (Figure 2). In 2019, the sector grew 4.3% compared to the year prior, well ahead of the 2.6% increase in total U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). Even at the onset of the pandemic in 2020, nationwide Arts & Culture value added declined by just 1.7%, less than the overall economy's 2.2% contraction. The rebound that followed was especially striking: in 2021, Arts & Culture surged by 11.2%, nearly double the growth rate of total GDP. Growth continued in subsequent years, expanding by 3.8% in 2022 and 6.6% in 2023, again outpacing the national economy.

<sup>3</sup> "Arts & Culture" as defined by the U.S. Bureau Economic Analysis.

**FIGURE 2: NATIONWIDE YEAR-OVER-YEAR PERCENT CHANGE IN ARTS & CULTURE CONTRIBUTION TO GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (REAL VALUE ADDED) VS. TOTAL U.S. GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP)**

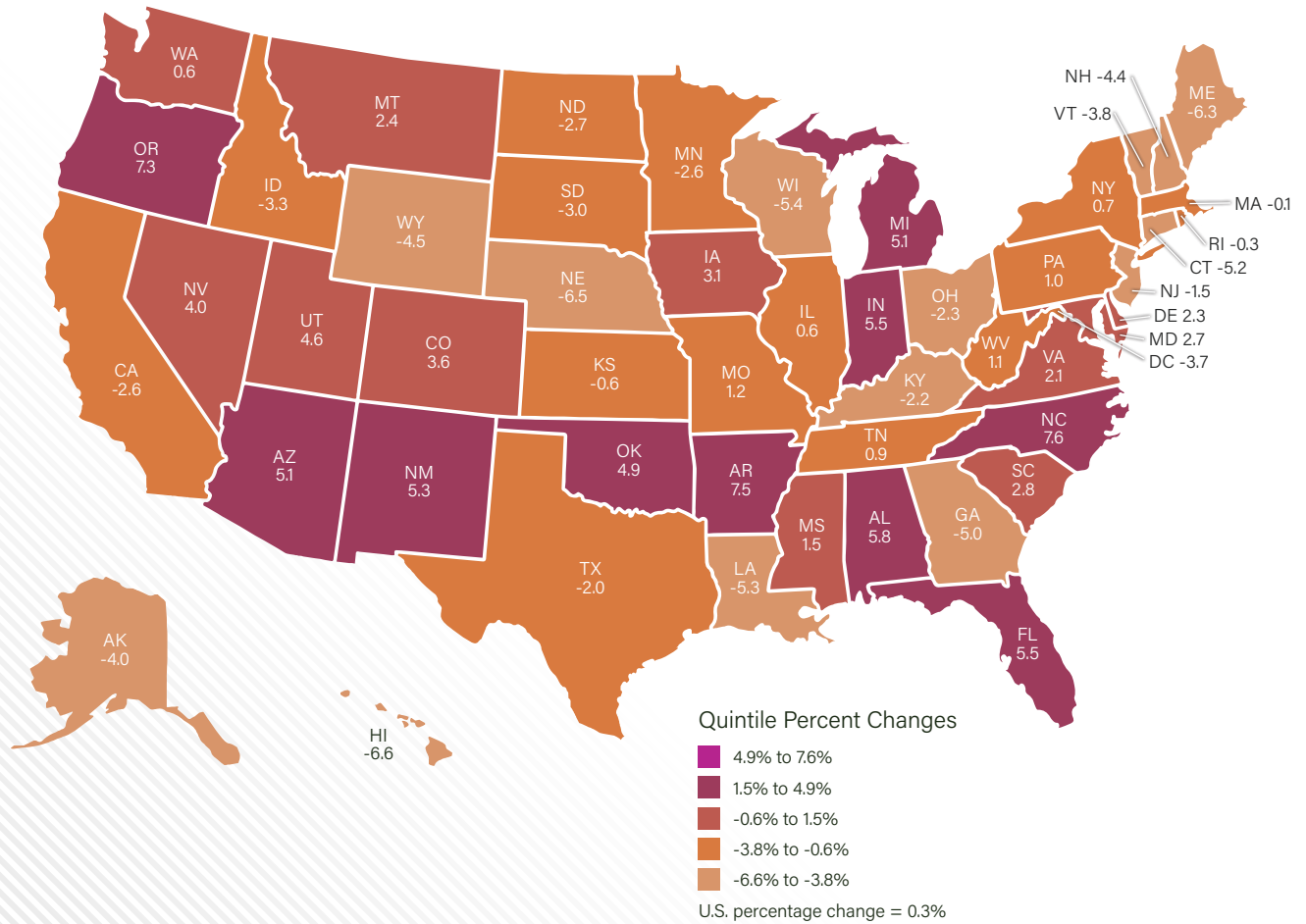


Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis Arts and Culture Satellite Account, CVL Economics.

While the national picture underscores the strength of the overall Arts & Culture sector, only some states are reaping the benefits—and California is not one. Many states posted strong gains in arts and cultural employment between 2022 and 2023 (Figure 3). North Carolina (+7.6%), Oregon (+7.3%), Florida (+5.5%), and New Mexico (+5.3%) were among the top performers, with other states like Arizona, Nevada, and Colorado showing decent growth. Washington and New York experienced minimal, but still positive growth in Arts & Culture employment.

California, by contrast, saw a 2.6% decline in Arts & Culture employment. This relative decline is striking for a state often regarded as a global hub for creativity and culture, and it signals a growing disconnect between California's reputation and its current trajectory. Historically, the arts and creative industries have been central to California's rise as a global economic powerhouse—anchored by industries like film, music, design, theatre, and digital media that helped define the state's economic strength. Yet today, the very sector that once symbolized California's competitive edge faces mounting challenges: high costs of living and doing business, policy barriers, outmigration of talent, and increasing incentives (e.g., tax breaks) offered by other jurisdictions.

FIGURE 3: PERCENT CHANGE IN ARTS & CULTURE EMPLOYMENT BY STATE | 2022-2023



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

This broader statewide decline provides an important backdrop for understanding Berkeley’s own creative economy. As California struggles with high costs, policy hurdles, and growing competition from other states, local communities are feeling these pressures acutely—and Berkeley is no exception.

# CREATIVE ECONOMY LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Berkeley's creative economy is both broad in scope and deeply embedded in the city's identity. As of September 2025, the City of Berkeley recorded 650 active business licenses in the creative sector industries, accounting for about 5% of all active licenses (12,783) in the city.<sup>4 5</sup> These counts include private and nonprofit corporations, sole-ownerships, partnerships, and cooperatives.

The nonprofit sector plays a particularly prominent role in Berkeley's creative economy compared to other industries. Analysis of Internal Revenue Service tax-exempt filings alongside local business license data shows that creative fields have a significantly higher share of nonprofit organizations than the citywide average across all industries (Figure 4). In total, nonprofits account for roughly 30% of Berkeley's creative economy organizations, compared to 11% of all businesses citywide.<sup>6</sup> **This structure has important implications: while it reflects the strong civic and cultural mission of Berkeley's creative sector, it also underscores the sector's reliance on contributed income, philanthropy, and public funding.**

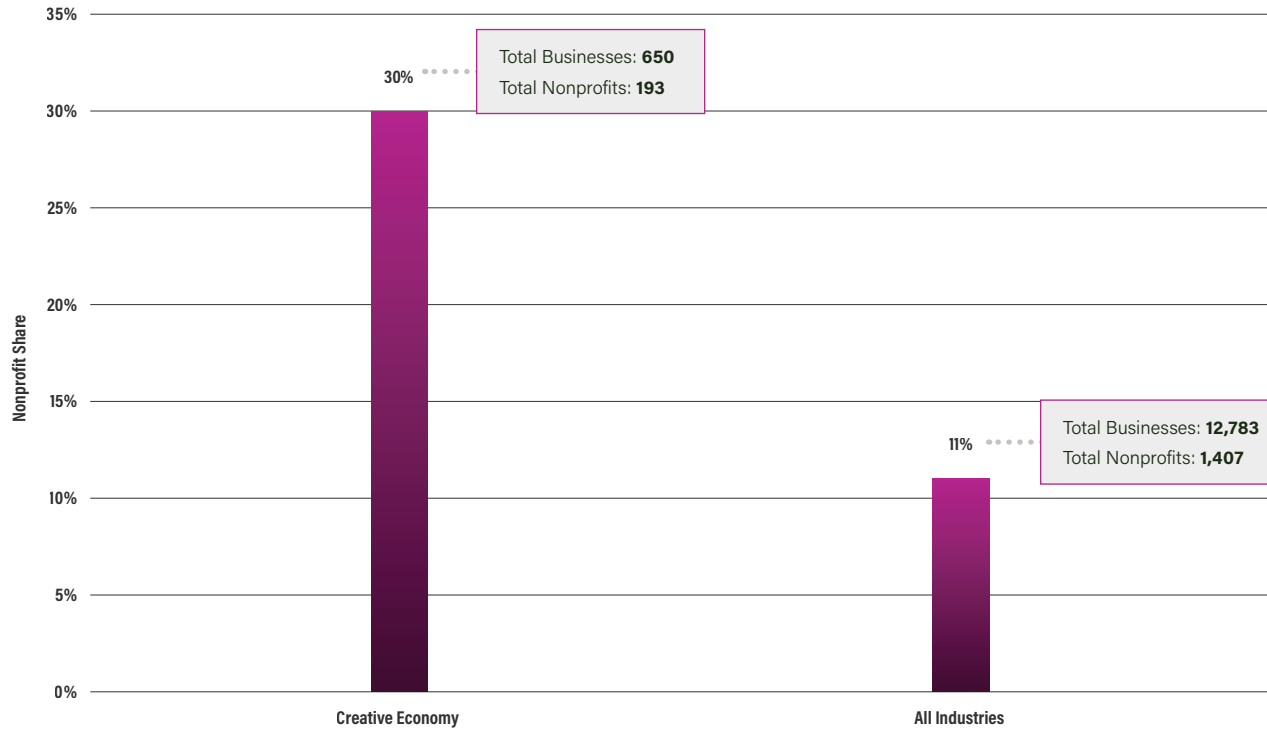
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4 City of Berkeley. *Business Licenses*. Accessed September 2025. [https://data.cityofberkeley.info/Business/Business-Licenses/rwnf-bu3w/about\\_data](https://data.cityofberkeley.info/Business/Business-Licenses/rwnf-bu3w/about_data).

5 See Appendix A.2 for further details on business count methodology.

6 See Appendix A.2 for further details on business count methodology.

FIGURE 4: SHARE OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN BERKELEY’S CREATIVE ECONOMY VS. ALL INDUSTRIES | 2025



Source: City of Berkeley Active Business License Data, Internal Revenue Service, CVL Economics.

## CREATIVE ECONOMY EMPLOYMENT

In 2024, Berkeley’s creative economy employed 8,186 jobs (Figure 5). Within the creative workforce, Visual & Performing Arts is by far the largest subsector, accounting for more than half of all jobs (55.8%). Other significant subsectors include Architecture & Design (11.1%), Entertainment & Digital Media (9.7%), and Publishing & Printing (6.9%). Smaller subsectors include Communication Design (6.0%), Post-Secondary Arts Education (4.6%), Creative Goods & Decorative Arts (4.0%), and Fashion (2.0%). Together, these fields form a dynamic ecosystem that extends well beyond traditional arts organizations—supporting innovation, attracting talent, and fueling the city’s broader economic vibrancy.

### Forms of Employment

The composition of Berkeley’s creative workforce reflects not only the city’s sectoral diversity but also the different ways people participate in creative work. As Figure 5 shows, jobs in the creative economy are distributed across three primary categories: salaried (W-2 employees), self-employed workers, and gig-based roles, as defined below.

- **Salaried Employment (W-2):** Full-time and part-time jobs on payroll who receive a W-2 form, including both those covered by unemployment insurance (UI) programs (captured in the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, or QCEW) and those not covered by UI programs (non-QCEW, such as certain small nonprofits, religious organizations, and others).

Examples: *a full-time museum administrator, or a part-time stage manager employed by a theater.*

- **Self-Employed:** Individuals who work for themselves and are not on a payroll. This category is measured using IRS tax filings and Bureau of Economic Analysis proprietorship data and includes sole proprietors, freelancers, and independent contractors who typically file Schedule C income.

Examples: *a freelance graphic designer running their own studio, or an independent architect who takes on client projects as their main source of income.*

- **Gig Employment:** A separate measure drawing from additional IRS non-employer filings that fall outside the standard self-employment category. This often includes freelancers, independent contractors, and sole proprietors who take on multiple short-term or project-based jobs. This category captures more contingent or supplemental work activity, often part-time or secondary. Including gig work is essential to understanding Berkeley's creative economy, where it represents a significant share of the arts and culture workforce.

Examples: *an artist selling work occasionally on Etsy while holding another job, or a musician performing in one-off gigs or short-term productions while holding another source of employment.*

Each type of work carries its own opportunities and challenges, and together they form the backbone of Berkeley's cultural and creative ecosystem. In Berkeley, this dynamic is particularly visible in the Visual & Performing Arts subsector, where over 84% of jobs are self-employed or gig-based. By contrast, fields like Architecture & Design or Entertainment & Digital Media lean more heavily on salaried employment, providing relatively greater stability. Sectors such as Publishing & Printing, Communication Design, and Post-Secondary Arts Education fall in between, with a mix of W-2, self-employed, and gig roles that together illustrate the hybrid nature of creative work.

**FIGURE 5: CREATIVE ECONOMY SUBSECTOR EMPLOYMENT COUNT BY WORKER TYPE IN BERKELEY | 2024**

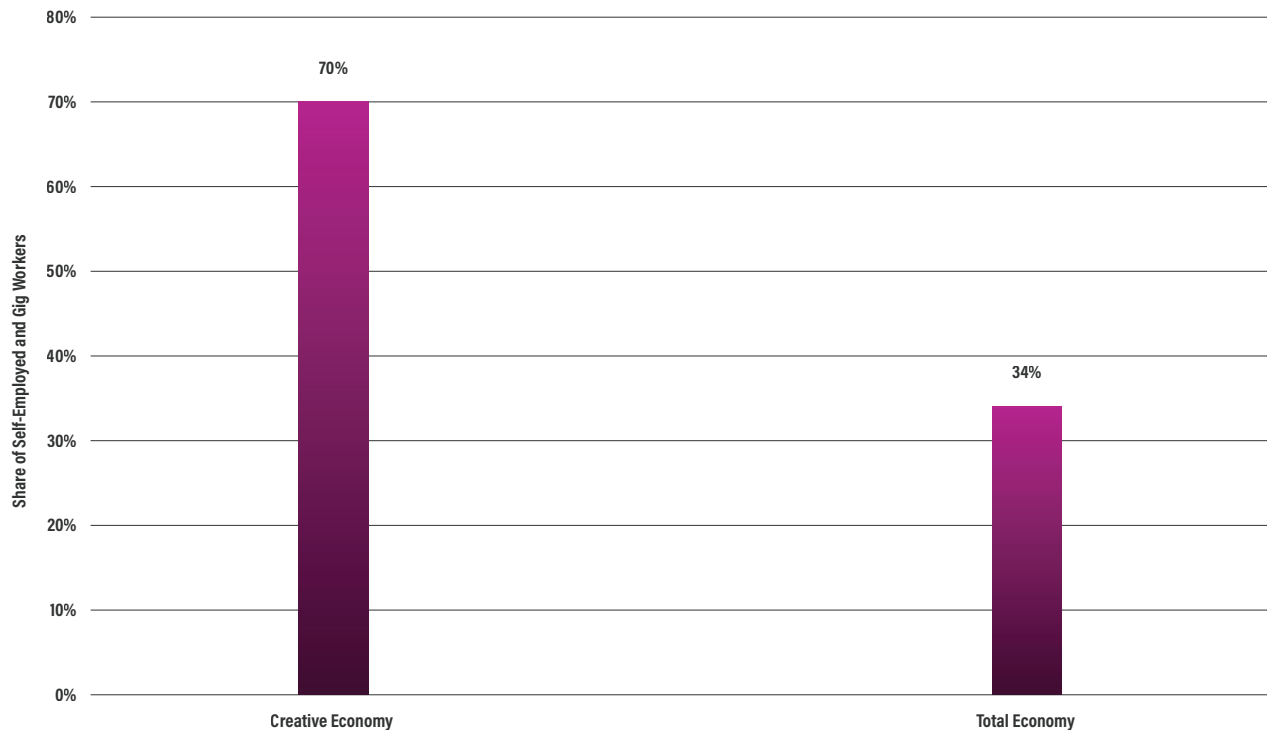
| CREATIVE ECONOMY SUBSECTOR       | SALARIED (W-2) | SELF-EMPLOYED | GIG          | TOTAL        | SHARE OF CREATIVE ECONOMY TOTAL |
|----------------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Visual & Performing Arts         | 718            | 827           | 3,022        | <b>4,567</b> | <b>55.8%</b>                    |
| Architecture & Design            | 534            | 138           | 236          | <b>908</b>   | <b>11.1%</b>                    |
| Entertainment & Digital Media    | 478            | 159           | 154          | <b>791</b>   | <b>9.7%</b>                     |
| Printing & Publishing            | 193            | 43            | 326          | <b>562</b>   | <b>6.9%</b>                     |
| Communication Design             | 105            | 101           | 289          | <b>495</b>   | <b>6.0%</b>                     |
| Post-Secondary Arts Education    | 174            | 74            | 130          | <b>377</b>   | <b>4.6%</b>                     |
| Creative Goods & Decorative Arts | 283            | 26            | 16           | <b>325</b>   | <b>4.0%</b>                     |
| Fashion                          | 89             | 23            | 49           | <b>161</b>   | <b>2.0%</b>                     |
| <b>Total Creative Economy</b>    | <b>2,574</b>   | <b>1,391</b>  | <b>4,222</b> | <b>8,186</b> | -                               |

Note: Employment counts reflect the number of unique jobs and not individuals. In that sense, one individual can hold multiple jobs and therefore be counted more than once. This dynamic is especially prevalent in the "Gig" work category, where organizational models in industries like Visual & Performing Arts rely heavily on short-term, project-based, or seasonal hiring, and artists and performers often piece together income through multiple jobs.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

Unlike many other industries where traditional W-2 employment (salaried, with benefits) dominates, the creative economy is notable for its reliance on non-traditional work arrangements. Artists and creative workers are far more likely than the general workforce to be self-employed or gig-based (Figure 6). In Berkeley, nearly 70% of creative economy workers are self-employed or gig workers compared to 34% across the total economy. This reflects both the flexibility and precarity of the sector: while project-based and freelance work can create room for innovation and independence, it also often comes with irregular income, limited benefits, and less access to worker protections.

**FIGURE 6: SHARE OF SELF-EMPLOYED AND GIG EMPLOYMENT FOR CREATIVE ECONOMY AND ALL INDUSTRIES IN BERKELEY | 2024**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

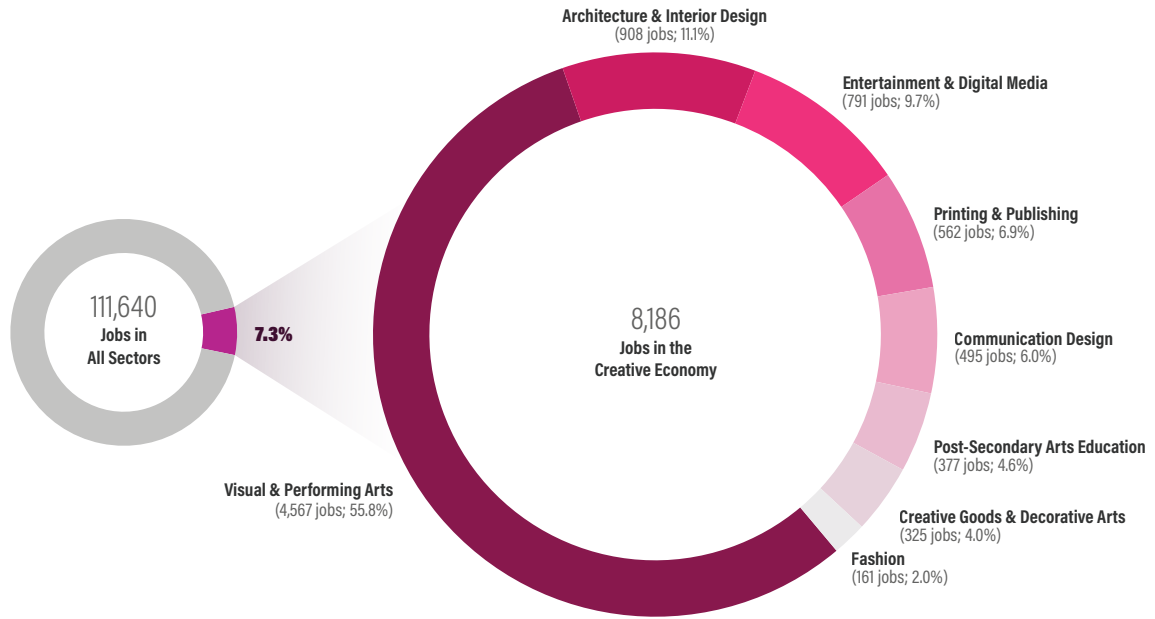
### Berkeley's Creative Economy in the City's Broader Economic Landscape

Berkeley's creative economy is a critical part of the city's economic landscape, accounting for a significant share of total employment. While creative economy businesses accounted for 5% of all enterprises, they supported 7.3% of all employment citywide in 2024—8,186 out of the 111,640 total jobs across industries (Figure 7).<sup>7</sup>

Creative economy employment today has been declining year over year since the pandemic, following a period of strong growth in the years prior. From 2010 to 2018, Berkeley's creative sector expanded steadily, adding more than 2,300 jobs and peaking at nearly 9,850 positions (Figure 8). That momentum ended abruptly in 2020, when the pandemic caused steep job losses that erased much of the previous decade's gains. While employment has stabilized somewhat in recent years, 2024 levels remain just over 8,100 jobs—roughly on par with 2013.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix A.3 for detailed documentation of employment counts.

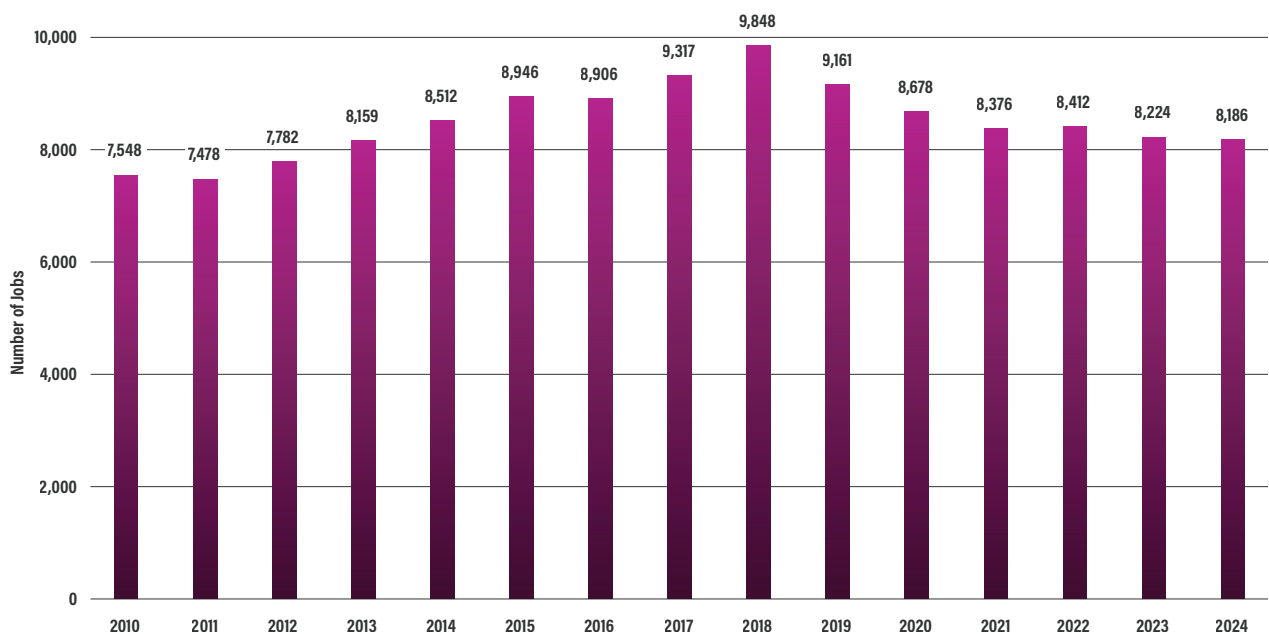
FIGURE 7: COMPOSITION OF CREATIVE SECTOR WORKFORCE IN BERKELEY | 2024



Note: Includes salaried, self-employed, and gig jobs in the creative economy and across all sectors. Employment counts reflect the number of unique jobs and not individuals. In that sense, one individual can hold multiple jobs and therefore be counted more than once. Berkeley salaried (QCEW) jobs total 2,574 in the creative economy and 68,126 in the overall economy.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

FIGURE 8: CREATIVE ECONOMY EMPLOYMENT IN BERKELEY | 2010-2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

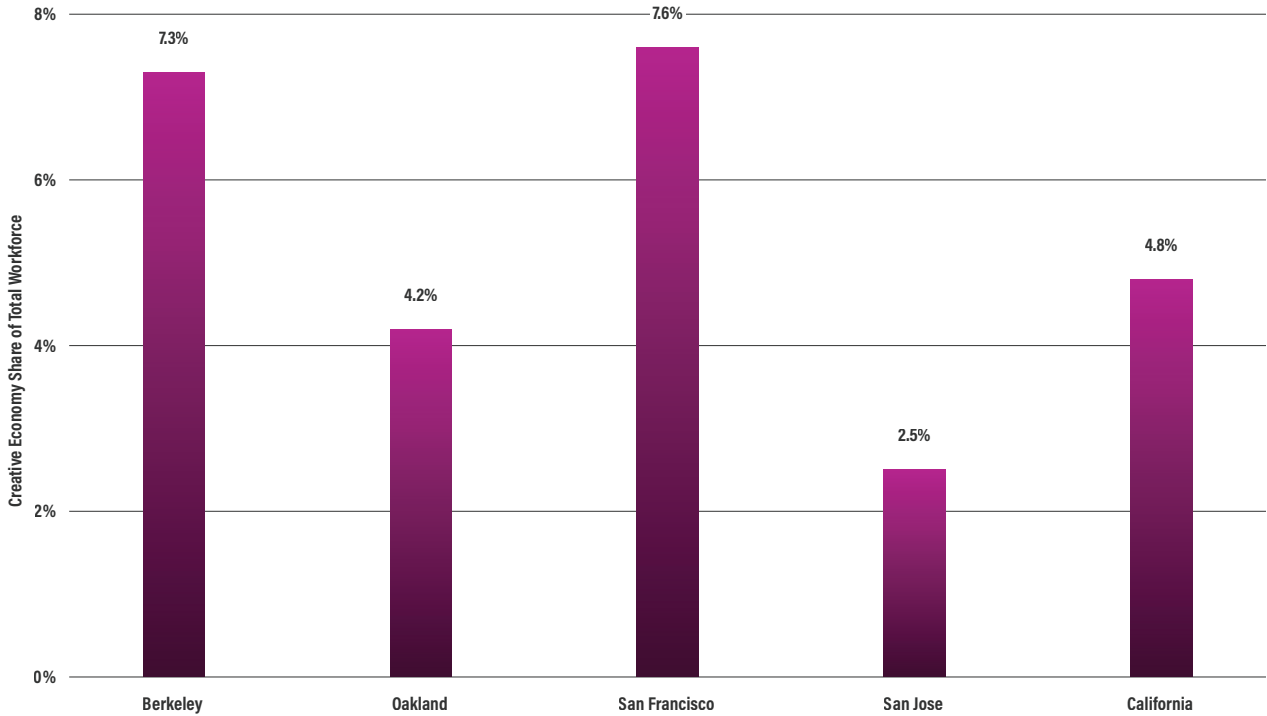


## REGIONAL COMPARISONS

When compared to neighboring regions in the San Francisco Bay Area and the state as a whole, Berkeley's creative economy stands out. In 2024, it accounted for 7.3% of the city's total workforce—a larger share than in Oakland, San Jose, and California overall, though slightly trailing San Francisco (Figure 9).

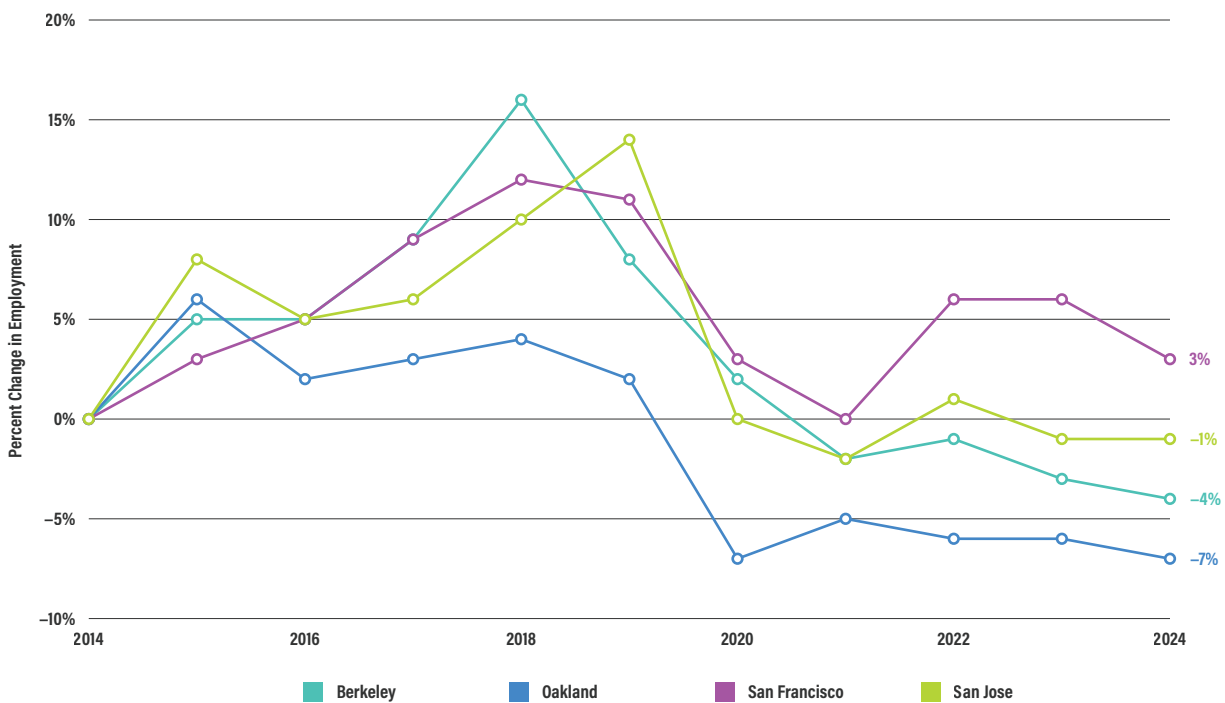
In the years leading up to the pandemic, Berkeley's creative economy was outperforming even San Francisco's sector in terms of job growth. Between 2014 and 2018, creative employment in Berkeley expanded 16%, outpacing industry growth in neighboring cities (Figure 10). Although all regional creative economies experienced steep declines with the onset of the pandemic in 2020, Berkeley's recovery has especially lagged behind. San Francisco and San Jose have seen partial rebounds, regaining some of their lost ground, but Berkeley's creative economy has remained flat or slightly negative through 2024.

FIGURE 9: CREATIVE ECONOMY EMPLOYMENT AS A SHARE OF TOTAL WORKFORCE BY REGION AND STATE | 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

FIGURE 10: COMPARATIVE CREATIVE ECONOMY REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT GROWTH RATE | 2014-2024



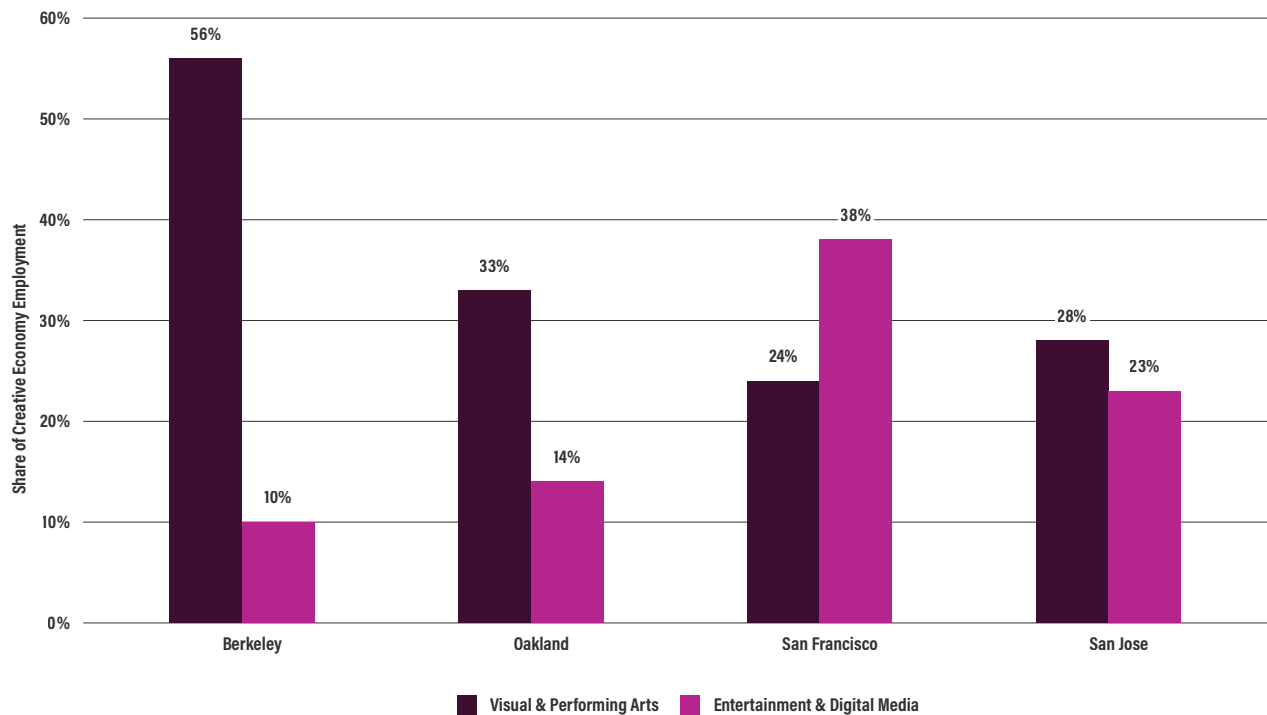
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

The result is a sector that was once leading the region in growth but now sits well below its pre-pandemic trajectory, underscoring the depth of the disruption and the ongoing challenges to full recovery.

**One factor behind Berkeley's slower recovery is the composition of its creative economy relative to other cities. More than half of Berkeley's creative sector jobs are concentrated in Visual & Performing Arts (56%), making the city far more dependent on live, in-person activity than its regional peers** (Figure 11).

San Francisco, by contrast, has a much larger share in Entertainment & Digital Media (38%), led by industries such as media streaming, software publishing (e.g., video game development), and broadcasting. These segments not only proved more resilient during shutdowns but in many cases expanded as digital content consumption surged. San Jose and Oakland fall between these two poles, with stronger mixes across both the Performing Arts and Digital Media industries.

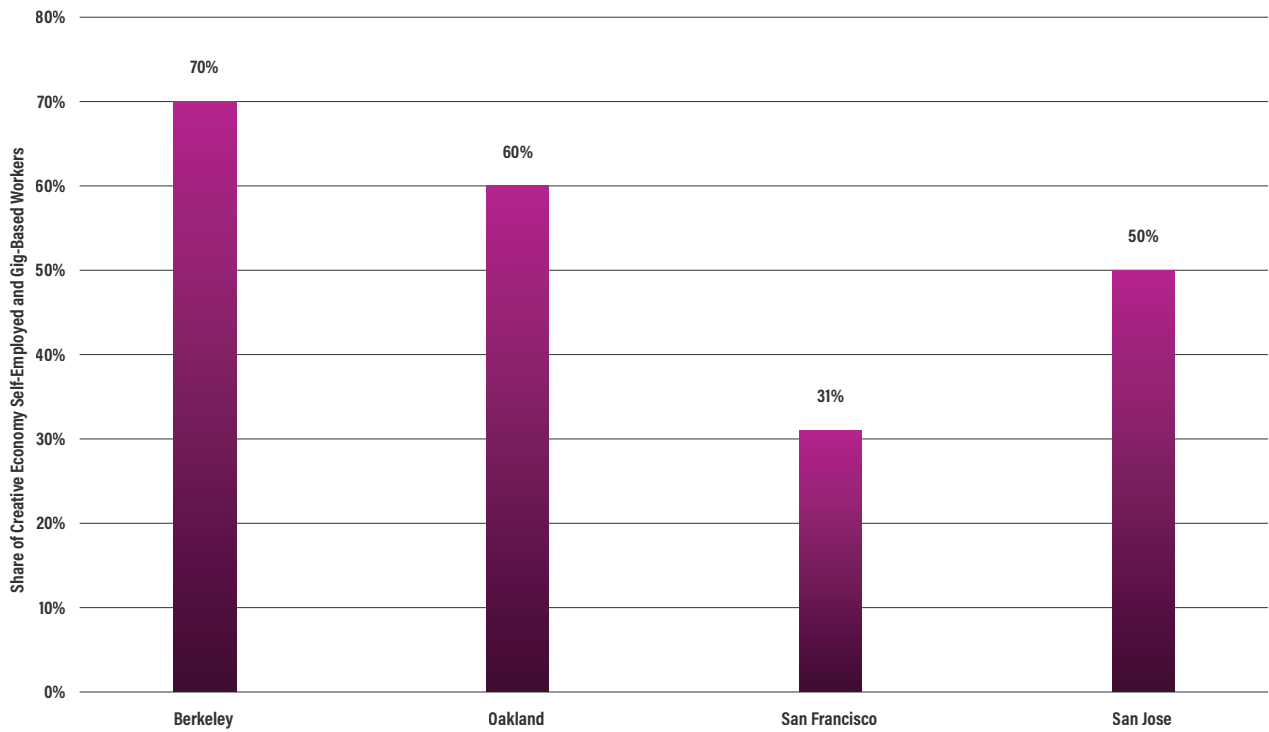
**FIGURE 11: REGIONAL CREATIVE ECONOMY COMPOSITION: VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS VS. ENTERTAINMENT & DIGITAL MEDIA | 2024**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

With a significant percentage of Performing Arts industry employment comes other struggles tied to the sector's reliance on gig and contract work, as well as its nonprofit-heavy structure. **In Berkeley, the estimated 70% of the creative workforce that is self-employed or gig-based is driven largely by the city's Visual & Performing Arts sector, which alone accounts for 3,850 workers (827 self-employed and 3,022 gig-based).** By comparison, only 31% of San Francisco's creative workforce falls into these categories (Figure 12). Oakland and San Jose also have higher shares of self-employed and gig workers (60% and 50%, respectively), but are not as high as Berkeley's.

FIGURE 12: SHARE OF CREATIVE ECONOMY SELF-EMPLOYED AND GIG-BASED WORKFORCE BY CITY | 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

At the same time, Performing Arts is among the industries with the highest share of nonprofit organizations. For instance, in Alameda County, over 25% of Performing Arts jobs are in nonprofits, compared to just 9.4% across all industries countywide (Figure 13). The county’s nonprofit share in the Performing Arts is also notably higher than the statewide average of 15.8%.

FIGURE 13: SHARE OF NONPROFIT EMPLOYMENT IN BOTH COUNTY AND STATE: PERFORMING ARTS VS. ALL INDUSTRIES | 2024

| REGION         | SHARE OF PERFORMING ARTS EMPLOYMENT IN NONPROFITS* | SHARE OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT (ALL INDUSTRIES) IN NONPROFITS |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Alameda County | 25.1%                                              | 9.4%                                                     |
| California     | 15.8%                                              | 7.8%                                                     |

\*Includes employment in NAICS 711 (Performing Arts, Spectator Sports, and Related Industries).

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Nonprofit Establishment Employment and Wage Estimates, CVL Economics.



## COMPARISON TO THE OVERALL ECONOMY IN BERKELEY

The picture becomes even more stark when comparing Berkeley’s creative economy to the city’s overall employment base (Figure 14). Before the pandemic, the creative workforce grew faster than Berkeley’s overall economy. Between 2014 and 2018, creative employment surged nearly 15%, compared to about 11% growth in the total workforce. This momentum underscored the sector’s potential as one of the city’s most dynamic economic drivers, suggesting that, absent disruption, it might have continued to anchor local growth.

The pandemic, however, set the creative economy in Berkeley on a very different trajectory than the overall local economy. While total employment in Berkeley dipped briefly in 2020, it has since resumed a steady upward climb, reaching new highs by 2024. The creative workforce, as noted earlier, has remained stagnant or declined since 2020, and is currently registering at levels observed back in 2013, more than a decade ago. This divergence makes clear that while Berkeley’s broader economy has expanded and rebounded, its creative economy, which relies on the Performing Arts industry, has been left behind—changing from a leading growth engine into a sector struggling to regain its footing.

FIGURE 14: CREATIVE ECONOMY EMPLOYMENT GROWTH RATE VS. GROWTH RATE FOR ALL SECTORS IN BERKELEY | 2014-2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

Berkeley’s heavy reliance on the Performing Arts—among the hardest-hit and slowest-recovering industries nationwide—has left its creative economy especially vulnerable. **The sector’s dual reliance on gig and contract work, alongside its nonprofit-heavy structure, compounds this fragility by tethering organizational stability to fluctuating audience demand, shifting philanthropic priorities, and uncertain public funding.** As a result, Berkeley’s creative economy remains more exposed to the ongoing challenges of rebuilding sustainable audiences than many of its regional peers.

Yet despite the sector’s slower recovery compared to the broader economy, Berkeley’s creative economy remains an essential economic engine. The following economic impact analysis highlights just how significant this activity is for Berkeley and the region—underscoring why the sector’s recovery is not simply a cultural priority, but an economic imperative.



# CREATIVE ECONOMY ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS

Entities in the creative economy are part of a broader ecosystem, constantly interacting with other businesses in other industries and consumers. While it is directly composed of the eight defined subsectors outlined earlier (see Figure 1), its reach extends well beyond these boundaries.

Arts organizations and creative firms rely on a wide array of goods and services—purchasing materials, contracting with marketing agencies, and engaging professional services—thereby generating demand across many other industries. At the same time, the people who work in creative jobs—whether performers, designers, technicians, or administrators—spend their earnings on everyday needs like groceries, rent, and childcare. These purchases further help sustain local businesses across many different sectors.

Economic impact analysis is a tool that helps us measure all of these effects—not just the direct output of an industry, but also the chain reaction it sets off across the broader economy, also known as the “multiplier effect.” To do this, we break the total impact into three parts: direct, indirect, and induced impacts, the latter two of which constitute the multiplier effect.<sup>8</sup> Together, these layers show the total economic impact of the creative economy through its role in a much larger ecosystem.

- **Direct effect** includes the economic activity that happens within the creative economy sector itself—like sector employee wages, business revenue, and taxes paid.
- **Indirect multiplier effect** captures the activity supported by the creative economy sector’s suppliers. For example, a theater might rely on a local costume shop, which in turn buys fabric from a regional wholesaler.
- **Induced multiplier effect** refers to the ripple effect of household spending. When creative economy sector employees or those in related businesses spend their paychecks locally, they help generate jobs and income in industries like food service, retail, and transportation.

To assess the contribution of arts and culture to the local and regional economy, several key indicators are analyzed:

- **Employment impact:** This refers to the total number of jobs supported by the creative economy—both directly (within arts organizations themselves) and indirectly (at supporting businesses), as well as jobs created through household spending by those workers (induced impact).
- **Labor income impact:** This captures the total wages, salaries, and benefits earned by workers across the direct, indirect, and induced layers of activity. It reflects how the sector supports livelihoods throughout the community.
- **Value added impact:** This measures the creative economy’s direct contribution to Gross Regional Product (GRP) in Berkeley. Value added reflects the net new wealth created by the sector, including labor income (wages and salaries), taxes on production, and business profits.
- **Fiscal impact:** This measures the tax revenue generated by businesses and workers associated with the creative economy. Tax revenue is broken down by city, county, and state levels.

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A.4 for IMPLAN input-output methodology.



## BASELINE IMPACT

The baseline impact reflects the economic impact that originates from creative economy activity within the City of Berkeley's boundaries. These impacts are generated by Berkeley-based entities and include the employment, labor income, and value added that flow directly from activity located in the city.

In 2024, the 8,186 direct jobs in Berkeley's creative economy supported an additional 251 jobs through multiplier effects (indirect and induced), for a total of 8,437 jobs supported citywide tied to the sector (Figure 15). Altogether, Berkeley's creative economy generated \$537.5 million in labor income (wages, salaries, and benefits) and contributed more than \$1.0 billion to the city's gross regional product (value added). Put another way, **each creative job in Berkeley generated about \$66,000 in labor income and \$125,000 in value added (contributions to Berkeley's gross regional product).**

These impacts are significant in scale: Berkeley's creative economy accounted for 7.6% of the city's total employment, 5.7% of labor income, and 7.9% of value added across the city in 2024. This underscores the sector's role not only as a major source of jobs and income but also as a key component of the city's overall economic base.

FIGURE 15: CITYWIDE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BERKELEY'S CREATIVE ECONOMY | 2024

|                                | EMPLOYMENT (JOBS) | LABOR INCOME           | VALUE ADDED              |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| DIRECT EFFECT                  | 8,186             | \$519.6 Million        | \$979.7 Million          |
| INDIRECT EFFECT                | 213               | \$15.3 Million         | \$22.6 Million           |
| INDUCED EFFECT                 | 38                | \$2.5 Million          | \$19.2 Million           |
| <b>TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT</b>   | <b>8,437</b>      | <b>\$537.5 Million</b> | <b>\$1,021.4 Million</b> |
| <b>SHARE OF BERKELEY TOTAL</b> | <b>7.6%</b>       | <b>5.7%</b>            | <b>7.9%</b>              |

Note: Totals may not be exact due to rounding. Includes impacts associated with private and non-profit entities in Berkeley's creative economy.

Source: IMPLAN, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, CVL Economics.

## REGIONAL SPILLOVERS ACROSS THE EAST BAY

While the city-level results capture the impacts that occur strictly within Berkeley, creative economy activity doesn't stop at the city's boundaries. Widening the lens to look at the East Bay (Alameda and Contra Costa counties) as a whole, the impact grows because of "leakages," or spillovers—spending that originates in Berkeley but flows outward to suppliers, contractors, and consumer markets located elsewhere in the two-county region as a result of the multiplier effect.

As such, in addition to the 8,437 jobs supported by the creative economy in Berkeley (citywide total employment impact from Figure 15), the sector supported an additional:

- 3,784 indirect jobs by supply-chain spending in other parts of the East Bay. For example, a Berkeley theater company might contract with a fabrication shop in Oakland or Richmond, or a design studio in Berkeley might purchase printing services from a vendor in Hayward or Concord. These transactions represent spillovers out of the city that become economic activity elsewhere in the East Bay.
- 1,821 induced jobs in other parts of the East Bay when creative workers spend their earnings on household needs. A Berkeley-based musician's paycheck might go towards childcare in Alameda or Albany, groceries in San Leandro or Orinda, or shopping in Oakland or Walnut Creek. Those everyday expenditures ripple outward, supporting additional jobs and income across the region.

This means an additional 5,605 jobs were supported by Berkeley's creative economy in other parts of the East Bay (elsewhere in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties) (Figure 16).

**FIGURE 16: SPILLOVER ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BERKELEY'S CREATIVE ECONOMY INTO OTHER PARTS OF THE EAST BAY | 2024**

|                              | EMPLOYMENT (JOBS) | LABOR INCOME           | VALUE ADDED            |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| DIRECT EFFECT                | -                 | -                      | -                      |
| INDIRECT EFFECT              | 3,784             | \$307.9 Million        | \$426.4 Million        |
| INDUCED EFFECT               | 1,821             | \$138.6 Million        | \$254.7 Million        |
| <b>TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT</b> | <b>5,605</b>      | <b>\$420.8 Million</b> | <b>\$624.0 Million</b> |

Note: As this analysis measures only creative economy activity originating within the City of Berkeley, direct effects occur only within Berkeley, as shown in Figure 15. Totals may not be exact due to rounding. Includes impacts associated with private and non-profit entities in Berkeley's creative economy.

Source: IMPLAN, CVL Economics.

**A DEEPER LOOK:****UNDERSTANDING THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT**

The multiplier effect (indirect and induced impacts) captures how the impact of the creative economy extends beyond the organizations and workers directly involved in creative activity. Every creative job in Berkeley generates additional activity across a wide range of other industries, through business-to-business (supply-chain) transactions and household spending by industry workers. Because Berkeley is deeply interconnected with the surrounding East Bay economy, these multiplier effects also have a geographic dimension. While some of the secondary activity remains inside city boundaries, much of it naturally flows to nearby communities such as Oakland, Emeryville, Richmond, Albany, El Cerrito, and San Leandro where many vendors are located and workers live.

The multiplier effect of Berkeley's creative economy is evident in the diverse range of industries supported through supply-chain linkages (indirect effects) and household spending (induced effects) (Figure 17). On the supply-chain side, the largest employment impacts occur in industries directly tied to arts and culture production. Promoters of performing arts (i.e., organizations that organize and manage live shows, concerts, theatres, or festivals) (805 jobs) and independent artists, writers, and performers (205 jobs) illustrate how creative activity sustains related fields within the broader arts ecosystem.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, significant spillovers occur in various professional and technical service industries: employment services (376 jobs), other real estate (261 jobs), custom computer programming (168 jobs), and management consulting (160 jobs) all benefit from the demands of creative organizations and firms. Even industries like warehousing and storage (64 jobs), couriers and messengers (108 jobs), and commercial sports (230 jobs) are strengthened through their connections to Berkeley's creative sector.

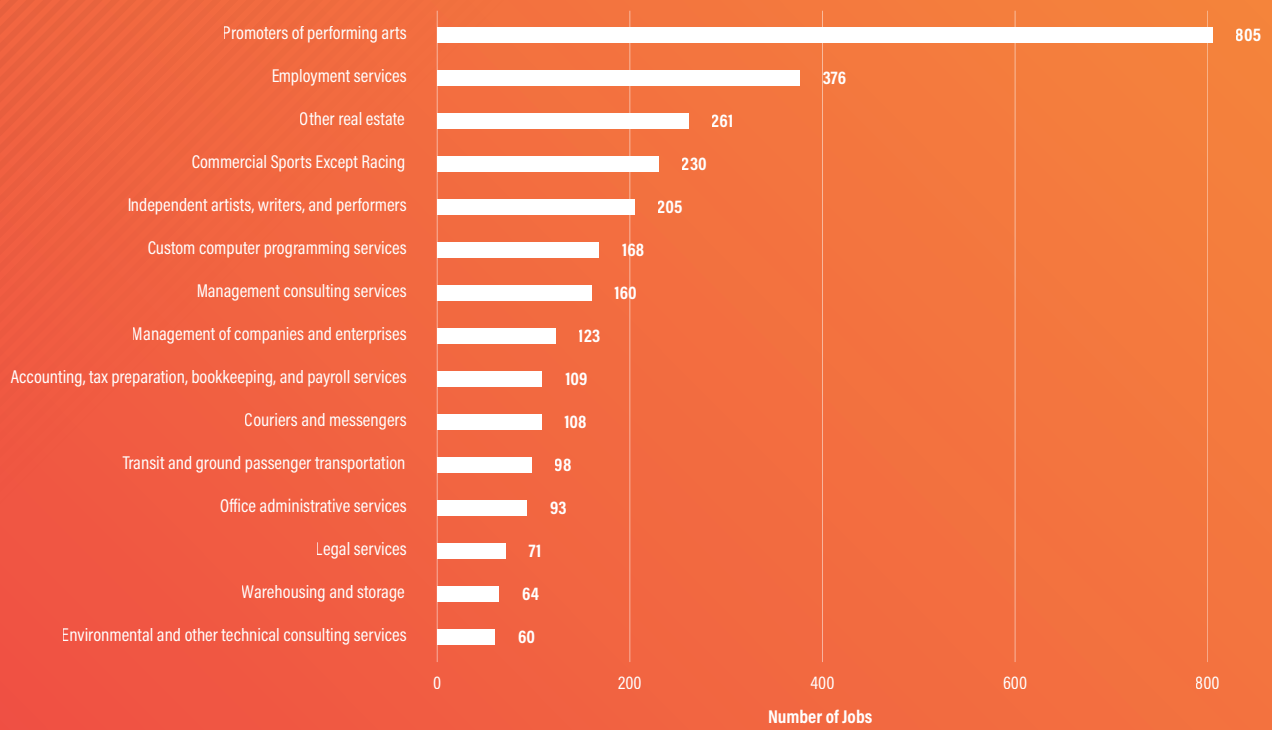
On the household spending side, induced effects spread the benefits in a different way. Creative workers spend their earnings on everyday needs that sustain jobs in restaurants (175 jobs across full- and limited-food service), family services (103 jobs), and healthcare (55 hospital jobs and 48 in physicians' offices). Retail is also a major beneficiary, with creative economy earnings supporting employment in food and beverage stores (51 jobs), general merchandise stores (43 jobs), and other retail outlets. Additional gains are seen in education (37 jobs in other educational services), personal care services (42 jobs), and even auto repair and maintenance (32 jobs).

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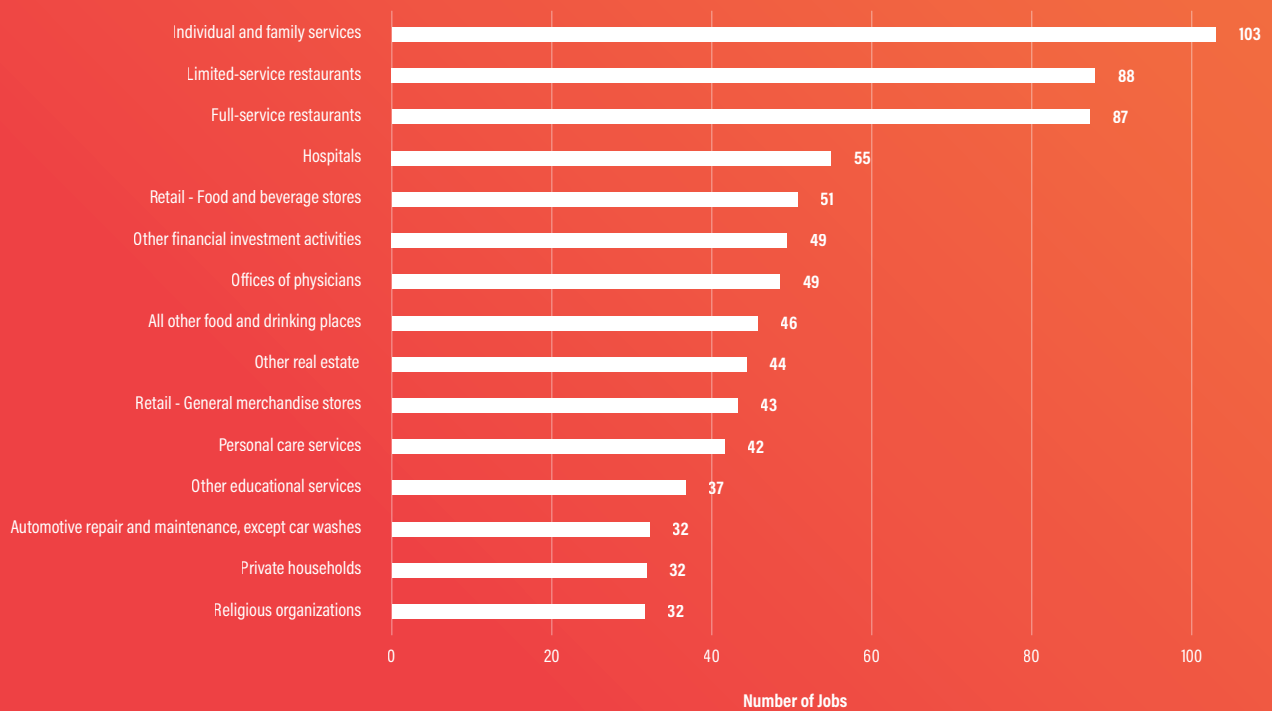
<sup>9</sup> Industry titles are reported using IMPLAN's sectoring scheme, which is mapped to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

FIGURE 17: RIPPLE EFFECT OF EAST BAY EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTED BY THE BERKELEY CREATIVE ECONOMY | 2024

A) Indirect Effect (Supply Chain)



B) Induced Effect (Household Spending)



Source: IMPLAN, CVL Economics.

**BEYOND THE TICKET:****ARTS AND CULTURE ATTENDEE SPENDING**

In considering the broader role of the creative economy, it is important to account for the additional activity generated by visitors to arts and culture establishments. Audiences at performances and visitors to museums often turn their outings into fuller experiences—grabbing a meal at a restaurant, stopping at a café or bar, or browsing nearby shops. This ancillary spending amplifies the value of arts and culture by circulating dollars into multiple sectors and sustaining the vitality of surrounding commercial corridors. The presence of continued arts and culture programming drives foot traffic that sustains nearby businesses and keeps commercial corridors vibrant.

To quantify this effect, CVL Economics used the SMU DataArts Cultural Data Profile database to compile attendance figures for an available sample of Berkeley arts and culture organizations. **Together, the 37 arts and culture venues in Berkeley in this sample group attract roughly 1.4 million attendees annually.**<sup>10</sup>

Spending estimates were drawn from *Arts & Economic Prosperity 6* (Americans for the Arts), which provides audience spending patterns for local regions. While no Berkeley-specific profile exists, spending data from Walnut Creek and San Francisco were averaged to approximate Berkeley's position—more urbanized than Walnut Creek, yet less dense (and with lower associated costs) than San Francisco. Similarly, the average mix of local and nonlocal attendees was applied to get an estimate of spending in Berkeley. This distinction is important because local attendees, who live in the city, generate less new spending when they attend a performance than their nonlocal counterparts. **In total, the average Berkeley local attendee spends \$35.76 on additional activities per artistic/cultural event, and the average (nonlocal) attendee from outside Berkeley spends \$48.83.**

Applying these patterns to the Berkeley sample group shows **that arts and culture audiences for these organizations generate an estimated \$56 million in annual spending at other local businesses** (Figure 18). This includes nearly \$30 million at food and drink establishments, \$7.6 million at retail stores, \$7.2 million on local transportation, and \$3.5 million on lodging.

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<sup>10</sup> SMU DataArts Cultural Data Profile (2017–2024).

**FIGURE 18: ANNUAL ARTS AND CULTURE ATTENDEE SPENDING BY CATEGORY FOR 37 ARTS AND CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS IN BERKELEY | 2024**

| SPENDING CATEGORY        | LOCAL ATTENDEES       | NONLOCAL ATTENDEES    | TOTAL ATTENDEES       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Food and Drink           | \$17.6 Million        | \$11.8 Million        | \$29.2 Million        |
| Retail Shopping          | \$4.5 Million         | \$3.1 Million         | \$7.6 Million         |
| Overnight Lodging        | \$0.6 Million         | \$3.0 Million         | \$3.5 Million         |
| Local Transportation     | \$3.5 Million         | \$3.7 Million         | \$7.2 Million         |
| Clothing and Accessories | \$2.5 Million         | \$1.4 Million         | \$3.8 Million         |
| Groceries and Supplies   | \$1.8 Million         | \$0.8 Million         | \$2.6 Million         |
| Childcare                | \$0.5 Million         | \$0.4 Million         | \$0.9 Million         |
| Other/Miscellaneous      | \$0.6 Million         | \$0.5 Million         | \$1.2 Million         |
| <b>Total Spending</b>    | <b>\$31.3 Million</b> | <b>\$24.6 Million</b> | <b>\$56.0 Million</b> |

Source: SMU DataArts, Americans for the Arts, CVL Economics.

## FISCAL IMPACT

Creative economy activity within the City of Berkeley also generates meaningful public revenues that flow across multiple levels of government. While these activities take place strictly within city boundaries, California's layered tax system distributes the resulting revenues among the City of Berkeley, Alameda County, and the State of California. This means that a single dollar of creative economy activity in Berkeley contributes to multiple jurisdictions simultaneously.

Creative activity contributes to several types of taxes that fund distinct public services (Figure 19). The following are major sources of creative economy tax revenue:

- **Property tax (shared by City of Berkeley and Alameda County)** revenues come from the assessed value of land and buildings occupied by creative organizations and businesses—such as theaters, studios, galleries, or design offices—whether paid directly by the property owner or indirectly through commercial leases. These revenues fund a broad range of public services, from public safety to county-administered programs, including road maintenance and transit services.
- **Sales tax (shared by City of Berkeley, Alameda County, and California)** in the creative sector is typically tied to ancillary transactions like food and beverage concessions, merchandise, or purchases of supplies and equipment. Ticket sales are not included because they are not subject to California sales tax. These revenues are distributed across all three levels of government—supporting the City's general fund, countywide systems administered by Alameda County, and the State's General Fund, which finances education, health and human services, and other statewide priorities.
- **Personal income taxes (California only)** are generated by the wages and self-employment earnings of workers employed in the creative economy, including W-2 employees, freelancers, and gig workers. They are a major source for the State of California's General Fund.
- **Corporate income taxes (California only)** apply to the net profits of for-profit creative firms, such as design practices, production companies, or galleries, while nonprofit entities are generally exempt. These revenues also accrue to the State's General Fund and help sustain statewide systems and programs alongside income taxes.

**FIGURE 19: SCENARIOS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CREATIVE ECONOMY’S TAX REVENUE GENERATION**

| TAX TYPE & COLLECTOR               | SCENARIO 1: NONPROFIT THEATER COMPANY                                                                       | SCENARIO 2: PRIVATE DESIGN FIRM                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PROPERTY TAX<br>(City, County)     | Theater company leases its space; tax is assessed on the property owner but is effectively built into rent. | Firm leases its space; tax is assessed on the property owner but is effectively built into rent.                                                                |
| SALES TAX<br>(City, County, State) | Sales tax collected on concessions (food, drink), merchandise, and taxable rentals. Ticket sales exempt.    | Core design services exempt. Sales tax applies to tangible goods (printed collateral, models, branded merchandise) and on taxable inputs purchased by the firm. |
| PERSONAL INCOME TAX<br>(State)     | Actors, stage crew, and set designers pay income tax on wages or self-employment income.                    | Designers, administrative staff, and contractors pay state income tax on wages or self-employment income.                                                       |
| CORPORATE INCOME TAX<br>(State)    | Exempt as a nonprofit.                                                                                      | Corporate profits taxed at the state level.                                                                                                                     |

Source: CVL Economics.

## DIRECT TAX BENEFITS

Creative economy activity in Berkeley generates tax dollars that flow into the City’s General Fund, which provides flexible revenues that are budgeted to core municipal services, such as public safety and personnel. Unlike special district revenues that are legally restricted to specific purposes, General Fund revenues represent the City’s discretionary pool.

In fiscal year 2024, the City of Berkeley’s General Fund was budgeted at \$273.4 million.<sup>11</sup> Of this, based on the IMPLAN modeling described above which includes the impact of multiplier effects, the creative economy generated an estimated \$10.7 million in tax revenues (Figure 20), equal to nearly 4% of the City’s discretionary tax base. The largest contributions came from sales taxes, where creative sector activity accounted for more than 15% of total collections, and property taxes at 4%.

<sup>11</sup> City of Berkeley, Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2025 & 2026 (PDF). Available at: <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FY-2025-2026-Proposed-Biennial-Budget.pdf>.

**FIGURE 20: CITY OF BERKELEY GENERAL FUND (GF) TAX REVENUE GENERATED BY BERKELEY'S CREATIVE ECONOMY | 2024**

| SOURCE OF REVENUE                     | CREATIVE ECONOMY GF TAX REVENUE | FY2024 EST. ACTUAL GF REVENUE (TOTAL GF REVENUE) | CREATIVE ECONOMY SHARE OF TOTAL GF REVENUE |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| PROPERTY TAX                          | \$4.6 Million                   | \$116.0 Million                                  | 4.0%                                       |
| SALES TAX                             | \$2.9 Million                   | \$18.7 Million                                   | 15.6%                                      |
| ALL OTHER TAXES*                      | \$3.2 Million                   | \$138.7 Million                                  | 2.3%                                       |
| <b>TOTAL GENERAL FUND TAX REVENUE</b> | <b>\$10.7 Million</b>           | <b>\$273.4 Million</b>                           | <b>3.9%</b>                                |

Note: Totals may not be exact due to rounding. Includes impacts associated with private and non-profit entities in Berkeley's creative economy.

\* "All Other Taxes" for the creative economy include Business License Taxes, Utility Users Taxes, Cannabis Taxes, and other smaller categories. For the City's total General Fund, this category also includes revenues not meaningfully generated by creative economy activity, such as Vehicle License Fees, Ambulance Fees, Interest Income, Franchise Fees, Indirect Cost Reimbursements, and Transfers.

Source: IMPLAN, City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.

## SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL SYSTEMS THAT RETURN VALUE LOCALLY

Beyond the direct benefit to Berkeley residents through City revenues, the tax dollars generated by Berkeley's creative economy for county and state jurisdictions also strengthen the regional and statewide system that Berkeley's population depends on.

In 2024, Berkeley's creative economy generated \$14.3 million in Alameda and Contra Costa County revenues (most is appropriated through Alameda County since that is where Berkeley activity is directly located) and \$74.6 million in state revenues (Figure 21). County revenues flow into systems that the City does not operate directly,

but that are critical for residents, including public health programs, social services, elections, courts, and jails. State revenues, meanwhile, are collected through income, sales, and corporate taxes and deposited into California's General Fund, which supports K-12 and higher education (the State General Fund is the largest source of public support for UC Berkeley), Medi-Cal, and other health programs. Though administered at the county and state levels, these dollars cycle back to Berkeley by funding schools, public universities, healthcare access, and regional services that residents use every day.

**FIGURE 21: COUNTY AND STATE TAX REVENUE GENERATED BY BERKELEY'S CREATIVE ECONOMY | 2024**

| SOURCE OF REVENUE        | REVENUE FOR ALAMEDA & CONTRA COSTA COUNTIES | REVENUE FOR THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| STATE OF CALIFORNIA      | -                                           | \$25.5 Million                      |
| PROPERTY TAX             | \$12.3 Million                              |                                     |
| SALES TAX                | \$0.6 Million                               | \$25.6 Million                      |
| CORPORATE TAX            | -                                           | \$14.2 Million                      |
| OTHER TAX                | \$1.4 Million                               | \$9.3 Million                       |
| <b>TOTAL TAX REVENUE</b> | <b>\$14.3 Million</b>                       | <b>\$74.6 Million</b>               |

Note: Totals may not be exact due to rounding. Includes impacts associated with private and non-profit entities in Berkeley's creative economy.

Source: IMPLAN, CVL Economics.



## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The City of Berkeley provides grant funding to arts and culture organizations, festivals, and individuals through its robust Civic Arts Grant Program, established in 1991.

The Civic Arts Grant Program aims to strengthen Berkeley's arts ecosystem by directly supporting individual artists, organizations, and festivals that expand cultural access, foster equity and inclusion, and contribute to the city's creative vitality and economic vibrancy.<sup>12</sup>

Over the past decade, the program has expanded significantly in scale, with annual direct investment increasing from \$230,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2016 to approximately \$700,000 annually since FY2022 (Figure 22).<sup>13</sup> Funding is distributed across three primary categories: Individual Artist Project Grants, Community Festival Grants, and General Operating Support for arts organizations.

12 For more information, visit the City of Berkeley's Civic Arts Grants page: <https://berkeleyca.gov/community-recreation/civic-arts/civic-arts-grants>.

13 City of Berkeley, *Civic Arts Grants Program – Improved Practices & Community Impact* (Work Session Item 01), March 21, 2023, <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2023-03-21%20WS%20Item%2001%20Civic%20Arts%20Grants%20Program.pdf>.

FIGURE 22: BERKELEY CIVIC ARTS GRANTS ALLOCATIONS | FY2016–FY 2024

| FISCAL YEAR | TOTAL GRANT AMOUNT AWARDED | NUMBER OF GRANTS | AVERAGE GRANT SIZE |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| FY2016      | \$229,100                  | 53               | \$4,323            |
| FY2017      | \$378,848                  | 56               | \$6,765            |
| FY2018      | \$497,510                  | 61               | \$8,156            |
| FY2019      | \$500,000                  | 63               | \$7,937            |
| FY2020      | \$650,199                  | 90               | \$7,224            |
| FY2021      | \$579,493                  | 94               | \$6,165            |
| FY2022      | \$714,470                  | 104              | \$6,870            |
| FY2023      | \$696,996                  | 114              | \$6,114            |
| FY2024      | \$698,782                  | 97               | \$7,204            |

Source: City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.

In FY 2024, the City of Berkeley awarded \$698,782 in Civic Arts Grants to 55 arts and culture organizations, 31 community festivals, and 11 individual artist projects (97 grants total).<sup>14</sup> This investment sustains year-round organizational programming in Berkeley, supports artists' livelihoods, and improves community access to diverse cultural experiences. To provide a better sense of the significance of this support, we estimate the City's return on investment using the following process outlined below.

In 2024, the organizations and festivals receiving Civic Arts Grants reported a combined operating revenue of \$131 million. CVL Economics estimated the total operating revenue of grantee organizations by compiling financial data from the IRS Exempt Organizations Business Master File. For festivals, revenue was attributed to the organizing entity (unless the festival was an entity itself); in some cases, the same organization received both a grant for its annual programming and a separate grant to support a festival it manages. In aggregate, however, these awards represent funding to a single entity, and the reported revenues reflect the full scope of that organization's operations.

While most revenue data was available through IRS tax filings, there were a few data gaps in organizational revenue availability. Adjustments were made where

necessary—for example, nonprofits with annual revenues under \$50,000 are not required to submit total revenue figures to the IRS, and CVL Economics developed reasonable estimates recognizing the relatively small scale of these entities. In a few cases where 2024 revenue data was not yet available, 2023 filings were used as a proxy to ensure consistency across the analysis. In addition, in 2024 the program distributed \$44,000 in project grants to individual artists, functioning as direct income in exchange for their creative work.

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.** This estimate was developed using IMPLAN input-output modeling, capturing not only the direct contributions of grantees and their employees, but also the supply chain effects on local vendors, contractors, and service providers, along with the induced spending of households supported by arts-related jobs. In other words, every \$1 of Civic Arts Grant funding supported nearly \$197 in total economic activity across the City of Berkeley. Overall, the City's investments supported about 7.5% of the total economic activity generated by its creative economy.

<sup>14</sup> City of Berkeley, Fiscal Year 2024 Civic Arts Grant Awards (Information Calendar), October 10, 2023, <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2023-10-10%20Item%2015%20Fiscal%20Year%202024%20Civic%20Arts%20Grant.pdf>.

## PUBLIC ART PROGRAM AND PANDEMIC RELIEF AND RECOVERY GRANTS

In addition to its Civic Arts Grants program, the City of Berkeley provides substantial support for the local creative economy through its Public Art Program. Unlike the Civic Arts Grants, which are allocated annually from the City's General Fund, Public Art funding is generated primarily through Berkeley's Public Art ordinances, which dedicate a portion of capital project budgets to commissioning, installing, and maintaining public artworks, as well as through in-lieu fees paid by private developers who opt to contribute funds rather than install art on their buildings. This structure means that funding levels are driven by the scale and timing of both municipal capital projects and private development activity, both of which can be cyclical, rather than a fixed appropriation. Because these allocations are tied to specific artworks and capital improvements—rather than to flexible operating support—they are not included in the ROI analysis, which focuses on General Fund dollars that flow directly into organizational capacity and community programming.

Public Art Program expenditures nevertheless represent a meaningful municipal investment in Berkeley's cultural landscape. Over the past five fiscal years, annual expenses have ranged from \$276,656 in FY21 to nearly \$923,475 in FY23. The spike in FY23 reflects one-time allocations from the City's T1 Infrastructure and Facilities Bond,<sup>15</sup> which

funded new public art commissions and conservation projects in conjunction with broader civic improvements. More recent spending totaled \$407,212 in FY24 and \$624,035 in FY25.<sup>16</sup> The City maintains a digital catalog of its public art collection, including an interactive map that allows residents and visitors to explore artworks across the community.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, in rapid response to the widespread impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local arts and culture sector, **the City of Berkeley awarded more than \$3 million in emergency relief and recovery grants between 2020 and 2022.** This included \$2.5 million to 88 arts and culture organizations and over \$520,000 to 193 individual artists. Although these were one-time allocations, they were extraordinary in scale and helped many organizations withstand the most difficult periods of pandemic shutdowns. **Every \$1 of the City's emergency investments spurred by the pandemic leveraged at least \$5.64 in sustained arts and culture economic activity that might otherwise have been lost entirely.**<sup>18</sup>

The impacts of these investments are detailed in the companion report (published concurrently), entitled *Assessment of Berkeley Arts & Culture Pandemic Relief and Recovery Funding*.

15 City of Berkeley, Measure T1: Infrastructure and Facilities Bond, <https://berkeleyca.gov/your-government/our-work/bond-revenue-measures/measure-t1>.

16 Jennifer Lowvorn, Chief Cultural Affairs Officer at City of Berkeley, email to CVL Economics, September 26, 2025.

17 City of Berkeley, City of Berkeley Public Art Collection, <https://www.artworkarchive.com/profile/civartscollection/portfolio>.

18 City of Berkeley, Assessment of Berkeley Arts & Culture Pandemic Relief and Recovery Funding, prepared by CVL Economics, October 2025.





# FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

## PRE-PANDEMIC MOMENTUM LOST

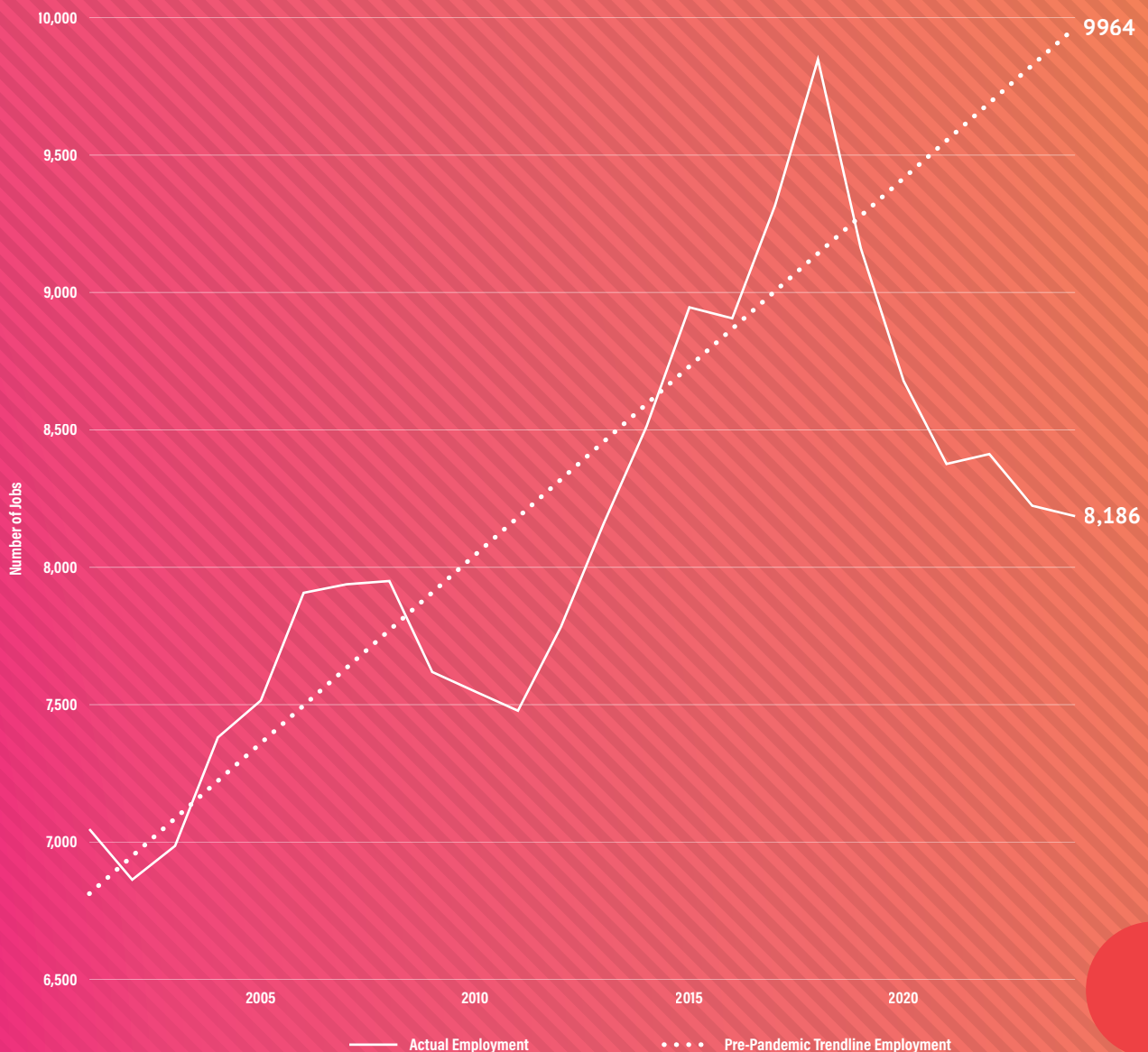
While the creative economy in Berkeley delivers significant impacts today, it is important to recognize the strength and momentum the sector had prior to the pandemic. In 2018, creative employment in Berkeley had climbed to a peak of nearly 9,850 jobs—growth that not only outpaced overall citywide employment, but also exceeded the expansion of creative sectors in neighboring regions. That momentum was abruptly halted when the pandemic hit. The shutdown of 2020 erased all of the gains built over the previous decade; today, Berkeley’s creative sector sits 17% below its 2018 peak and is aligned with employment levels experienced in 2013.

What had long been one of Berkeley’s greatest cultural strengths—its concentration of live performance venues and nonprofit arts organizations—quickly became a vulnerability when in-person gatherings were deemed unsafe. Live theater, music, and dance were among the first to close and the last to return, severing both earned and ancillary revenue streams. This challenge was compounded by Berkeley’s high proportion of nonprofit organizations, which made the sector particularly reliant on philanthropic and public funding sources. As emergency relief and federal grant programs have wound down, many of these funding streams have diminished, leaving organizations with fewer resources to sustain operations.

Unlike other industries that have since rebounded, Berkeley's creative economy has continued to decline year after year, leaving a widening gap between its current scale and the trajectory it was once on. Its strength in live performance—one of the sectors hardest hit by shutdowns and slowest to recover—made the creative economy especially vulnerable, while reliance on gig work, high local costs, and cautious audiences further compound the challenges.

The divergence between actual outcomes and the projected pre-pandemic trend highlights what has been lost, including nearly 1,800 more jobs than what was observed in 2024 (Figure 23). Those unrealized jobs represent more than just employment—they translate into lost wages, reduced household spending, and diminished tax revenues. If the pre-pandemic trajectory had held, Berkeley's creative economy would not only employ more people, but also generate higher levels of labor income and value added (contributions to the City's gross regional product) than currently measured citywide.

FIGURE 23: ACTUAL CREATIVE ECONOMY EMPLOYMENT VS. PRE-PANDEMIC TRENDLINE IN BERKELEY



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, CVL Economics.

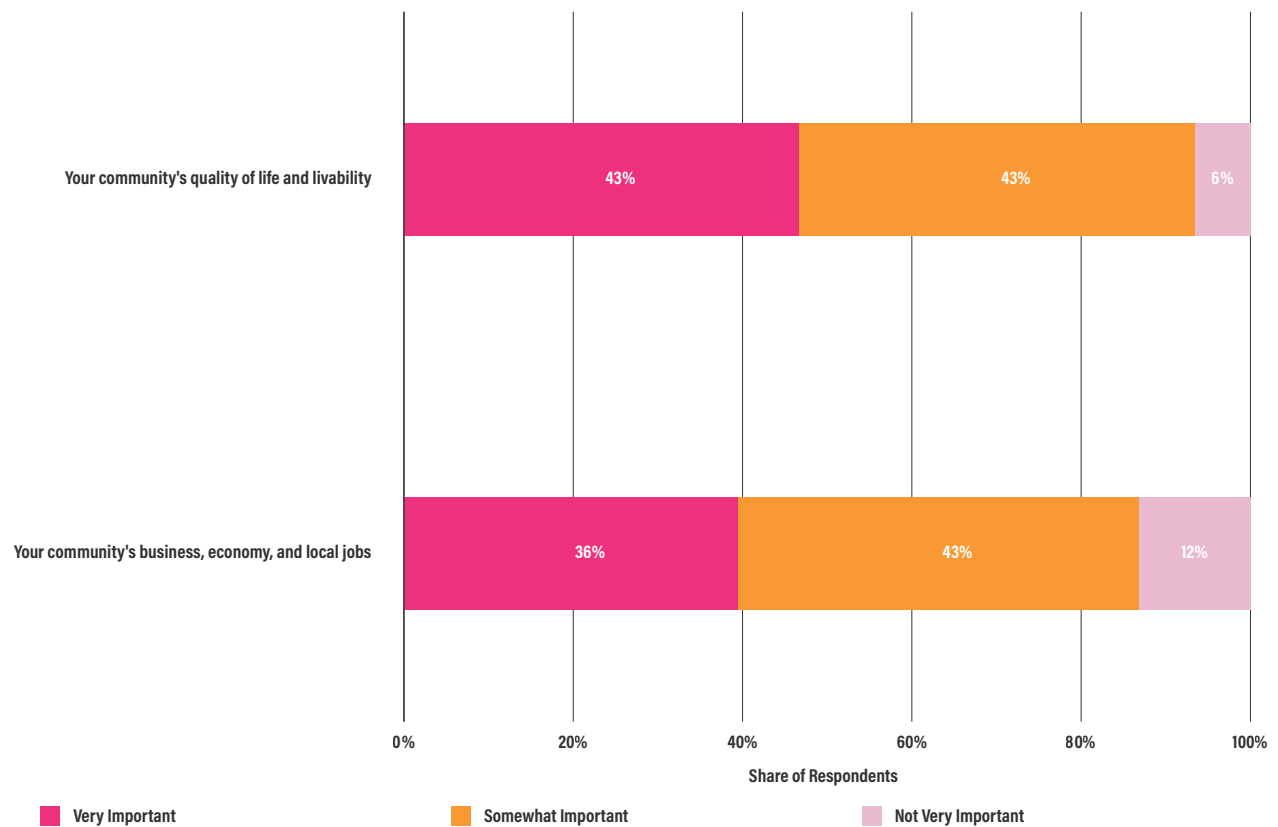
## ARTS AND CULTURE AS ENGINES OF ECONOMIC VITALITY

Beyond the numbers, the creative economy plays a central role in shaping Berkeley’s identity, quality of life, and appeal as a place to live and work. A strong creative sector enriches the city with performances, festivals, cultural institutions, and design-driven businesses that make Berkeley distinctive within the Bay Area and attractive to both residents and employers.

This connection between creativity and community wellbeing is not unique to Berkeley—it reflects a broader national understanding of the arts’ role in civic life. A 2023 nationwide survey conducted by Americans for the Arts reveals that a vast majority of Americans share this view: 86% agreed that arts and culture are important to their community’s overall quality of life and livability, and 79% affirmed the importance of arts and culture to supporting local businesses, the economy, and jobs (Figure 24).<sup>19</sup>

FIGURE 24: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF ARTS AND CULTURE IN COMMUNITY WELLBEING IN THE U.S.

How important, if at all, do you think having arts and culture are to...



Source: Americans for the Arts.

19 Americans for the Arts, Americans Speak Out About the Arts: An In-Depth Look at Public Perceptions and Attitudes About Arts & Culture in America in 2023, December 2024. [https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/AFTA\\_2023\\_Public%20Opinion%20Study\\_FINAL\\_12.4.24.pdf](https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/AFTA_2023_Public%20Opinion%20Study_FINAL_12.4.24.pdf)

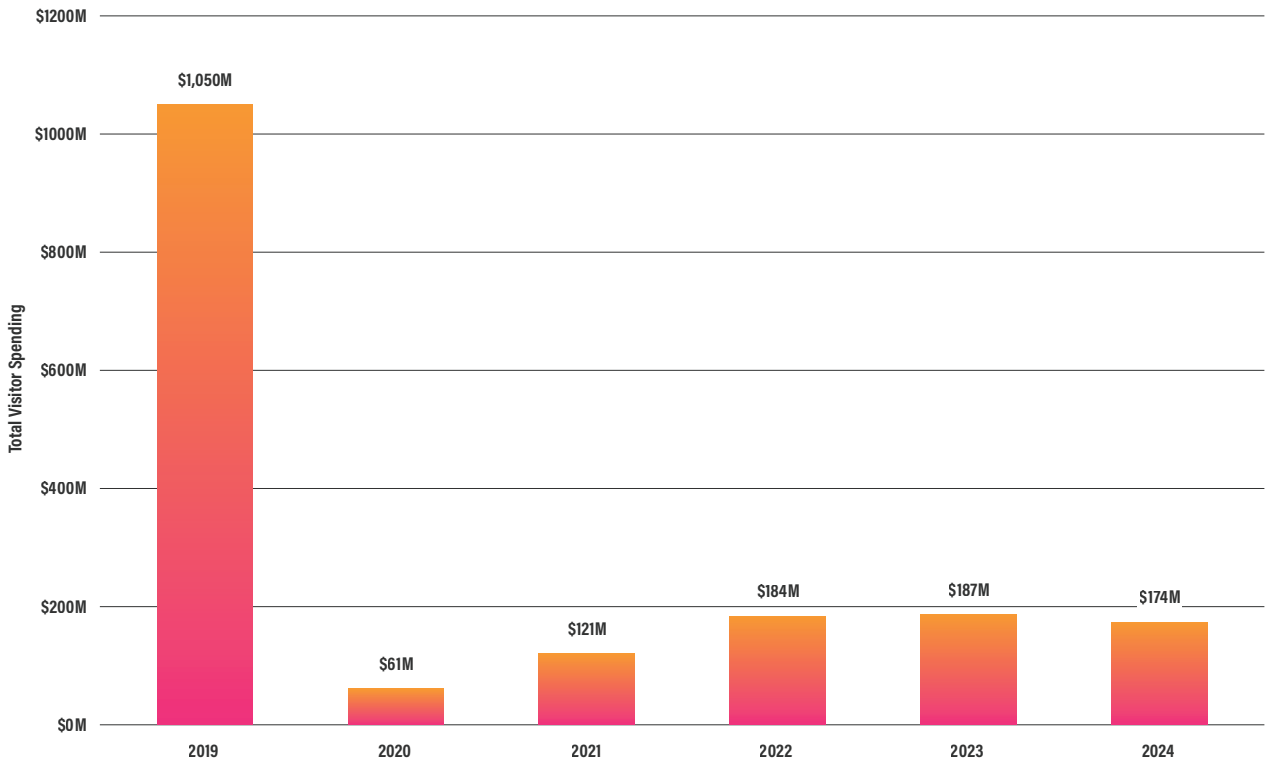
The significance of arts and culture extends directly to the vitality of downtowns and commercial districts. Cultural venues—such as theaters, galleries, and music spaces—serve as anchors that drive foot traffic, activate public spaces, and generate demand for nearby restaurants, bars, and retail establishments. These dynamics not only support small businesses but also contribute to perceptions of safety and livability by ensuring that public areas remain active and inviting across a range of hours and days of the week. Investments in arts and culture have proven to be catalysts for broader downtown revitalization, sparking further private investment and creating a multiplier effect that benefits the entire local economy.

Berkeley itself has long recognized this connection. The establishment of the Downtown Arts District along Addison Street in the 1990s and early 2000s was a deliberate recognition of arts and culture's role in economic development as the city faced an 18% ground-

floor vacancy rate downtown.<sup>20</sup> By clustering cultural venues along Addison Street and leveraging relatively modest public investment into tens of millions in private dollars, Berkeley transformed a struggling downtown corridor into a vibrant destination that continues to anchor the city's economic and cultural identity.

Berkeley's recent downward trends underscore what is at stake, threatening to erode the progress built from the 1990s through 2020. Visitor spending in the city fell from over \$1 billion in 2019 to just \$174 million in 2024 (Figure 25), while the Downtown Berkeley commercial vacancy rate (including office and retail spaces) sat at nearly 11% in 2024, more than double pre-pandemic levels in 2019 (Figure 26). Office vacancies have driven much of this increase as remote work has become more prevalent, but ground floor retail and restaurant spaces have also struggled.

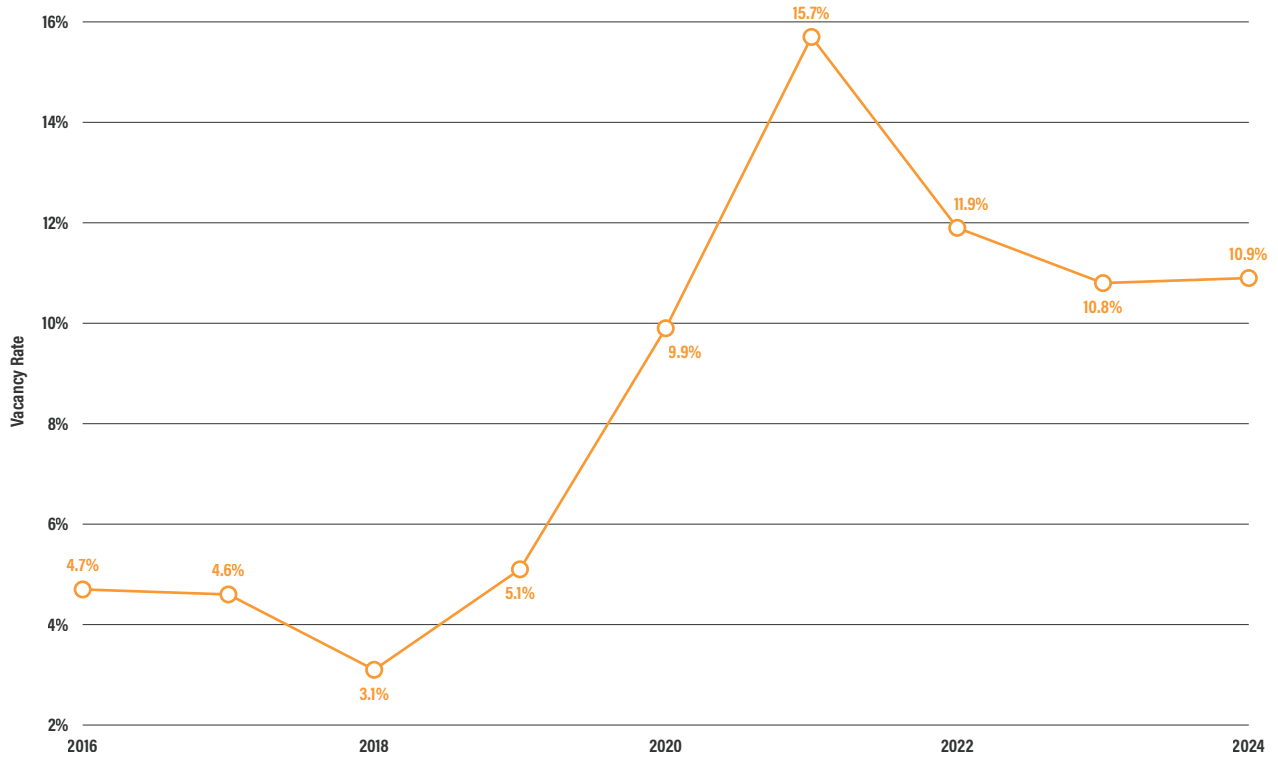
FIGURE 25: TOTAL SPENDING BY VISITORS TO BERKELEY | 2019-2024



Source: Visit Berkeley, Placer.ai, CVL Economics.

20 City of Berkeley, Arts as Economic Development, presented by M. Caplan at the U.S. Mayors Innovation Conference, August 2016. Available online: [https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/ArtsDistrict\\_Panel\\_CoB\\_8.27.2016.pdf](https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/ArtsDistrict_Panel_CoB_8.27.2016.pdf).

FIGURE 26: DOWNTOWN BERKELEY GROUND FLOOR COMMERCIAL VACANCY RATE | 2016-2024



Note: Includes office and retail properties.  
 Source: City of Berkeley Office of Economic Development, CVL Economics.

These findings can help shape practical solutions for Berkeley’s long-term recovery and the resilience of its diverse economy. As work continues to shift from traditional 9 to 5 office schedules to flexible, remote arrangements, the daytime worker presence that once sustained downtown retail, hospitality, and cultural activity has diminished. The outmigration of higher-wage workers to places with lower costs of living has left central business districts in Bay Area downtowns more vulnerable to shrinking audiences and weaker engagement with arts and culture.

Revitalizing downtown does not mean reverting to pre-pandemic models. To counter falling visitor spending and rising vacancies, Berkeley must reimagine how investment in the creative economy can drive renewal. Orienting economic development around the creative and nighttime economies is one of the most effective strategies for sparking new energy, with efforts focused on leveraging existing arts, culture, and entertainment amenities to attract residents and visitors alike. Sustaining and growing Berkeley’s creative economy—especially its artists, arts organizations, and festivals—is essential to preserving the qualities that make the city a place where people want to live, work, and visit.

# APPENDIX

## A.1: CREATIVE ECONOMY INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION CODES

To ensure clarity and comparability, the definition of the creative economy is grounded in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), the federal standard used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Bureau of Economic Analysis. Using NAICS codes allows us to map creative industries consistently across geographies over time, and to model their economic contributions. While no single code fully captures the breadth of the creative economy, assembling a curated set of codes provides a robust picture of the industry.

FIGURE A.1 CREATIVE ECONOMY INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION CODES

| INDUSTRY CATEGORY AND DESCRIPTION                                                                  | NAICS  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| <b>ARCHITECTURE &amp; DESIGN</b>                                                                   |        |
| Ornamental and Architectural Metal Work Manufacturing                                              | 332323 |
| Architectural Services                                                                             | 541310 |
| Landscape Architectural Services                                                                   | 541320 |
| Drafting Services                                                                                  | 541340 |
| Interior Design Services                                                                           | 541410 |
| Industrial Design Services                                                                         | 541420 |
| <b>COMMUNICATION DESIGN</b>                                                                        |        |
| Graphic Design Services                                                                            | 541430 |
| Advertising Agencies                                                                               | 541810 |
| Photography Studios, Portrait                                                                      | 541921 |
| Commercial Photography                                                                             | 541922 |
| <b>ENTERTAINMENT &amp; DIGITAL MEDIA</b>                                                           |        |
| Motion Picture and Video Production                                                                | 512110 |
| Motion Picture and Video Distribution                                                              | 512120 |
| Teleproduction and Other Postproduction Services                                                   | 512191 |
| Sound Recording Studios                                                                            | 512240 |
| Software Publishers                                                                                | 513210 |
| Radio Broadcasting Stations                                                                        | 516110 |
| Television Broadcasting Stations                                                                   | 516120 |
| Media Streaming Distribution Services, Social Networks, Other Media Networks and Content Providers | 516210 |

| INDUSTRY CATEGORY AND DESCRIPTION                                       | NAICS  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| <b>FASHION</b>                                                          |        |
| Fiber, Yarn, and Thread Mills                                           | 313110 |
| Broadwoven Fabric Mills                                                 | 313210 |
| Narrow Fabric Mills and Schiffli Machine Embroidery                     | 313220 |
| Nonwoven Fabric Mills                                                   | 313230 |
| Knit Fabric Mills                                                       | 313240 |
| Textile and Fabric Finishing Mills                                      | 313310 |
| Fabric Coating Mills                                                    | 313320 |
| Apparel Knitting Mills                                                  | 315120 |
| Cut and Sew Apparel Contractors                                         | 315210 |
| Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing (except Contractors)                  | 315250 |
| Apparel Accessories and Other Apparel Manufacturing                     | 315990 |
| Footwear Manufacturing                                                  | 316210 |
| Other Leather and Allied Product Manufacturing                          | 316990 |
| Toilet Preparation Manufacturing                                        | 325620 |
| Jewelry and Silverware Manufacturing                                    | 339910 |
| Jewelry, Watch, Precious Stone, and Precious Metal Merchant Wholesalers | 423940 |
| Piece Goods, Notions, and Other Dry Goods Merchant Wholesalers          | 424310 |
| Footwear Merchant Wholesalers                                           | 424340 |
| Clothing and Clothing Accessories Merchant Wholesalers                  | 424350 |
| Other Specialized Design Services                                       | 541490 |
| <b>FINE ARTS SCHOOLS</b>                                                |        |
| Fine Arts Schools                                                       | 611610 |
| <b>FURNITURE, TOYS &amp; DECORATIVE ARTS</b>                            |        |
| Carpet and Rug Mills                                                    | 314110 |
| Curtain and Linen Mills                                                 | 314120 |
| Textile Bag and Canvas Mills                                            | 314910 |
| Rope, Cordage, Twine, Tire Cord, and Tire Fabric Mills                  | 314994 |
| All Other Miscellaneous Textile Product Mills                           | 314999 |
| Pottery, Ceramics, and Plumbing Fixture Manufacturing                   | 327110 |
| Other Pressed and Blown Glass and Glassware Manufacturing               | 327212 |
| All Other Miscellaneous Nonmetallic Mineral Product Manufacturing       | 327999 |
| Wood Kitchen Cabinet and Countertop Manufacturing                       | 337110 |
| Upholstered Household Furniture Manufacturing                           | 337121 |
| Nonupholstered Wood Household Furniture Manufacturing                   | 337122 |
| Household Furniture (except Wood and Upholstered) Manufacturing         | 337126 |
| Institutional Furniture Manufacturing                                   | 337127 |

| INDUSTRY CATEGORY AND DESCRIPTION                                                 | NAICS  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Wood Office Furniture Manufacturing                                               | 337211 |
| Custom Architectural Woodwork and Millwork Manufacturing                          | 337212 |
| Office Furniture (except Wood) Manufacturing                                      | 337214 |
| Showcase, Partition, Shelving, and Locker Manufacturing                           | 337215 |
| Mattress Manufacturing                                                            | 337910 |
| Blind and Shade Manufacturing                                                     | 337920 |
| Doll, Toy, and Game Manufacturing                                                 | 339930 |
| Furniture Merchant Wholesalers                                                    | 423210 |
| Home Furnishing Merchant Wholesalers                                              | 423220 |
| Toy and Hobby Goods and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers                             | 423920 |
| <b>PUBLISHING &amp; PRINTING</b>                                                  |        |
| Commercial Printing (except Screen and Books)                                     | 323111 |
| Commercial Screen Printing                                                        | 323113 |
| Books Printing                                                                    | 323117 |
| Support Activities for Printing                                                   | 323120 |
| Book, Periodical, and Newspaper Merchant Wholesalers                              | 424920 |
| Newspaper Publishers                                                              | 513110 |
| Periodical Publishers                                                             | 513120 |
| Book Publishers                                                                   | 513130 |
| Directory and Mailing List Publishers                                             | 513140 |
| Greeting Card Publishers                                                          | 513191 |
| All Other Publishers                                                              | 513199 |
| Libraries and Archives                                                            | 519210 |
| <b>VISUAL &amp; PERFORMING ARTS</b>                                               |        |
| Musical Instrument Manufacturing                                                  | 339992 |
| Art Dealers                                                                       | 459920 |
| Theater Companies and Dinner Theaters                                             | 711110 |
| Dance Companies                                                                   | 711120 |
| Musical Groups and Artists                                                        | 711130 |
| Other Performing Arts Companies                                                   | 711190 |
| Agents and Managers for Artists, Athletes, Entertainers, and Other Public Figures | 711410 |
| Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers                                      | 711510 |
| Museums                                                                           | 712110 |

\*Note: In addition to the NAICS codes used to define Visual & Performing Arts, employment figures were adjusted to include three major arts and culture institutions at University of California, Berkeley, that would otherwise fall under the broader "colleges and universities" classification: Cal Performances, the Greek Theatre, and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Employment data was provided by these entities directly.

## A.2: BERKELEY BUSINESS COUNT METHODOLOGY

Data on Total Businesses is sourced from the City of Berkeley Active Business License (BL) dataset. Total Nonprofit data is sourced from the Internal Revenue Service Tax-Exempt Organizations Business Masterfile (IRS EO BMF).

### Total Business Count

The BL file provides the most comprehensive and locally specific inventory of business establishments available, capturing sole proprietorships, small enterprises, and other entities that are often excluded from federal datasets. While we know the BL file omits some arts organizations noted above, the reported total of 12,783 businesses is likely only a modest undercount. Even with this limitation, the BL dataset remains the most robust and locally accurate source for understanding the full scope of business activity in the city.

We benchmark the BL dataset against two other common sources for business counts: the U.S. Census Bureau County Business Patterns (CBP), which captures only employer establishments with payroll (and thus undercounts small nonprofits) and carries a 2-year reporting lag; and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), which provides establishment counts for payroll businesses at the county, metropolitan statistical area (MSA), and state levels (Figure A.2.2).

FIGURE A.2.1 TOTAL BUSINESS COUNT CROSS-REFERENCES IN BERKELEY

| SOURCE                     | REGION          | TOTAL BUSINESSES | TOTAL ARTS & CULTURE BUSINESSES |
|----------------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Berkeley Active BLs (2025) | Berkeley        | 12,783           | 650                             |
| CBP Establishments (2023)  | Berkeley        | 4,279            | 139                             |
| QCEW Establishments (2024) | Alameda County* | 71,737           | 2,335                           |

\*For reference, Berkeley employment accounts for about 10% of total Alameda County employment.

### Nonprofit Organization Count

The IRS EO BMF is a national database of organizations recognized as tax-exempt under section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code. This dataset is updated monthly and serves as the most comprehensive listing of nonprofit entities in the U.S. It includes key information such as Employer Identification Number (EIN), ruling date, subsection designation, filing status, and industry. For analytic purposes, the IRS dataset is widely used to benchmark the size and scope of the nonprofit sector because it applies consistent classification standards across jurisdictions and time periods. For this analysis, arts-related nonprofits were identified using National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) codes in the "A" category (Arts, Culture, and Humanities), which map onto the industry NAICS codes used to define the creative economy.

CVL Economics uses the IRS file for nonprofit counts. The Berkeley BL dataset lists only 63 arts and culture nonprofits, which is a smaller number than what is present in the IRS findings. For example, several organizations known to be operational in Berkeley are not listed in the BL spreadsheet. In addition, the 2017 Arts and Culture Plan Update 2018–2027 indicates 152 arts nonprofits in Berkeley. In this context, the IRS count of 193 arts and culture nonprofits appears most consistent with the broader evidence presented in the table below (Figure A.2.2).

FIGURE A.2.2 NONPROFIT COUNT CROSS-REFERENCES IN BERKELEY

| SOURCE                                                                                 | TOTAL NONPROFITS | TOTAL ARTS & CULTURE NONPROFITS |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| IRS Tax-Exempt Organization Masterfile (2025)                                          | 1,407            | 193                             |
| City of Berkeley Active Business Licenses (2025)                                       | 634              | 63                              |
| City of Berkeley Internal Compiled Arts & Culture Organization List (2025)*            | n/a              | 187                             |
| Arts and Culture Plan Update - Economic Impact Report of the Arts in Berkeley (2017)** | n/a              | 152                             |
| City of Berkeley Pandemic Relief and Recovery Grant Recipients (2025)***               | n/a              | 71                              |

\* An internal list of organizations compiled by the City of Berkeley that includes those listed in the City internal database (such as the Civic Arts Operating Grant program), organizations compiled by Visit Berkeley, and members of the Berkeley Cultural Trust.

\*\* An economic impact report conducted in 2017 on the impact of Berkeley arts and culture nonprofit organizations, see section A.5 below.

\*\*\*In 2020 and 2022, the City of Berkeley issued pandemic relief and recovery grants in response to the devastating toll of the COVID-19 pandemic. Grants were issued to 88 Berkeley-based nonprofit arts and culture organizations, of which 71 are still operating today.

### Additional Data References on Berkeley's Arts and Culture Nonprofit Composition

Note that the methodology above estimates that 30% of creative economy businesses and 11% of total businesses (All Industries) are nonprofit organizations. To further benchmark this composition, we draw on the BLS Nonprofit Establishment Employment and Wage Estimates dataset. While that dataset is limited to state, county, or Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) geographies, offers limited NAICS detail, and the most recent data year is 2022, it supports benchmarking for the creative economy using NAICS 711 (Performing Arts)—Berkeley's largest creative sector. When we adjust the business-count methodology above to focus on Performing Arts (NAICS 711), about 28% of Berkeley's Performing Arts businesses are nonprofits. This is comparable to the shares shown in Figure A.2.3.

FIGURE A.2.3 BLS NONPROFIT ESTABLISHMENT EMPLOYMENT AND WAGE ESTIMATES (2022)

| REGION         | PERCENT TOTAL BUSINESSES NONPROFIT | PERCENT NAICS 711 BUSINESSES NONPROFIT | PERCENT TOTAL EMPLOYMENT NONPROFIT | PERCENT NAICS 711 EMPLOYMENT NONPROFIT |
|----------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Alameda County | 4%                                 | 22%                                    | 9%                                 | 25.1%                                  |
| Bay Area MSA   | 4%                                 | 23%                                    | 9%                                 | 36.8%                                  |
| California     | 2%                                 | 4%                                     | 8%                                 | 15.8%                                  |

## Methodology Considerations

IRS nonprofit filings and City active business licenses are based on different reporting systems. IRS counts reflect the number of federally recognized nonprofit entities, whereas business license data reflects locally registered operations. The IRS EO BMF dataset is therefore a more standardized and comprehensive source for counting nonprofit organizations because it captures all federally recognized tax-exempt entities, regardless of local business-license status.

Some nonprofits may not appear in City records due to reporting gaps, classification issues, or exemptions from local registration requirements, yet they will still appear in the IRS file as long as their tax-exempt status is active. For measuring the nonprofit landscape—especially for standardization and comparisons across jurisdictions and time periods—the IRS dataset is the most reliable count, while City BL data remains valuable for the broader local business context. Although these measures are not perfectly interchangeable, together they provide useful benchmarks on the scale and structure of the City of Berkeley's creative economy.

## A.3: CREATIVE ECONOMY EMPLOYMENT DOCUMENTATION

Measuring employment in the creative economy requires going beyond traditional payroll data sources. Standard datasets, such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), provide a solid baseline for tracking salaried jobs, but they capture only part of the picture. Creative work often falls outside of conventional salaried employer–employee arrangements, relying instead on independent contracting, self-employment, and gig labor. To produce a more accurate account of the sector, our analysis incorporates multiple employment categories, each drawn from established federal datasets that are widely used in labor market research and economic modeling.

**Salaried Jobs:** QCEW is the most widely used dataset for measuring local employment. It is based on administrative records from unemployment insurance (UI) programs, which employers are legally required to file for most payroll workers. Additional salaried employment is derived from administrative and statistical adjustments that capture payroll jobs not covered by UI programs. These include W-2 employees at organizations exempt from UI reporting requirements, such as certain small nonprofits, charitable or community-based organizations, and religious institutions.

- **Includes:** Full- and part-time payroll jobs.

**Self-Employed Jobs:** Measured using IRS tax filings (Schedule C income) and Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) data on proprietorships. Represents individuals whose primary income comes from operating their own business.

- **Includes:** Sole proprietors, freelancers, and independent contractors whose primary source of income is generated from their own enterprises.

**Gig Jobs:** Derived from the U.S. Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics (NES) dataset and supplemented by BEA adjustments. Represents secondary or contingent forms of work where individuals may earn supplemental income through short-term, project-based, or part-time activities.

- **Includes:** Freelancers, independent contractors, and sole proprietors engaged in gig-style or occasional work. Often counted in addition to a primary payroll or self-employed job.

Together, these categories ensure that creative employment is not undercounted and that the analysis captures the full scale and impact of the creative workforce.

## A.4: ECONOMIC IMPACT METHODOLOGY

The foundational step in quantifying the economic impact of Berkeley's creative economy is the identification of the appropriate sectors that comprise the core—or "direct"—components of the industry (see industry classification in Appendix A.1).

Economic data are reported using the standardized North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which allows for consistency and comparability across datasets. No single NAICS code wholly encapsulates the creative economy. As a result, a curated list of relevant sectors was assembled.

The Industry Economic Accounts produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) are a key foundational data source for all input-output models. The BEA's tables provide a summary of how industries produce and consume commodities at the national level. The economic impact analysis in this report utilizes the industry-standard IMPLAN (Impact Analysis for Planning) software. IMPLAN is an input-output modeling system used to build economic models at various levels of geography. IMPLAN is widely used and recognized by government organizations, nonprofits, economic development organizations, workforce planners, education institutions, and consultants across the U.S. and Canada.

For this analysis, CVL Economics tailored the modeling framework specific to the creative economy to build an Input-Output (I-O) model to better account for market transactions, capture supply chains across regions, and more accurately estimate regional industry leakages. The impact analyses were estimated using a Multi-Regional Input-Output (MRIO) model, which expands upon the traditional I-O system to include various additional socioeconomic variables including sub-regional trade and income flows, commuting patterns, and household spending patterns between the City of Berkeley and the East Bay (Alameda and Contra Costa Counties).

Additionally, because Berkeley's creative economy comprises a significant portion of self-employed and gig workers, we adjusted the model to reflect the differences between these job structures. Salaried jobs typically generate greater and more stable economic impacts (through higher wages, benefits, and payroll taxes) while self-employed and gig work tends to involve lower and/or variable earnings and different tax treatment. By accounting for these differences, our model avoids overstating independent work while still recognizing its importance to the sector.

Within this framework, the following impacts are generated:

- **Direct effects** capture the employment, labor income, and value added generated by creative economy organizations and workers located in Berkeley.
- **Indirect effects** reflect the activity supported through the supply chain. IMPLAN estimates these based on regional purchasing patterns—how much, on average, businesses in a given sector spend on inputs from other industries within the study area.
- **Induced effects** reflect household spending by workers employed and supported by the creative industries. These are modeled from regional averages of consumer expenditure data (sourced from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Expenditure Survey), adjusted to the income distribution of the study region.

## A.5: DATA METHODOLOGY COMPARISONS TO 2017 ECONOMIC IMPACT REPORT

A previous economic impact report, the *Arts and Culture Plan Update — Economic Report of the Arts in Berkeley* (2017), provided the last benchmark for understanding the role of arts and culture in Berkeley's economy.<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that there are key differences between the methodology used in the 2017 analysis and this report, which means direct comparisons should be approached with caution. Notably, the 2017 study examined a sample of 100 nonprofit arts and culture organizations, while the current analysis covers the broader creative economy, including nonprofits, private firms, individual artists, and other creative enterprises.

The following distinctions should be noted regarding the results reported in Table 6 (on page 18) of the 2017 study. This analysis modeled nearly \$98 million in annual spending from the 100 nonprofits as the basis of its analysis. This produced estimates of 3,606 full-time equivalent (FTE) workers, \$80.8 million in labor income, and \$3.8 million in local tax revenue (including both City and County). By contrast, this current report captures the entire creative economy, counting 8,186 jobs (not converted to FTEs), which helps explain the larger overall economic contribution CVL Economics presents in the current report's findings.

The methodology behind these calculations of economic and fiscal impact also differs. The 2017 study used the Arts & Economic Prosperity Calculator 5 (AEP5), developed by Americans for the Arts. AEP5 measures the economic impact of nonprofit arts and cultural activity through a standardized input-output modeling framework. It combines locally reported organizational expenditures with audience spending data collected through on-site surveys, and then applies pre-set IMPLAN multipliers to estimate jobs, income, and local and state tax revenues. While this approach ensures consistency across participating communities, the calculator does not allow for adjustments to the unique structure of each local economy.

In comparison, the current study is modeled directly within the IMPLAN system, enabling customization to Berkeley's unique economic profile, including its composition of for-profit and non-profit organizations. This approach not only captures direct activity within Berkeley but also provides a breakout of the indirect and induced effects that ripple through the local economy and the broader East Bay as creative organizations and workers purchase goods and services and circulate income. This customization also allows for greater City-level detail on fiscal impact reporting.

Finally, the 2017 report added estimates of attendee spending on top of the modeled impact results, since they were able to capture attendee spending for their total sample of 100 organizations, using the SMU DataArts Cultural Data Profile and additional survey outreach. To ensure a process that can be standardized, we used the same approach to calculate visitor spending, but we treat these figures separately rather than folding them into the overall creative economy totals, recognizing that they represent only a sample of the wider ecosystem in this study.

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<sup>21</sup> See the 2017 report here: <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/Berkeley%20Arts%20Economic%20Impact%20Report.pdf>

# Berkeley Creative Economy Economic Impact Analysis

DECEMBER 2025

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



This report was made possible through the leadership and support of the City of Berkeley, including the Office of Economic Development and its Civic Arts Program, the Civic Arts Commission, and Berkeley City Council, whose commitment to advancing the city's creative and cultural vitality guided this work. We also extend our appreciation to the many nonprofit arts and culture organizations, creative practitioners, and community stakeholders who generously contributed their time, insights, and experiences.

## PREPARED BY:



CVL Economics is an economic consulting firm that takes a data-driven, human-centric approach to equitable development and sustainable growth. Founded in 2021, CVL Economics partners with communities, municipalities, organizations, and institutions to address today's most complex challenges and foster bold action. Coupling robust economic models with innovative research methodologies, we provide decision-makers with the actionable insights needed to effect change, expand opportunity, and improve economic well-being.





# Assessment of Berkeley Arts & Culture Pandemic Relief and Recovery Funding

DECEMBER 2025





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# CONTEXT



Between 2020 and 2022, the City of Berkeley awarded over \$3 million in emergency relief and recovery grants to arts and culture organizations and individual artists in Berkeley facing severe financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As one of the first municipalities to mobilize comprehensive support for the cultural sector, Berkeley's intervention provides a unique case study in crisis response for arts ecosystems operating in high-cost environments. Drawing on financial data, organizational surveys, and demographic analyses, this assessment examines both the immediate stabilization effects and longer-term outcomes of the City's emergency relief and sustained recovery investments, offering evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of targeted cultural relief strategies and the fundamental challenges facing creative communities during periods of economic disruption.

When the COVID-19 pandemic brought the Bay Area to a standstill in March 2020, the region's vibrant arts and culture sector—from intimate theaters and galleries to

community festivals and independent artists—faced an unprecedented crisis as venues shutdown, events were cancelled, and revenue streams vanished overnight. Recognizing the essential role of arts and culture in the city's identity and economy, the City of Berkeley quickly mobilized a series of emergency grant programs to support local artists, nonprofit organizations, and cultural institutions facing acute financial strain. Over the course of three years, the City awarded \$2.5 million to 88 organizations and \$523,089 to 193 individual artists and cultural workers (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The City directed resources with a focus on equity and accessibility to sustain creative work, preventing organizational closures and ensuring underrepresented communities remained at the center of recovery.

<sup>1</sup> To view the original documentation for these grants, see City of Berkeley, "Business and Arts Organization Continuity Grant Awards" (Off Agenda Report), April 27, 2020, <https://newspack-berkeleyside-cityside.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Business-and-Arts-Organization-Continuity-Grant-Programs-042720.docx-1.pdf>; and City of Berkeley, "Civic Arts Grants Program—Improved Practices & Community Impact" (includes Berkeley Art Works Project and Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants,), March 21, 2023, <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2023-03-21%20WS%20Item%2001%20Civic%20Arts%20Grants%20Program.pdf>.



Figure 1: Summary of Berkeley Pandemic Relief Funding Programs

|                                                                             | PROGRAM YEAR | NUMBER OF GRANTEES | AVERAGE GRANT AWARDED     | RECIPIENT TYPE                                                               | TOTAL AMOUNT AWARDED |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| ARTS ORGANIZATION CONTINUITY GRANTS                                         | 2020         | 63                 | \$15,151 organization     | Nonprofit or fiscally-sponsored arts and culture organizations               | \$954,543            |
| EAST BAY/OAKLAND RELIEF FUND FOR INDIVIDUALS IN THE ARTS*                   | 2020         | 47                 | \$1,372 per individual    | Individual artists and arts workers                                          | \$64,500             |
| BERKELEY ART WORKS PROJECT (BAWP)                                           | 2021         | 32                 | \$5,698 per individual    | Individual artists, performers, and community members                        | \$182,339            |
| BERKELEY ARTS RECOVERY GRANTS (BARG) FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS AND FESTIVALS   | 2022         | 74                 | \$20,707 per organization | Nonprofit or fiscally-sponsored arts and culture organizations and festivals | \$1,532,345          |
| BERKELEY ARTS RECOVERY GRANTS (BARG) FOR ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS | 2022         | 114                | \$2,423 per individual    | Individual artists, culture bearers, teaching artists                        | \$276,250            |
| <b>Total Amount Awarded to Arts &amp; Culture Individuals (2020-2022)</b>   |              |                    |                           |                                                                              | <b>\$523,089</b>     |
| <b>Total Amount Awarded to Arts &amp; Culture Organizations (2020-2022)</b> |              |                    |                           |                                                                              | <b>\$2,486,888</b>   |
| <b>Total Berkeley Pandemic Relief and Recovery Funding (2020-2022)</b>      |              |                    |                           |                                                                              | <b>\$3,009,977</b>   |

\* The East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund was a regional grant program administered by the Center for Cultural Innovation that provided grants to 515 artists and cultural workers across Alameda and Contra Costa counties. The table includes only the portion awarded to 47 individual Berkeley artist residents leveraged with City of Berkeley funds.

Source: City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.

These investments, totaling over \$3 million, were extraordinary in scale. By comparison, the City's annual Civic Arts Grants program distributes nearly \$700,000 to arts and culture organizations, festivals, and individuals in a typical year. The pandemic-era funding programs for arts and culture organizations and individuals granted more than \$1 million in 2020 and over \$1.8 million in 2022, more than doubling its Civic Arts Grants investment in a typical year. For many Berkeley organizations and individual artists, the pandemic relief and recovery programs were more than simply helpful—they meant the difference between shuttering permanently and surviving long enough to rebuild.

## SCALE OF COVID-19 DISRUPTION

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a wave of regionally mandated closures that reshaped daily life and severely disrupted arts and cultural activity. Berkeley is just one of three cities in California that operates its own public health department separate from the county, with an independent Health Officer who has the authority to issue local health orders.<sup>2</sup> During the pandemic, this meant that while the City often issued orders in alignment with Alameda County, it also at times acted earlier, leaving city residents and businesses subject to mandates that on occasion differed from neighboring cities and counties.

On March 17, 2020, Berkeley joined Alameda County and five other Bay Area counties to issue shelter-in-place orders, two days before Governor Newsom's statewide order on March 19. Under these orders, residents were required to remain in their places of residence except to perform essential activities. All non-essential business—like retail, entertainment, cultural, and recreational facilities—had to close to the public. This marked the beginning of what would become one of the most disruptive periods of widespread closures and halted activity in recent history.

In this environment of sudden and prolonged shutdowns, the timing of Berkeley's pandemic support for arts organizations and individuals was especially critical (Figure 2). The first round of funding (Arts Organization Continuity Grants) for organizations distributed in May 2020 arrived at the height of shutdowns and, for many organizations, served as their first—and in some cases only—source of external aid. In parallel, the City also contributed to the East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund for Individuals in the Arts, a regional effort launched in May 2020 to provide direct

cash assistance to artists and cultural workers. These local dollars often reached grantees before county, state, or federal relief programs such as the California Arts Council's Cultural Organizations Emergency Relief Fund, Shuttered Venue Operators Grants, Alameda County Arts Relief Grants, and the Paycheck Protection Program.

It wasn't until October 2020 that the City of Berkeley, along with Alameda County, cautiously began reopening a wider range of businesses and community spaces to the public under strict capacity limits. New health order protocols could now allow businesses like museums, galleries, personal care services, libraries, places of worship, restaurants, and movie theaters to operate indoors at 25% capacity. These steps marked the first time many cultural and social gathering spaces could invite the public back, albeit in highly restricted forms.

However, this momentum was short-lived. In December, a resurgence of COVID-19 cases strained intensive care unit capacity to below 15%, which in turn triggered a new regional stay-at-home order and the closure of nearly all indoor sectors across Berkeley and Alameda County once again. As cases eased in early 2021 and vaccines became widely available, cultural and recreational facilities were gradually permitted to return in stages: first at 25% capacity, then 50%, and by the spring of 2021 up to 75%. By May 2021, many museums, galleries, and other indoor spaces were operating under these expanded limits. It was not until June 15, 2021—fifteen months after the first shutdown—that nearly all restrictions were finally lifted, and businesses across California could fully reopen.

Recognizing the toll of lost work opportunities on local

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<sup>2</sup> Sara Kassabian, "Berkeley is unusual in having its own public health division. How does that work during a pandemic?" *Berkeleyside*, April 15, 2020, <https://www.berkeleyside.org/2020/04/15/berkeley-is-unusual-in-having-its-own-public-health-division-how-does-that-work-during-a-pandemic>.



artists throughout this period, the City of Berkeley launched the Berkeley Arts Works Project (BAWP) in 2021, funded through the City's Cultural Trust Fund (Fund 148).<sup>3</sup> Modeled in spirit after the New Deal-era Works Progress Administration, which employed artists during the Great Depression to create public works, the program provided paid opportunities for artists, performers, and community members to produce temporary public artworks. These projects not only offered much needed income, but also fostered community healing by addressing themes of public health, resilience, and belonging at a time when many cultural venues were only beginning to reopen.

While the statewide June 2021 reopening marked a turning point for most cultural and recreational facilities, performing arts venues had endured some of the longest closures. Classified as among the highest-risk settings, they were the last to reopen, allowed to return only when the rest of the economy was cleared to resume operations. The Berkeley Repertory Theatre offers a vivid example of just how long the road back was for performing arts institutions. Despite the state's reopening in June, Berkeley Rep remained dark until November 12, 2021, when it finally welcomed audiences back with its production of *Wintertime*—a nearly 20-month closure from March 2020.

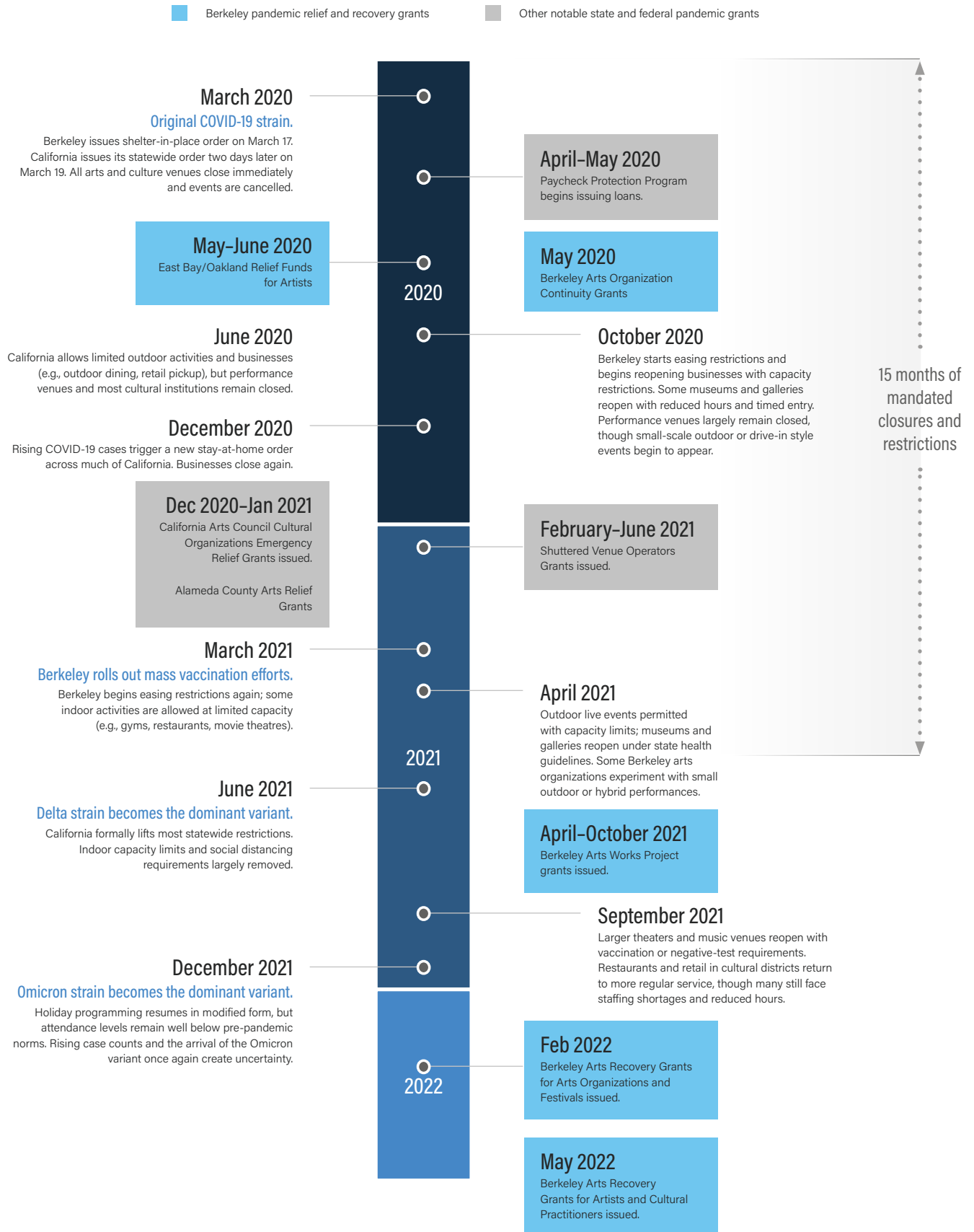
The City's next major rounds of recovery funding came through the Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants (BARG) two years later in 2022 (funded with American Rescue Plan Act dollars).<sup>4</sup> This program was available to both arts and culture organizations and individuals. The BARG program arrived at a moment when federal and state programs wound down and organizations were confronting new pressures: inflation, workforce shortages, and lower levels of consumer engagement that had not fully recovered since the pandemic.

Together, the launch of these programs over three years created a phased response that moved from emergency relief to longer-term recovery. This approach helped preserve Berkeley's cultural ecosystem and sustain its creative workforce during one of the most disruptive periods in recent history.

<sup>3</sup> The Cultural Trust Fund is a dedicated pool of City revenues that supports Berkeley's arts ecosystem through grants, public art, and cultural programming.

<sup>4</sup> The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), a \$1.9 trillion federal stimulus package enacted in March 2021, provided local governments with flexible State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to address public health and economic impacts of the pandemic, with a focus on disproportionately impacted communities. The City of Berkeley allocated a portion of these funds to support arts and culture organizations and individual cultural practitioners.

Figure 2: Timeline of COVID-19 Pandemic Relief & Recovery Grant Distribution



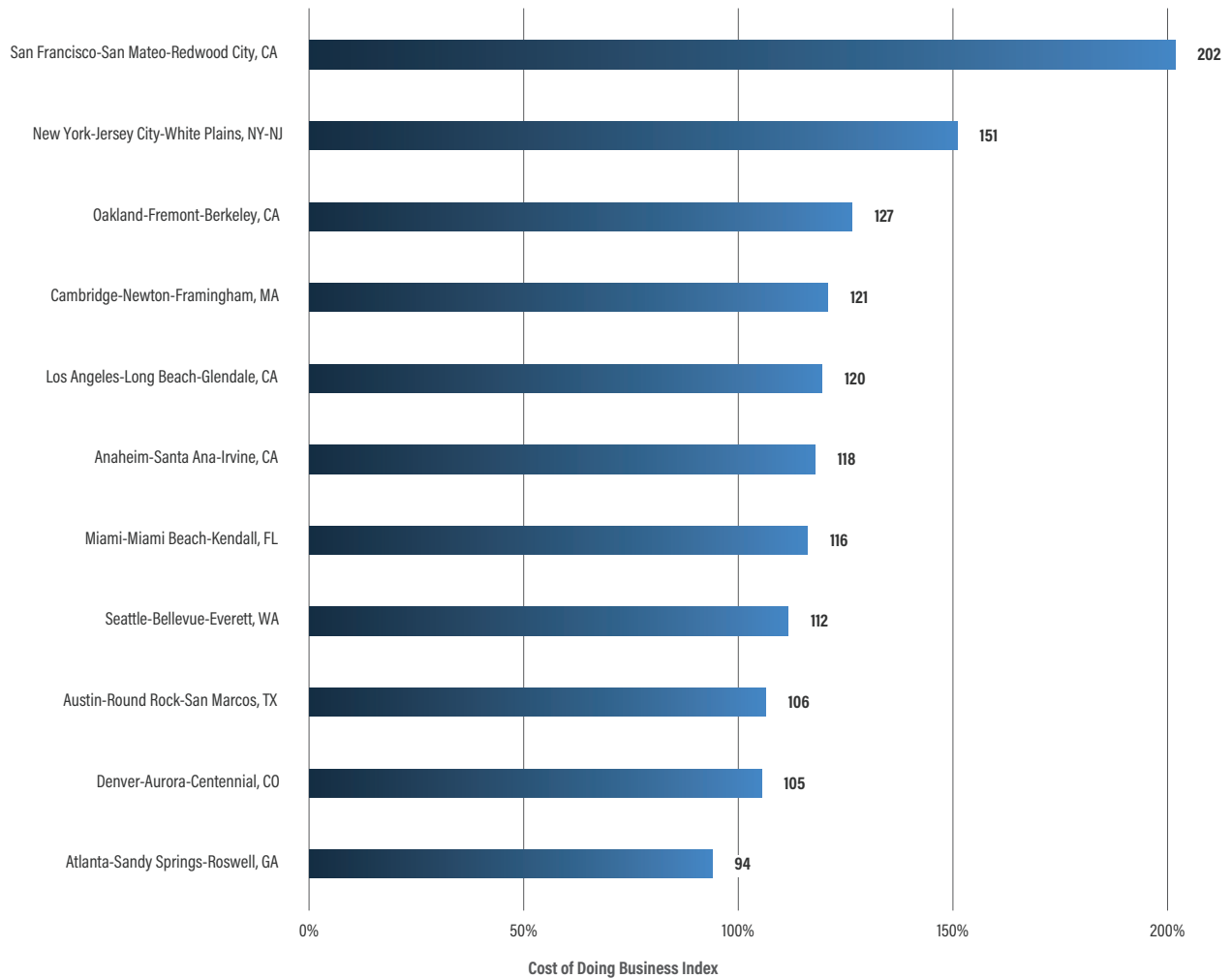
Source: CVL Economics.

At the same time, these prolonged closures exacerbated Berkeley's already exceptionally high-cost environment (Figure 3). The East Bay (comprising Alameda and Contra Costa counties, also known as the Oakland-Fremont-Berkeley metropolitan division) consistently ranks among the most expensive regions in the country—not just for households but also for employers. Berkeley arts and culture organizations must contend with some of the nation's highest commercial rents, utility costs, and taxes.

For nonprofit cultural organizations, the in-person experience is central to their survival. Earned income streams—such as ticket sales, performances, classes, festivals, gallery admissions, and space rentals—depend almost entirely on people gathering in shared physical

spaces. When COVID-19 forced those spaces to close, the entire business model of many arts groups collapsed overnight. Unlike some industries that could pivot to remote operations, much of Berkeley's arts and culture sector remained tied to in-person engagement. While many organizations worked hard to provide online content and cultural experiences, virtual substitutes could not replicate the community connection of live experiences nor meaningfully make up for revenue shortfalls. Moreover, many organizations continued to shoulder fixed costs, such as leases, insurance, and baseline staffing. The inability to shed these expenses during more than a year of shutdown meant reserves were rapidly depleted, forcing some organizations to suspend operations entirely.

Figure 3: Cost of Doing Business Index by Metropolitan Division | 2022



Note: The Cost of Doing Business Index is a Moody's Analytics calculation factoring in labor costs, energy costs, office rent, and tax burden in a given metropolitan division.

Source: Moody's Analytics, CVL Economics.

# KEY FINDINGS

## IMPACT OF BERKELEY'S PANDEMIC RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUNDING FOR ARTS & CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS

**Two rounds of Berkeley pandemic relief and recovery grant programs were administered to 88 arts and culture organizations, totaling almost \$2.5 million.**

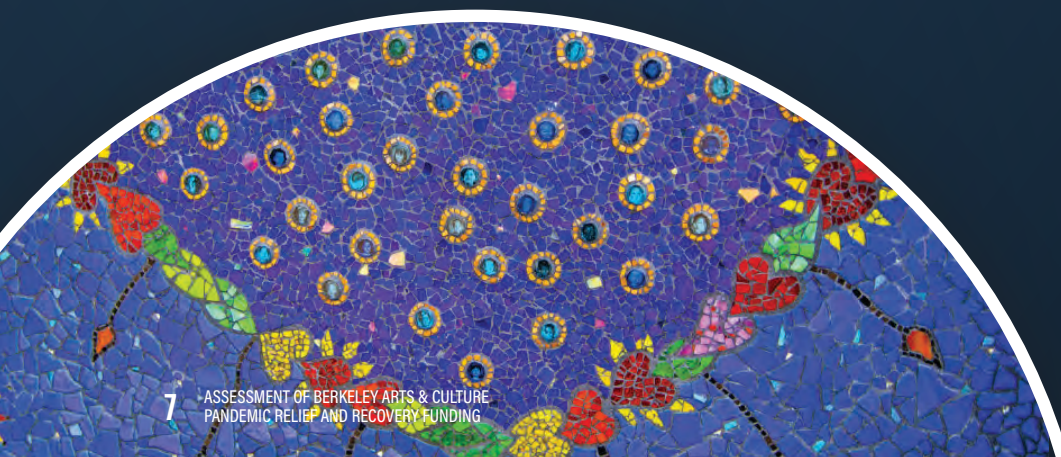
The two rounds were the Arts Organization Continuity Grants (\$954,543) in 2020 and the Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants (BARG) for Arts Organizations and Festivals (\$1.5 million) in 2022.

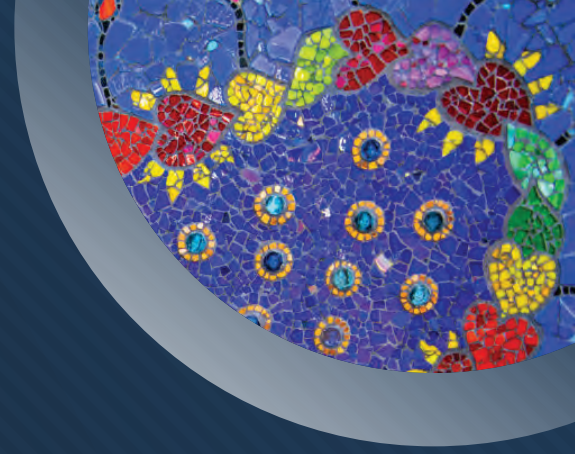
**Smaller organizations were the most vulnerable to initial pandemic disruptions.**

At the onset of the pandemic, organizations with annual budgets of \$500,000 or less saw their revenues drop by nearly 50% on average, compared to a 30% decline among mid-sized organizations (\$500k-\$1M) and about a 40% decline among large organizations (over \$1M). This sharper decline highlights how limited reserves and thinner margins left smaller organizations far more vulnerable to the initial shock.

**Relief and recovery funding was broadly seen as critical, helping most organizations avoid layoffs and business closure entirely.**

Nearly 83% of Arts Organization Continuity Grant (2020) and 90% of BARG (2022) recipients rated their Berkeley pandemic relief and recovery grant(s) as either "very helpful" or "essential." The remaining organizations, which were larger in size, described the funding as "moderately helpful." Importantly, the vast majority of grantees (up to 84%) credited the grants with preventing both organizational shutdowns and employee layoffs during the most acute months of the pandemic.





### **Arts Organization Continuity Grants (2020) served as an immediate lifeline.**

Issued at the height of uncertainty in May 2020, these grants kept doors open during the first wave of shutdowns. Arts Organization Continuity Grants reached organizations before many other federal, state, and local relief programs. However, their impact tended to be short-term: most grantees (84%) stated funds sustained operations for less than six months, 11% said funds lasted 6-12 months, and just 5% stated funds lasted a year or more. Even so, the immediacy of this funding was critical; more organizations attributed the Arts Organization Continuity Grant as helping them avoid layoffs (85%) and closures (84%) than the BARG (2022) program. Over half of the recipients stated the grants helped them survive the pandemic period but left no lasting impact.

### **Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants (2022) offered stabilization and transformation.**

Distributed in a more stable but still challenging environment in 2022, BARG enabled longer-term planning and adaptation. 22% of recipients stated the funding lasted 6–12 months, and 11% reported funding lasting a year or more. Nearly one in five (19%) described the grants as transformative—compared to just 5% of Arts Organization Continuity grantees—and almost half (48%) credited the funds with helping them stabilize and make strategic changes. 70% of BARG recipients credited the grant for avoiding layoffs and 74% for avoiding business closure.

### **Many arts & culture organizations received both rounds of funding, which extended impact beyond any single cycle.**

A majority of grantees (49 of 88) benefited from receiving both the 2020 Arts Organization Continuity Grant and the 2022 BARG. This sequencing mattered: the first round provided a lifeline in the immediate aftermath of shutdowns, while the second arrived during a difficult reopening phase marked by inflation, workforce shifts, and lagging consumer engagement. Taken together, the two rounds of support compounded one another, allowing organizations not only to survive the immediate crisis but also to weather the prolonged and unpredictable recovery period. In this way, limited local dollars stretched across multiple years of disruption, amplifying their effect far beyond what a single grant cycle could have achieved.

## IMPACT OF BERKELEY'S PANDEMIC RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUNDING FOR ARTS & CULTURE INDIVIDUALS<sup>5</sup>

### Three Berkeley pandemic relief and recovery grant programs were administered to arts and culture individuals residing and practicing in Berkeley, totaling over \$520,000.

The three programs were the East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund (\$64,500 to Berkeley residents) in 2020, the Berkeley Art Works Project (BAWP; \$182,339) in 2021, and the BARG for Artists and Cultural Practitioners (\$276,250) in 2022.

While the East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund (2020) and BARG (2022) programs provided unrestricted funds to Berkeley's arts and culture workers, BAWP (2021) supported paid temporary visual and performing arts projects in public spaces. Instead of serving as direct stimulus assistance, BAWP (inspired by the Depression-era Works Progress Administration) functioned more like traditional income, employing artists who might otherwise have been working locally in theaters or other cultural venues, and redirecting their talents into community-based creative projects.

### Individual grants covered the equivalent of up to nearly four months of housing costs.

Grants provided immediate relief for artists facing significant reductions in income, often covering essential living costs like rent, groceries, and medical bills. When measured against the median individual housing cost in Berkeley (\$1,100/month), the impact becomes clear: East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund awards covered over one month of housing, BARG awards covered more than two months, and BAWP awards stretched nearly four months. Even this short-term coverage of basic living expenses mattered enormously for artists, and in some cases represented the difference between staying in Berkeley or being displaced.

### Relief and recovery programs advanced equity and reached those most impacted.

Grants were mostly awarded to historically underrepresented artists, including Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and multi-racial cultural workers. More than half of grantees reported losing at least 50% of their arts-related income in 2020, with nearly one-quarter losing 90–100%, showing funding reached those in greatest need.

<sup>5</sup> While pandemic relief funding supported both organizations and individuals, this assessment focuses primarily on organizations. Relief to individual artists in Berkeley was important, and a high-level assessment is included, however the anonymity of individual grant awards limited the availability of detailed data. In addition, organizations serve as anchors for artists and the community and are more deeply established within communities, making their stability a clearer lens into the overall health of the creative ecosystem.



## LONG-TERM OUTCOMES FOR ARTS & CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS

### **Every \$1 in City funding leveraged at least \$5.64 in ongoing arts and culture economic activity.**

The City's \$2.5 million investment in arts and culture organizations during the years spanning 2020 to 2022 helped safeguard more than \$12.9 million in arts and culture revenue that otherwise would have been lost. This translates to every \$1 of City pandemic emergency funding having leveraged at least \$5.64 in arts and culture economic activity. This return captures not only the direct operations of arts and culture organizations, but also the ripple effects through local suppliers, contractors, and service providers.

### **17 of the 88 grantee organizations or 19% (of both relief and recovery programs to arts and culture organizations) closed permanently between 2020–2024, the majority of which were very small organizations.**

Nine of the 28 grantee organizations with operating budgets under \$100,000 closed, the highest number of any group. But large organizations were also not immune; two of the 13 institutions with revenues between \$1M-\$2M also shut down, as did two of the 11 organizations with operating budgets over \$2 million. This pattern shows that while scale and resources provided some resilience, no segment of the sector was fully insulated. The loss of larger organizations—typically those with the broadest audiences or consumer base, most extensive programming, and greatest fundraising capacity—underscore the vulnerability of even the city's established cultural institutions.

### **Revenue for the 71 surviving grantees sits 9% below pre-pandemic levels, though the 62 smaller surviving organizations, with budgets less than \$2 million, fared relatively better over time.**

In 2024, grantee median revenue sat 9% below the 2019 benchmark. That said, smaller grantee organizations that are still operational have fared relatively better over time than their larger peers. For many of these groups, Berkeley's relief and recovery funds represented a substantial share of their annual budgets—sometimes covering the bulk of operating revenue in a given year. This scale of support often made the difference between survival and closure, allowing small organizations not only to stay afloat but also to begin rebuilding sooner than larger institutions, which in some cases remain more deeply destabilized.

**The 9 larger organizations with budgets over \$2 million that received grant funding faced deeper structural challenges, with current revenues sitting 33% below pre-pandemic levels.**

For larger organizations, City relief and recovery grants accounted for a smaller share of overall budgets, limiting their ability to offset the steep financial shocks of the pandemic. As a result, for organizations with operating budgets over \$1 million, funding was often described as moderately helpful rather than transformative. By 2024, revenues at these larger organizations remained one-third below 2019 benchmarks—far below the average 9% decline across all grantees.

**Broader economic challenges are compounding strain across Berkeley arts organizations of all sizes.**

Expenses have risen much faster than income, and earned revenue has been slow to rebound, leaving organizations more reliant on contributed income. Additionally, performing arts venues in particular continue to struggle with reduced attendance and shrinking subscriber bases. As a result of both of these factors, and a changed federal funding for the arts landscape, competition for public sector and philanthropic support has intensified, making recovery uneven, precarious, and difficult for arts organizations. Compounding these challenges, downtown revitalization struggles—including empty storefronts, reduced foot traffic, and heightened safety and transportation concerns—have made it more difficult for some arts venues to fully reestablish themselves as hubs of community life.

Together, these findings illustrate that while the pandemic-era grants were not sufficient in resolving every financial challenge for Berkeley’s artists and arts organizations, they served as a lifeline. For many organizations, relief and recovery funding was the difference between survival and closure during unprecedented times, ensuring that Berkeley’s arts and culture ecosystem remained intact long enough to begin navigating the long road to recovery.



# PANDEMIC RELIEF AND RECOVERY FOR ARTS & CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS

Eighty-eight arts and culture organizations received at least one of the two pandemic relief and recovery grants, with 49 organizations receiving both the Arts Organization Continuity Grant in 2020 and BARG in 2022 (Figure 4). Together, these programs directed nearly \$2.5 million in emergency support to the sector, which provided targeted financial assistance to help organizations weather immediate losses, retain staff, and adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

## ARTS ORGANIZATION CONTINUITY GRANTS (2020)

In response to the immediate financial crisis faced by arts organizations during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Berkeley launched the Arts Organization Continuity Grants program in March 2020. This program was funded directly by the City of Berkeley's General Fund Catastrophic Reserve. The program ultimately awarded \$954,53 in emergency funding to 63 local nonprofit arts organizations. Grants of up to \$25,000 (with an average award of approximately \$15,150) were distributed in May 2020 to organizations that demonstrated a loss of at least 25% in earned revenue, such as ticket sales, class fees, or venue rentals.

The program was designed as emergency gap funding to stabilize organizations experiencing acute financial hardship. Eligibility was limited to Berkeley-based organizations with a mission focused on the development or presentation of arts and culture, including fiscally sponsored entities. In keeping with the City's 2018 Arts & Culture Plan and commitment to cultural equity, applications were evaluated not only on financial need but also on equity-centered criteria, such as whether the organization worked primarily with artists from historically marginalized communities, served underrepresented audiences, operated in geographically underserved parts of Berkeley, or had a staff and board composition reflective of diverse communities.

## BERKELEY ARTS RECOVERY GRANTS FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS AND FESTIVALS (2022)

In 2022, the City of Berkeley distributed over \$1.5 million in one-time Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants (BARG) to 74 nonprofit arts organizations and recurring festivals as part of its broader pandemic recovery strategy. Funded by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars, the BARG program was designed to support sustainable recovery for Berkeley's arts sector after nearly two years of widespread disruption in the sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Award amounts ranged from \$3,000 to \$33,000, with an average award of approximately \$20,700 per organization.

Eligible applicants included Berkeley-based nonprofit or fiscally sponsored arts organizations and recurring festivals that had experienced a decline in revenue between 2019 and 2020. Awards were determined through a scoring system that prioritized organizations serving or led by historically marginalized communities, with 70% of the evaluation focused on cultural equity factors such as programming by or for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, low-income, disabled, senior, or unhoused populations. Funds could be used to offset lost revenue, support safe reopening efforts, or invest in long-term sustainability through marketing, consulting, or business planning.

Figure 4: Summary of Berkeley Pandemic Relief and Recovery Grants for Arts & Culture Organizations

|                                                                           | PROGRAM YEAR | RECIPIENT TYPE                                                               | NUMBER OF GRANTEES | TOTAL AMOUNT AWARDED | AVERAGE GRANT AWARDED |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| ARTS ORGANIZATION CONTINUITY GRANTS                                       | 2020         | Nonprofit or fiscally-sponsored arts and culture organizations               | 63                 | \$954,543            | \$15,151              |
| BERKELEY ARTS RECOVERY GRANTS (BARG) FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS AND FESTIVALS | 2022         | Nonprofit or fiscally-sponsored arts and culture organizations and festivals | 74                 | \$1,532,345          | \$20,707              |

Source: City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.



## PANDEMIC RELIEF AND RECOVERY GRANT IMPACT FOR ARTS & CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS

Although grantees varied in focus, size, and diversity, all Berkeley organizations faced acute financial hardships resulting from the pandemic, and for many, this persists into the present day. The scale of these challenges is underscored by the grantees themselves, who reported widespread disruptions to programming, facilities, and core revenue streams as the pandemic unfolded.

To better understand how Berkeley's pandemic relief and recovery funding shaped the local arts ecosystem, CVL Economics surveyed grantee organizations. Of the 88 organizations that received support through the Arts Organization Continuity Grant (2020) or the Berkeley Arts Recovery Grant (BARG; 2022), 30 completed the survey, providing valuable insights into both the immediate and lasting effects of the City's investment.<sup>6</sup>

### COVID-19 Disruptions

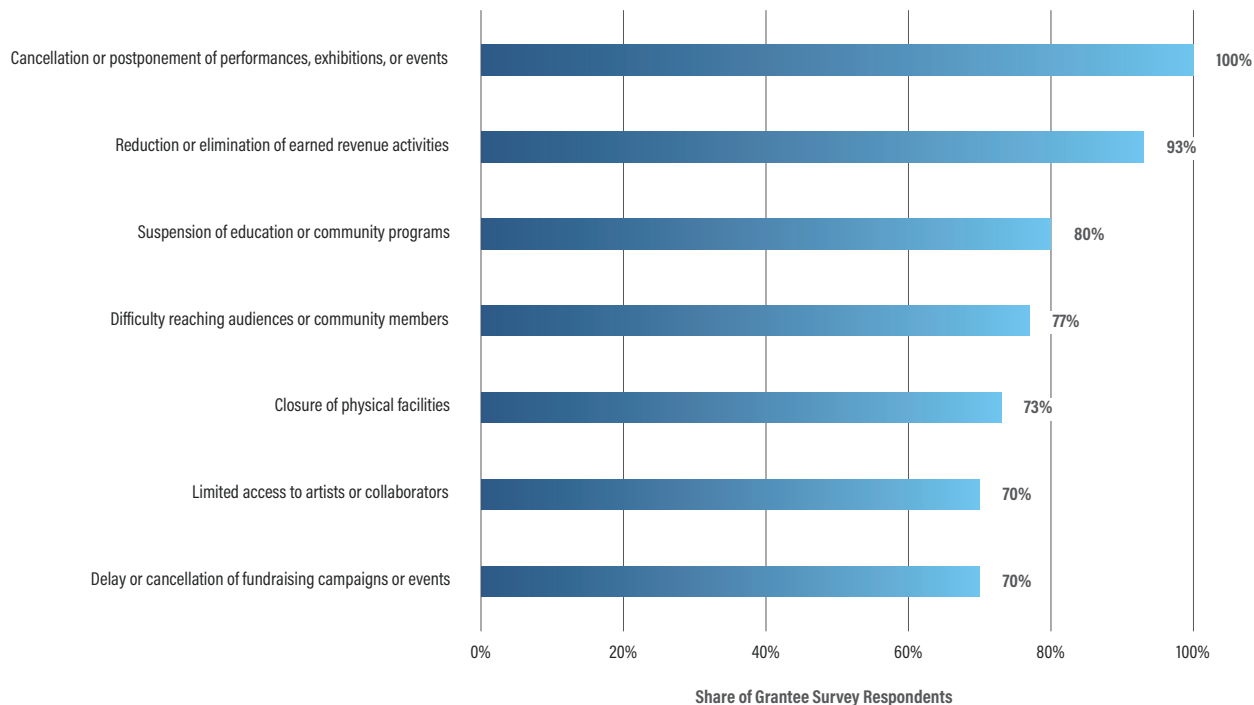
At the onset of the pandemic in mid-March 2020, every grantee organization had to cancel or postpone performances, exhibitions, or events. In a survey of grant recipients conducted five years later, in June 2025, 80% reported suspended education or community programs; and more than 73% were forced to close their physical facilities, resulting in the reduction or elimination of key earned revenue activities (Figure 5). Another 70% reported having to delay or cancel critical fundraising campaigns, cutting off vital revenue streams at a moment when operational expenses remained constant or, in some cases, increased due to safety measures.

Community connection was also severely disrupted by the pandemic in Berkeley. Nearly 77% of respondents reported difficulties reaching audiences or community members, a challenge compounded by the digital divide and the learning curve associated with pivoting to online programming. Limited access to artists, collaborators, and essential partners was cited by 70% of organizations, underscoring how the pandemic fractured the networks that sustain creative production.

The employment landscape in Berkeley in this sector shifted dramatically as well (Figure 6). Forty-three percent (43%) of arts organizations implemented temporary layoffs or furloughs, 40% imposed hiring freezes, and 13% faced permanent position eliminations. These staffing impacts not only affected the livelihoods of arts workers but also reduced organizational capacity, making recovery more difficult even after restrictions eased.

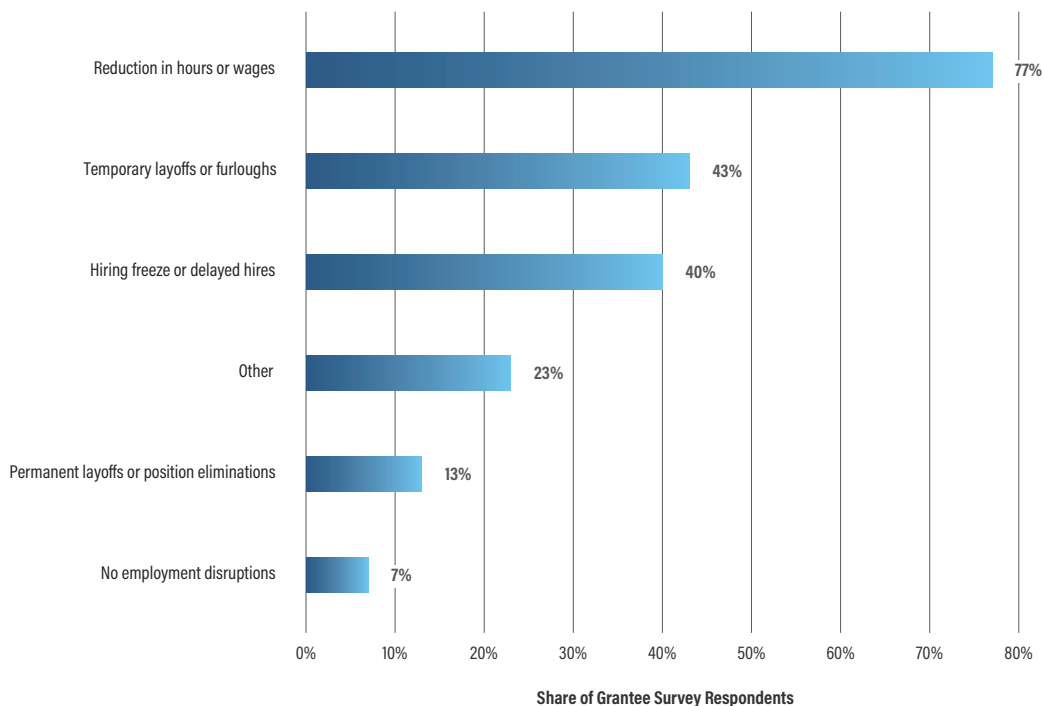
<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A.1 for more details on survey methodology.

Figure 5: Immediate COVID-19 Disruptions Experienced by Berkeley Arts Organizations



N=30  
Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

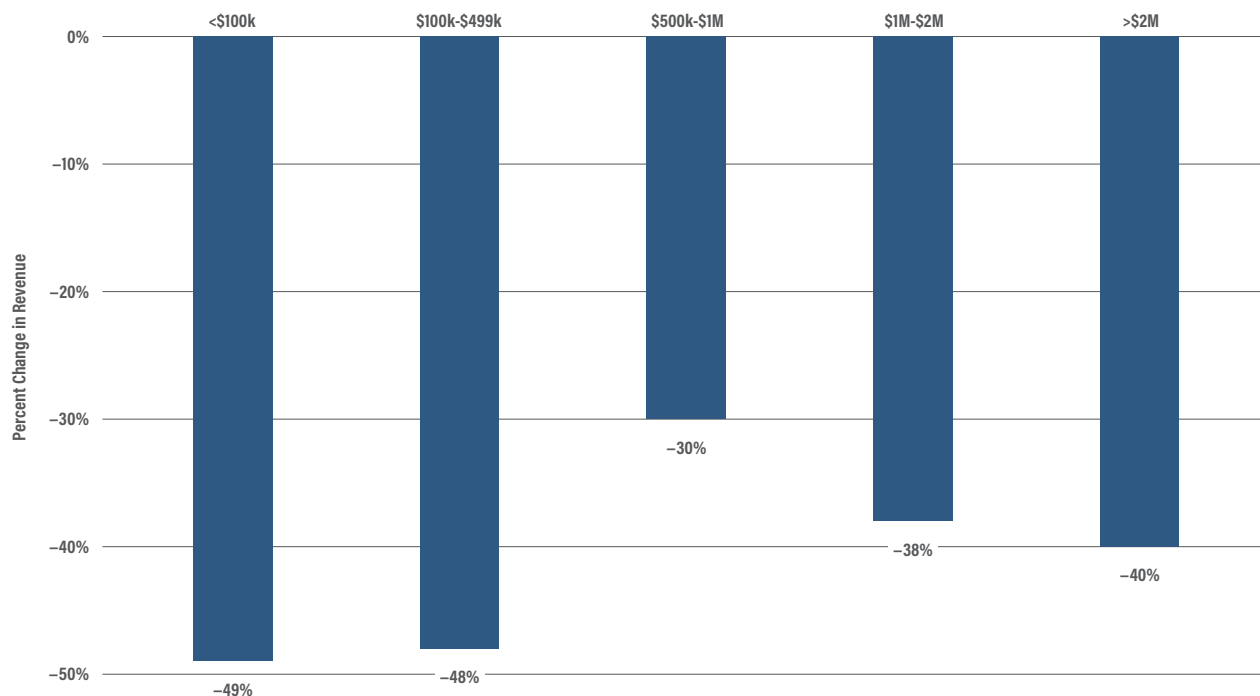
Figure 6: Immediate COVID-19 Employment Disruptions Experienced by Berkeley Arts Organizations



N=30  
Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

The financial toll of these disruptions is reflected in the immediate revenue loss experienced by grantee organizations (Figure 7). Across the 74 BARG grantees, average revenue fell by 44% between 2019 and 2020. The depth of these losses varied significantly by organization size. The smallest organizations—those with annual budgets under \$100,000—were hit the hardest, with revenues dropping nearly 50% on average. Mid-sized organizations with budgets between \$500,000 and \$1 million saw the least severe declines, though they still averaged a 30% loss. Large organizations with budgets over \$2 million were not immune either, facing an average revenue reduction of 40% at the onset of the pandemic.

Figure 7: Grantee Revenue Loss by Organization Size | 2019–2020



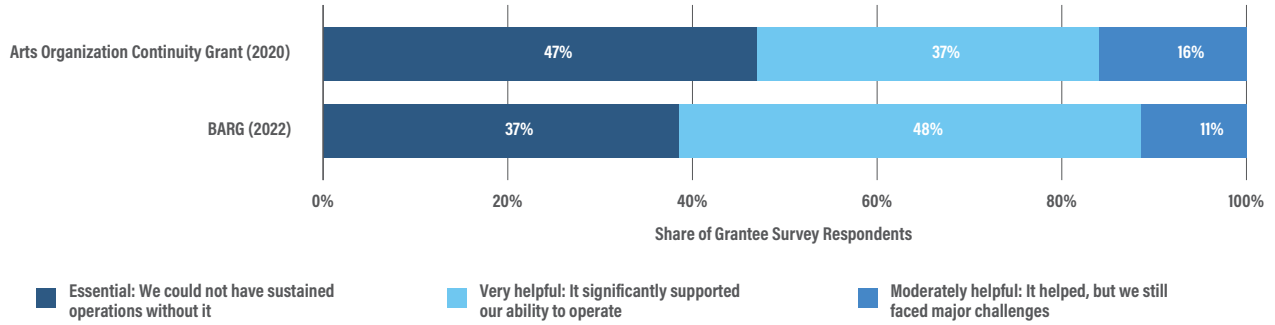
Source: City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.

## IMMEDIATE IMPACTS: ROLE OF PANDEMIC RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUNDING

Berkeley’s pandemic relief and recovery grants for arts and cultural organizations were not just helpful but essential for many grantees (Figure 8). Nearly half of Arts Organization Continuity Grant recipients (47%) and more than a third of BARG recipients (37%) said they could not have sustained operations without the grant. Another 37% of Arts Organization Continuity Grant recipients and 48% of BARG grantees reported that the funding was very helpful, significantly supporting their ability to continue operating.

The grants played a pivotal role in preventing widespread layoffs and closures. Eighty-four percent (84%) of Arts Organization Continuity Grant recipients and 70% of BARG recipients said the grants helped them avoid workforce reductions, protecting jobs during the most precarious months of the pandemic (Figure 9). Similarly, 84% of Arts Organization Continuity Grant recipients and 74% of BARG recipients said the funding prevented them from permanently shutting down (Figure 10).

Figure 8: Extent to Which Pandemic Relief and Recovery Funding Was Essential Among Berkeley’s Grant Recipients

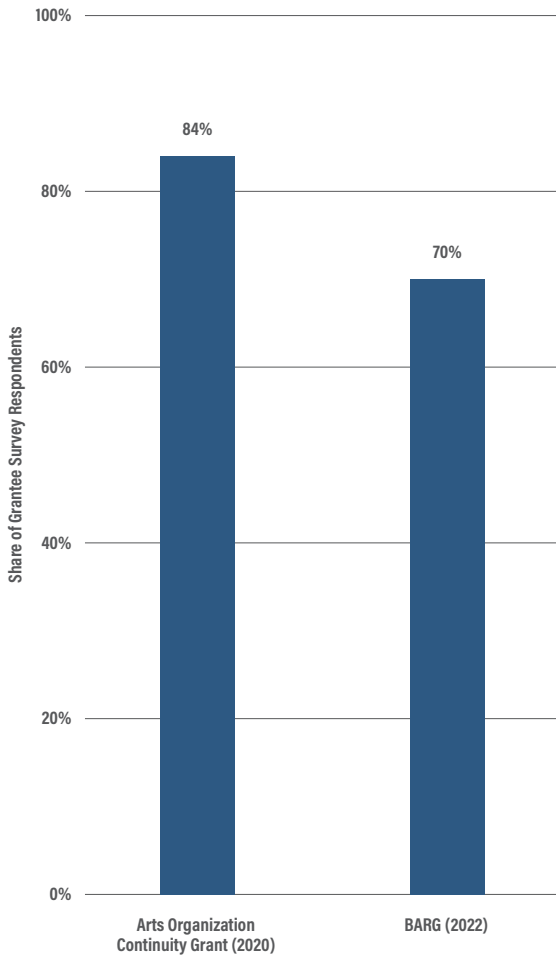


N=30

Note: Responses were measured on a five-point scale from “Not at all helpful” to “Essential.” No respondents selected either of the two ratings below “Moderately helpful.”

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

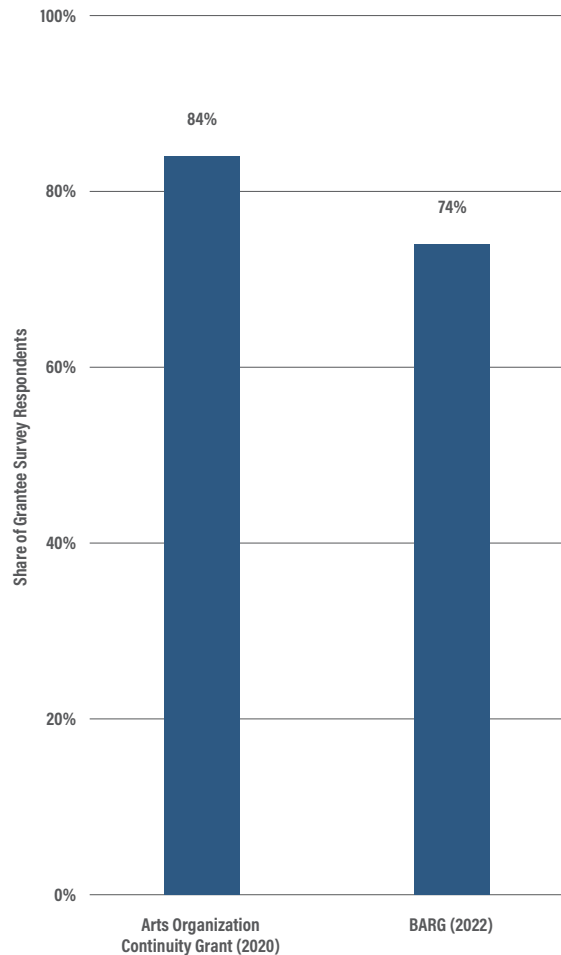
Figure 9: Share of Grantees That Avoided Layoffs Due to the Grants



N=30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

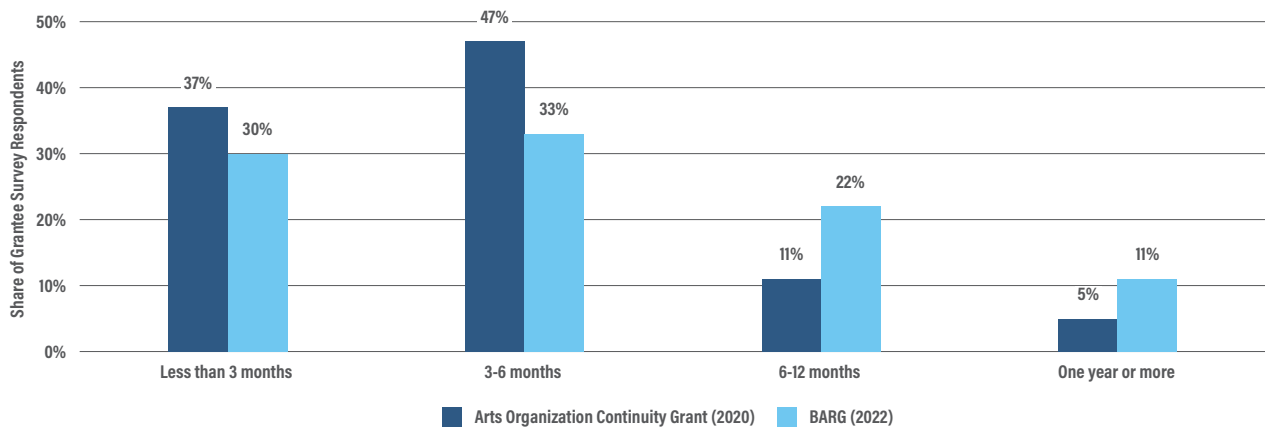
Figure 10: Share of Grantees That Avoided Closure Due to the Grants



Given their distribution in the earliest stages of the pandemic, the Arts Organization Continuity Grants provided critical short-term relief, serving as a bridge during the early days of the pandemic and sustaining arts organizations until other assistance programs became available. For many organizations, the funding was the difference between survival and immediate closure. That said, the support tended to last for a shorter duration and left fewer long-term organizational changes in place than the BARG program. Most (84%) Arts Organization Continuity Grant recipients said the funding lasted less than 6 months (Figure 11). More than half (53%) of recipients reported that the funds helped them survive the pandemic but did not generate lasting impact, and only 5% described the funding as transformative (Figure 12).

By contrast, BARG—issued at a time when most organizations had transitioned from response to recovery phases— tended to have a broader effect. The grants were generally larger, conditions had shifted toward reopening, the “new normal” was settling in, and organizations were positioned to leverage fiscal support for longer-term stability. Reflecting this, nearly half of BARG recipients (48%) said the grants helped them stabilize and make strategic changes, and almost one in five (19%) reported transformative, lasting impacts. Even in terms of duration, BARG funding stretched further: a third of recipients reported that it sustained operations for six months or more.

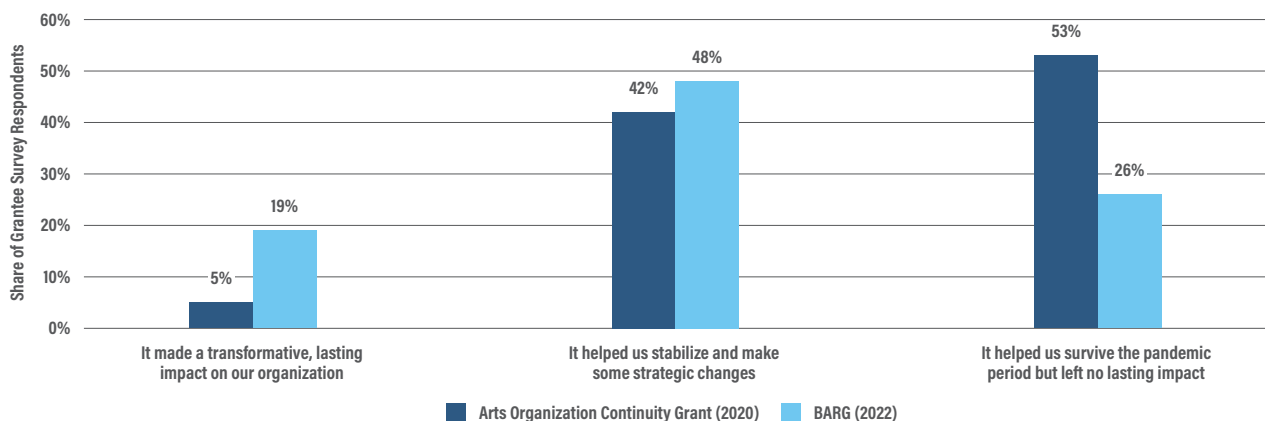
Figure 11: Length of Time Grants Sustained Operations in Berkeley



N=30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

Figure 12: Scale of Grant Impact on Berkeley Arts and Culture Organizations



N=30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

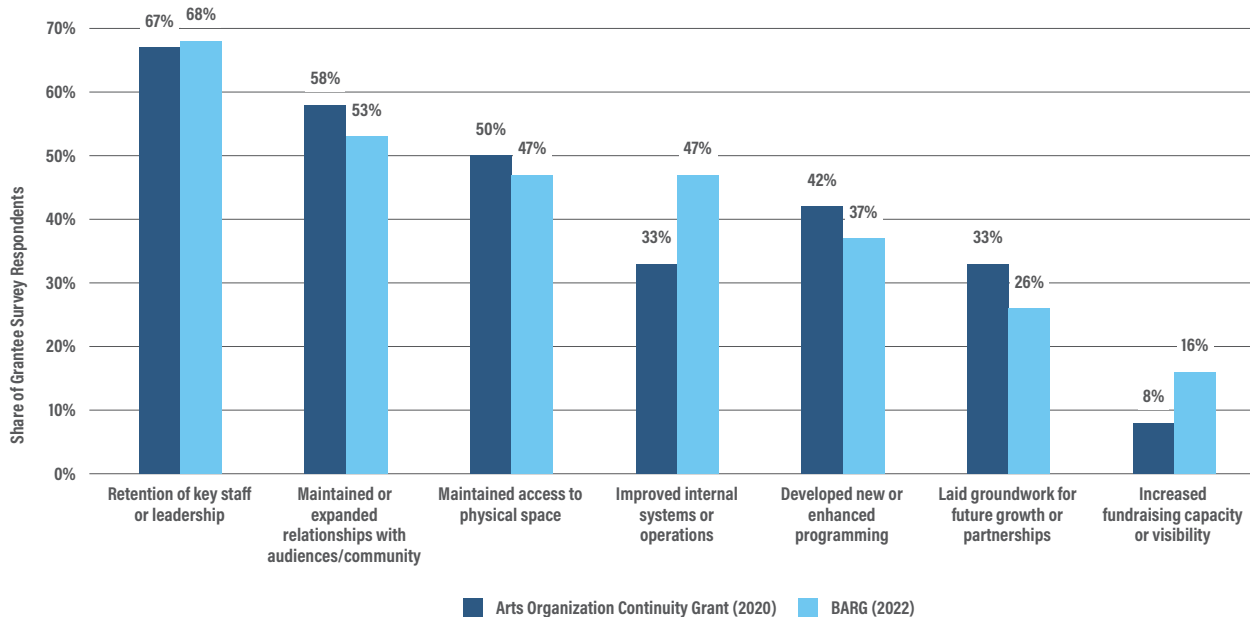
Organizations reported that relief and recovery funding helped them retain staff and leadership (67% of Arts Organization Continuity Grant recipients and 68% of BARG recipients) (Figure 13). More than half credited the grants with enabling them to maintain or expand relationships with their audiences and communities (58% and 53%, respectively), and nearly half of grantees noted that the funding allowed them to sustain access to physical spaces.

Arts Organization Continuity Grant recipients were more likely than BARG recipients to report developing new or enhanced programming (42% vs. 37%). This difference likely reflects the urgent pivot many organizations were forced to make at the height of the pandemic crisis—rapidly adapting to online or hybrid formats, experimenting with digital content, and reimagining community

engagement in a socially distanced world. In other words, the Arts Organization Continuity Grant helped seed immediate programmatic adjustments that allowed organizations to stay connected with their audiences under extraordinary circumstances.

By contrast, the BARG program in 2022 was more about strengthening internal systems, fundraising, and longer-term stabilization as organizations adjusted to a new operating environment. Nearly half of BARG recipients (47%) reported using funds to improve internal systems and operations, compared to just a third of Arts Organization Continuity Grant recipients. Additionally, 16% of BARG grantees said the funds helped increase fundraising capacity or visibility, compared to 8% of Arts Organization Continuity Grant recipients.

Figure 13: Detailed Impact of Relief and Recovery Grants for Berkeley Arts and Culture Organizations



N=30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

The distinction between the two grant programs points to a critical shift in focus of the City's approach to pandemic relief and recovery across the arts and culture sector. While the earlier Arts Continuity Grant program was more focused on immediate survival, the BARG program was better positioned to help organizations adapt to a new normal by strengthening infrastructure and building capacity to generate new revenue. Notably, most organizations (49 out of the 88 grantees) were able to benefit from both rounds of relief and recovery funding. This compounded support allowed grantees not only to weather the initial crisis but also to remain afloat during the prolonged and unpredictable recovery period, extending the effect of the funding well beyond a single grant cycle.

## LONG-TERM OUTCOMES: WHERE GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONS STAND IN 2025

Five years since the onset of the pandemic, we can begin to see the longer-term impacts on Berkeley's arts and culture ecosystem. The initial shock was compounded by rising costs for labor, rent, and production; challenges rebuilding and retaining staff; slower-than-expected audience and consumer engagement recovery; and changes in the funding landscape.

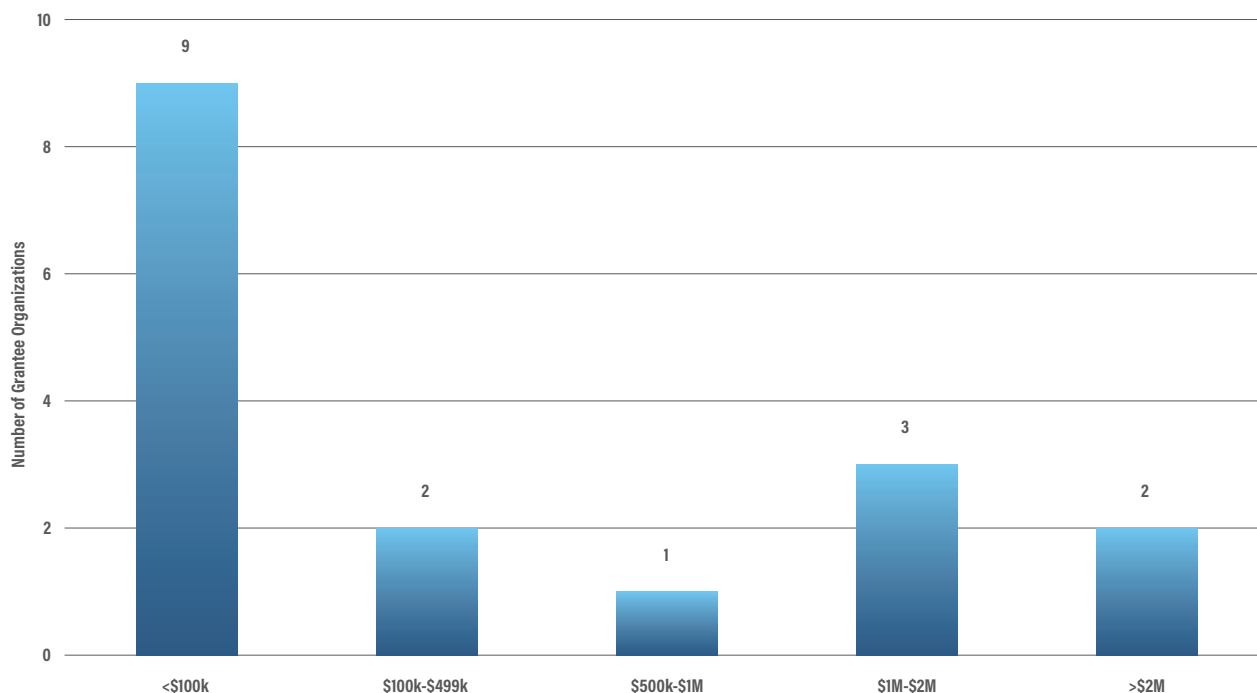
### Organizational Closures

Despite the critical role of relief and recovery funding, not all grantee organizations were able to withstand the prolonged pressures of the pandemic and its aftermath. Between 2020 and 2024, 17 grantee organizations ultimately closed. Of those 17 organizations, the vast majority were small (Figure 14). The steepest losses were among grantees with annual budgets under \$100,000: nine organizations of this size were unable to continue operating. Mid-sized organizations fared better, with only one organization closing with a budget between \$500,000 and \$1 million. Larger organizations also experienced notable losses: five organizations with budgets over \$1 million closed during this period. Among the closures were two of Berkeley's established and well-known institutions: the Bay Area Children's Theatre in 2023 (which had an operating budget exceeding \$3 million) and the Aurora Theatre Company in 2025.<sup>7</sup>

This pattern shows that while scale and resources provided some resilience, no segment of the sector was fully insulated. For larger organizations—typically those with the broadest audiences or consumer base, most extensive programming, and greatest fundraising capacity—such losses underscore the vulnerability of even the city's most established cultural institutions.

<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing, Aurora Theatre Company has not officially announced a permanent closure, but it has announced staff layoffs and the closure of its venue; for the purposes of this analysis, we are considering it closed. See: Lily Janiak, "Bay Area Theater Moves to Lay Off Staff, Vacate Downtown Berkeley Venue," August 12, 2025, San Francisco Chronicle, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/entertainment/article/aurora-theatre-layoffs-venue-vacate-20813096.php>.

Figure 14: Closures Among Berkeley Arts Relief and Recovery Grantee Organizations by Revenue Size



Source: City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.

While small organizations were more likely than larger ones to face permanent closure, those that survived often reported that pandemic relief and recovery funding was especially critical to their survival. For organizations with annual budgets under \$100,000, the grants represented a larger share of their total operating revenue (Figure 15).

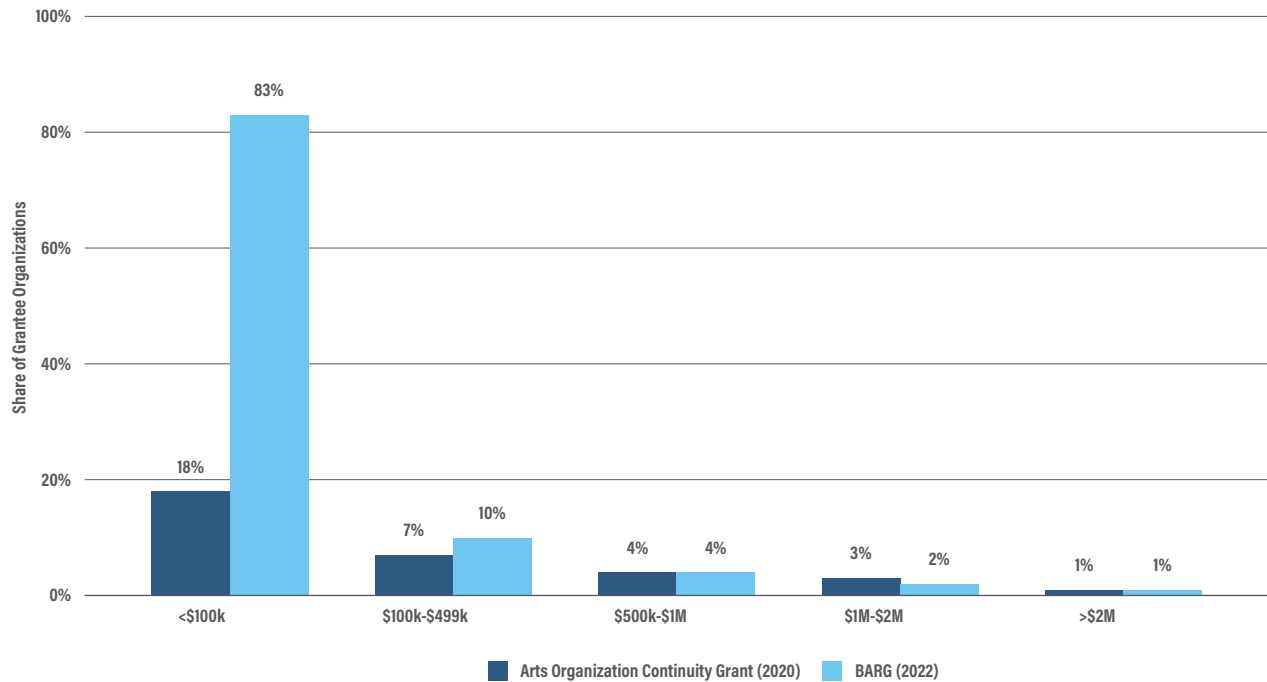
By contrast, larger organizations tended to view the grants as moderately helpful—providing short-term relief without fundamentally altering their financial trajectory. For institutions with budgets exceeding \$2 million, the grants made up less than 1% of annual revenue. Notably, because award criteria emphasized equity and demonstrated revenue loss rather than organizational size, some of the smallest organizations received equal or even greater funding amounts than their much larger counterparts. This approach magnified the impact of relief

and recovery funds for smaller organizations, and it aligned with the intent of the American Rescue Plan Act (the BARG program leveraged ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds dollars), which explicitly recognized the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities of color and sought to direct resources toward advancing equity in recovery.<sup>8</sup>

The significance of this support comes in light of the fact that more than one-quarter (28%) of grantee organizations reported receiving no other forms of pandemic-related financial assistance (Figure 16). For these organizations, the City of Berkeley's grants meant the difference between survival and closure, particularly for smaller organizations that may have lacked the capacity or access to other federal, state, or county-level programs.

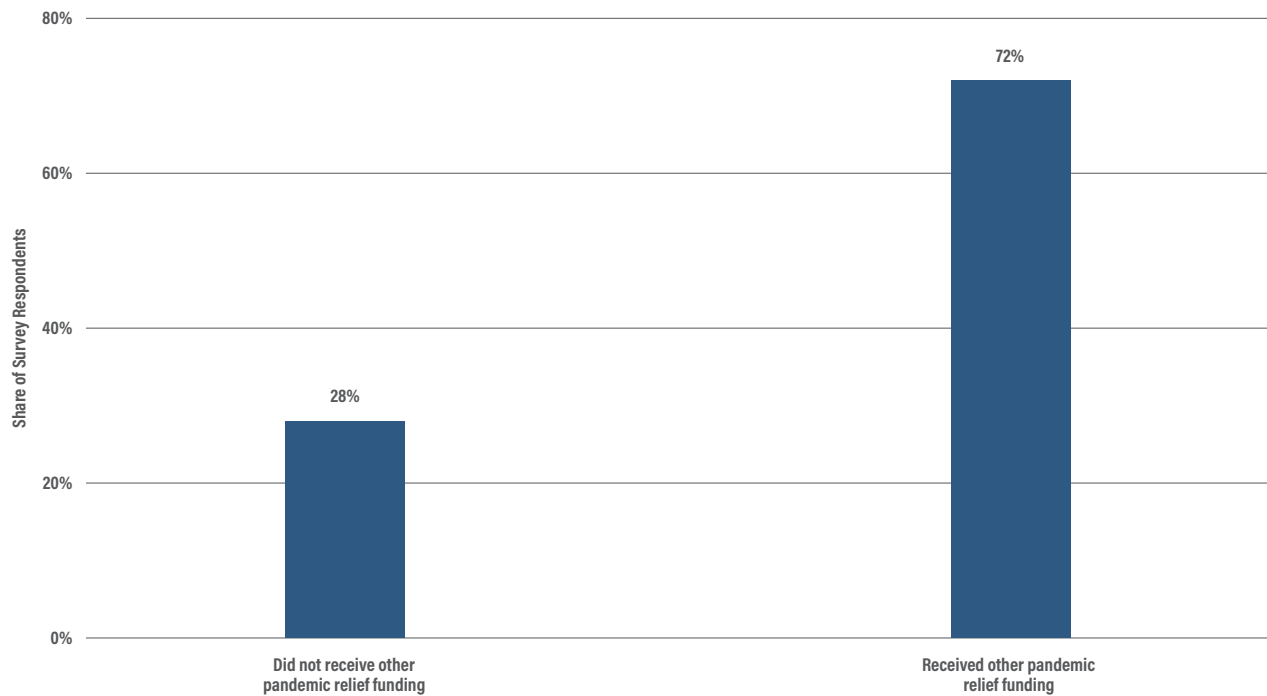
<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury, Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds: Interim Final Rule, Federal Register, 86(93), 26786–26861 (2021), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/05/17/2021-10283/coronavirus-state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds>.

Figure 15: Average Size of Grant in Proportion to Total Operating Budget by Organization Size



Source: City of Berkeley, Internal Revenue Service, CVL Economics.

Figure 16: Share of Respondents that Received Other Pandemic Relief Support



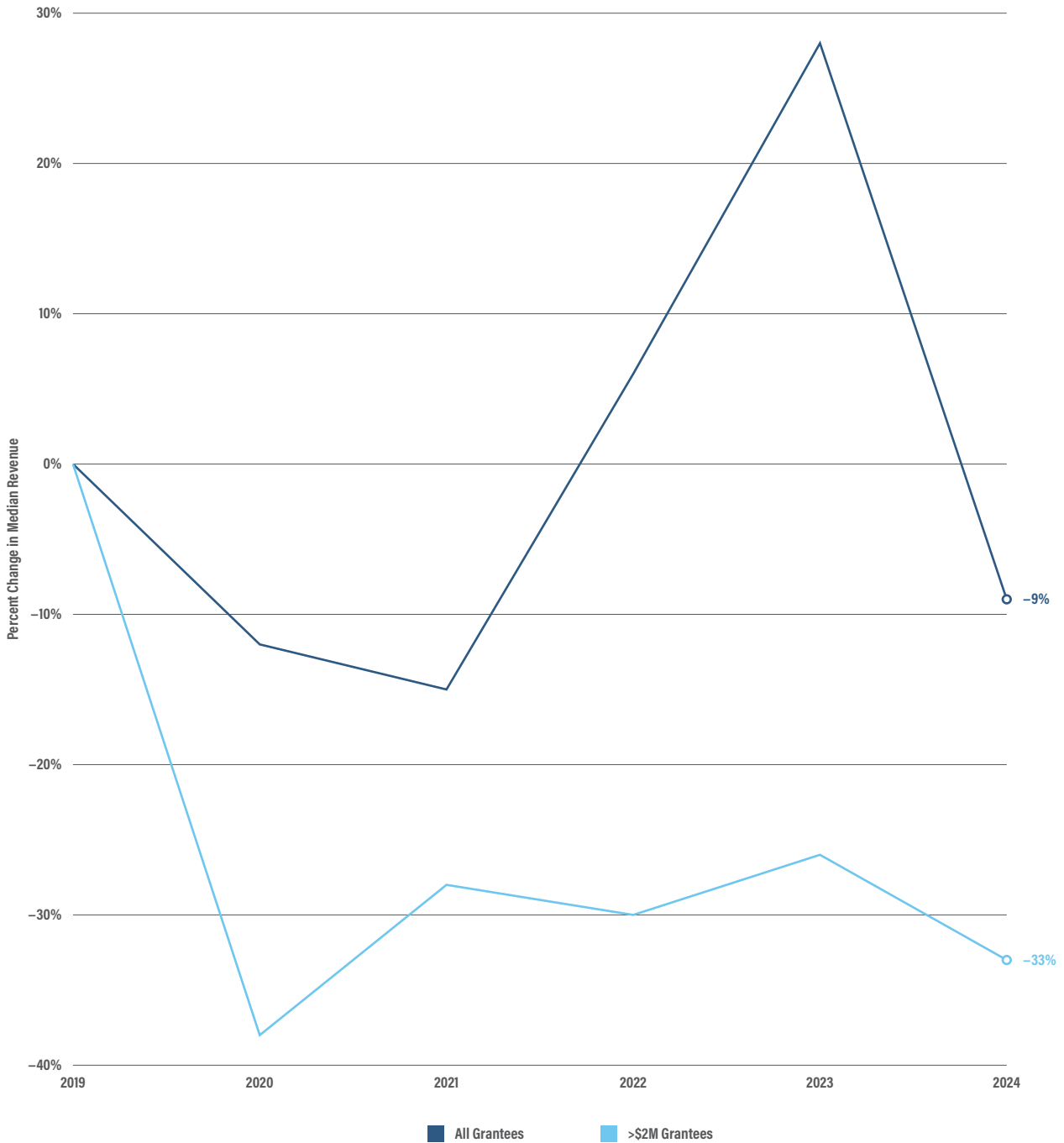
N=30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

**Evolving Revenue Streams and Rising Costs**

By 2024, the median revenue across all surviving grantees was still 9% below pre-pandemic levels—although this was still an improvement from the sector’s low point in 2021, when the median revenue had fallen 15% from 2019 (Figure 17). While smaller organizations were far more likely to close their doors permanently, those that survived fared relatively better than the largest organizations over time; the median revenue for grantee organizations with budgets above \$2 million, on the other hand, is still one-third below 2019 benchmarks.

**Figure 17: Percent Change in Median Surviving Berkeley Grantee Revenue Since 2019**



Note: Based on the median inflation-adjusted (2024 dollars) revenue across the 71 surviving grantee organizations.  
 Source: Internal Revenue Service, CVL Economics.

These patterns map onto broader regional trends: smaller organizations tended to show greater resiliency in recovery than their larger counterparts. A 2024 report on the sustainability of Bay Area performing arts organizations post-pandemic found that micro-organizations (defined as very small organizations, often characterized as those with fewer than 10 employees)—despite being largely excluded from federal relief programs—remained nimble by expanding programs and attendance, maintaining or growing their artistic workforce, and prioritizing community engagement and mission-focused recovery, even as expenses outpaced revenue growth.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, while larger organizations experienced the highest increase in government funding during the pandemic and exceptional federal relief programs kept many of these institutions afloat, those temporary funds are now waning, leaving structural financial gaps behind.

Across the Bay Area, arts organization expenses have risen much faster than income. Between 2022 and 2023, total expenses for regional arts organizations increased by 21% while revenues fell 12%. Earned revenue rebounded by 42% in 2023 but remained 26% below pre-pandemic levels after adjusting for inflation. In-person attendance more than doubled between 2022 and 2023, yet still sat 42% below 2019 levels. As a result, organizations have grown increasingly dependent on contributed income.<sup>10</sup>

These local trends reflect broader national patterns in the nonprofit performing arts sector. Nationwide, total income dropped sharply during the pandemic and, while it has begun to recover, expenses have risen at a much faster pace since 2021 (Figure 18). Regional theaters also report losing 20–30% of subscribers since 2019, eroding a dependable source of earned revenue and compounding these financial pressures.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the funding mix has shifted: as earned income has struggled to rebound, contributed income now accounts for a larger share of organizational budgets (Figure 19). Even so, recent budget cycles have become more challenging, with heightened competition for contributed dollars. Many foundations are shifting priorities

away from the arts, while federal uncertainty has created a chilling effect nationwide. Proposals from the executive branch to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, to condition or cancel awarded grants, and to impose new ideological restrictions on future eligibility have further undermined confidence for arts organizations across the country.

Locally, these trends are echoed by the experiences of the grantee organizations in Berkeley. Over 81% reported that financial stability remains their most pressing challenge today, followed closely by rising costs (74%) (Figure 20). Nearly half cited the intensifying competition for limited public and private funding as a major barrier and 30% reported access to affordable space as a top challenge. Some organizations also included rebuilding audience engagement and attendance, difficulty retaining or hiring qualified staff, and limited capacity for grant writing or fundraising as top challenges. Understanding these specific challenges helps inform local grantmaking by highlighting where support is most urgently needed—not only in covering rising operating costs, but also in building organizational capacity, sustaining workforce pipelines, and ensuring that cultural offerings remain accessible in Berkeley.

Feedback from stakeholder outreach reinforced these findings. As one organization leader put it, “It’s more expensive than ever to operate in the Bay Area. Meanwhile, federal and state support is drying up and audiences have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.” This illustrates the compounding pressures organizations now face: not only are operating costs escalating, but audience behavior has shifted in ways that directly affect earned revenue and long-term sustainability.

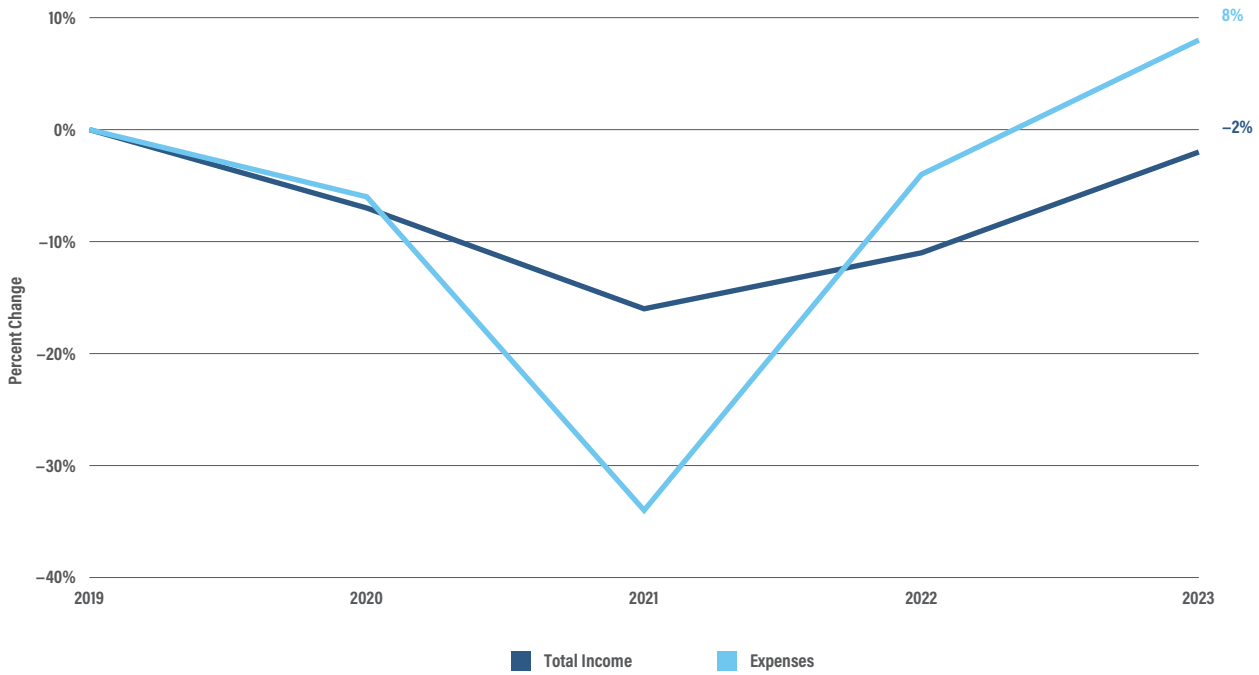
For many, this includes challenges rebuilding traditional subscriber bases. While theatre subscribers had already been in steady decline over a long horizon, the pandemic accelerated this trend—leaving older and more risk-averse audiences slower to return and making it increasingly difficult to rely on subscription revenue as a notable income stream. Berkeley Rep illustrates this shift: at its

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Rainin Foundation & SMU DataArts at Southern Methodist University, Bay Area Arts and Culture Organizational Sustainability Survey Report: Top line findings, 2019–2023 (2024), <https://culturaldata.org/learn/data-at-work/2025/kenneth-rainin-foundation-smu-dataarts-bay-area-sustainability-assessment>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

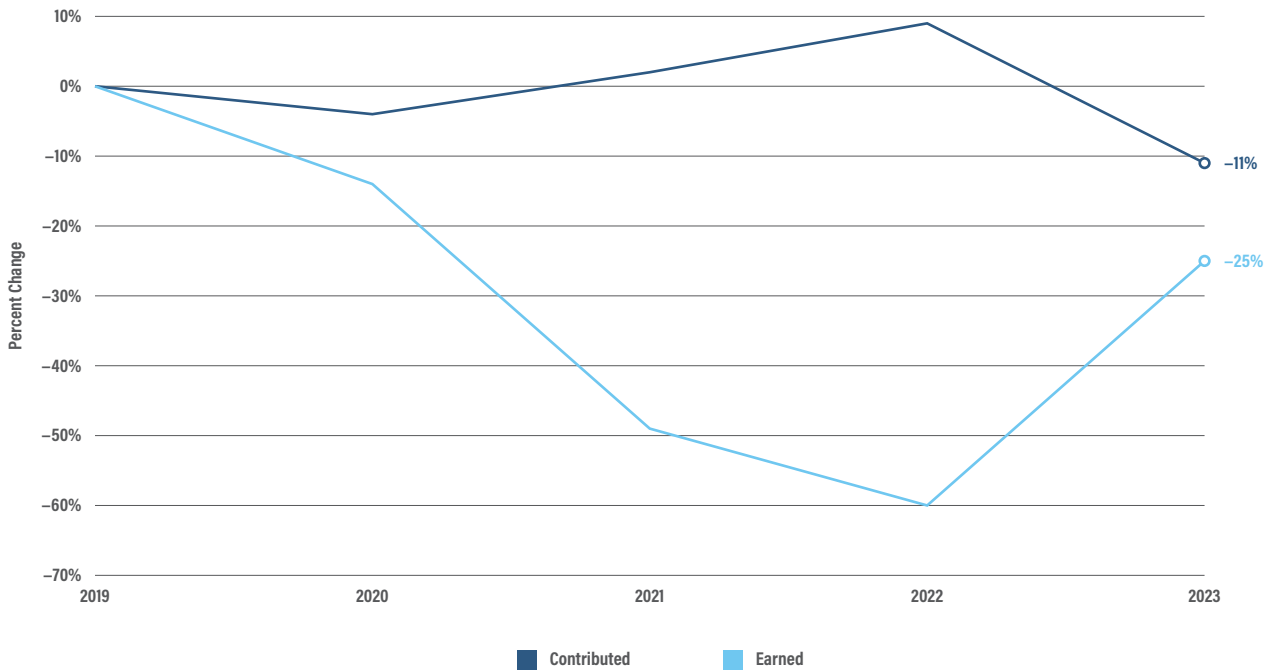
<sup>11</sup> Michael Paulson, “A Crisis in America’s Theaters Leaves Prestigious Stages Dark,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/23/theater/regional-theater-crisis.html>.

Figure 18: Percent Change in Total Income and Expenses of Nationwide Nonprofit Performing Arts Organizations Since 2019



Source: Theatre Communications Group, CVL Economics.

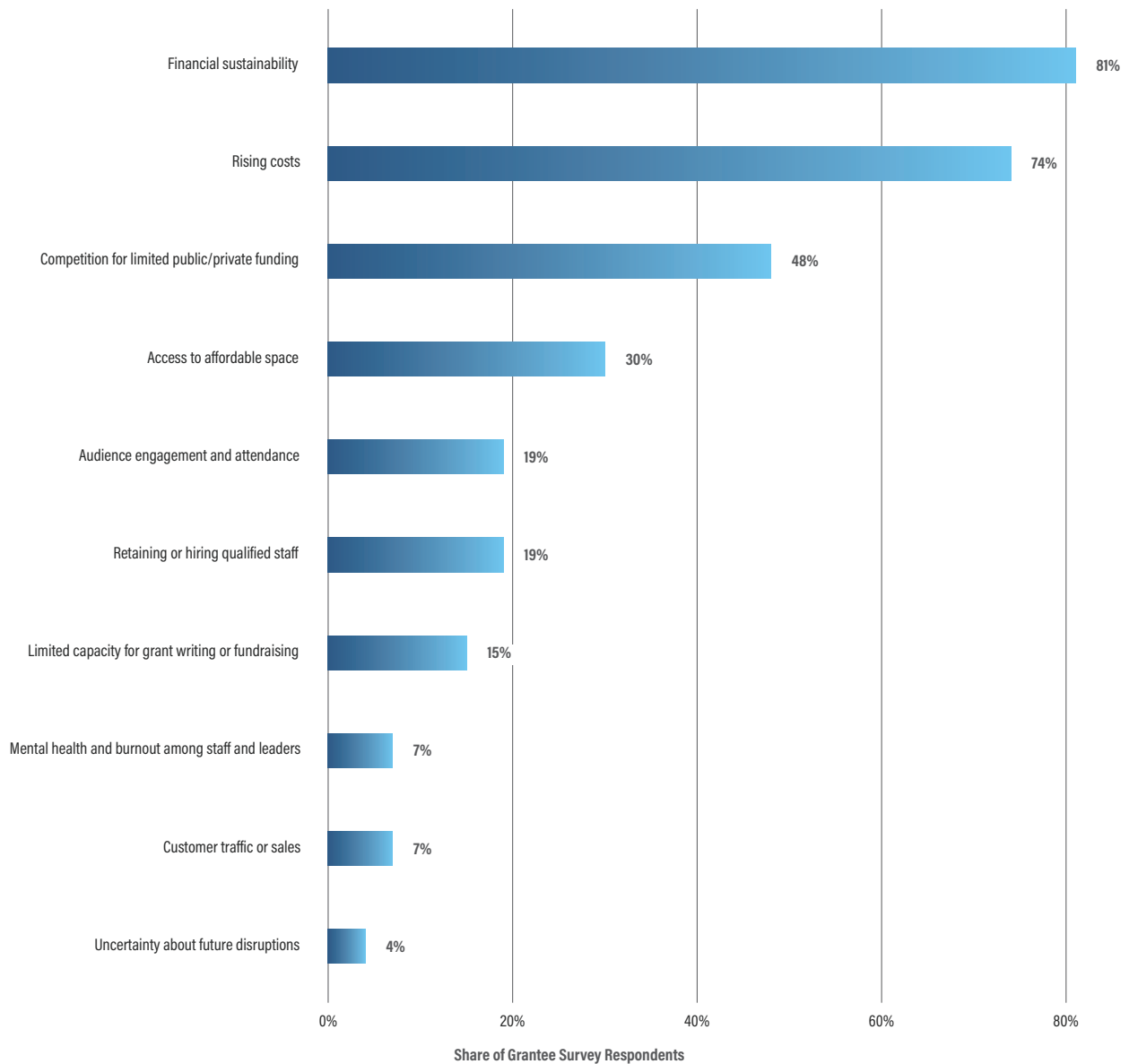
Figure 19: Percent Change in Income Type of Nonprofit Performing Arts Organizations Nationwide since 2019



Source: Theatre Communications Group, CVL Economics.

peak the theatre had about 22,000 season ticket holders, compared to roughly 12,000 just before the pandemic; today subscriptions hover closer to 9,000, with the goal of stabilizing around 10,000—acknowledging it is unlikely to return to pre-pandemic levels. While subscriptions rarely make up the majority of a theatre company’s revenue, they serve as a critical pipeline for cultivating individual donors—a major source of contributed income. A shrinking subscriber base not only reduces reliable ticket revenue but also weakens the sense of loyalty that often leads patrons to become long-term donors, making fundraising even more difficult.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 20: Top Challenges Berkeley Art and Culture Organization Grantees Face Today



N=30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

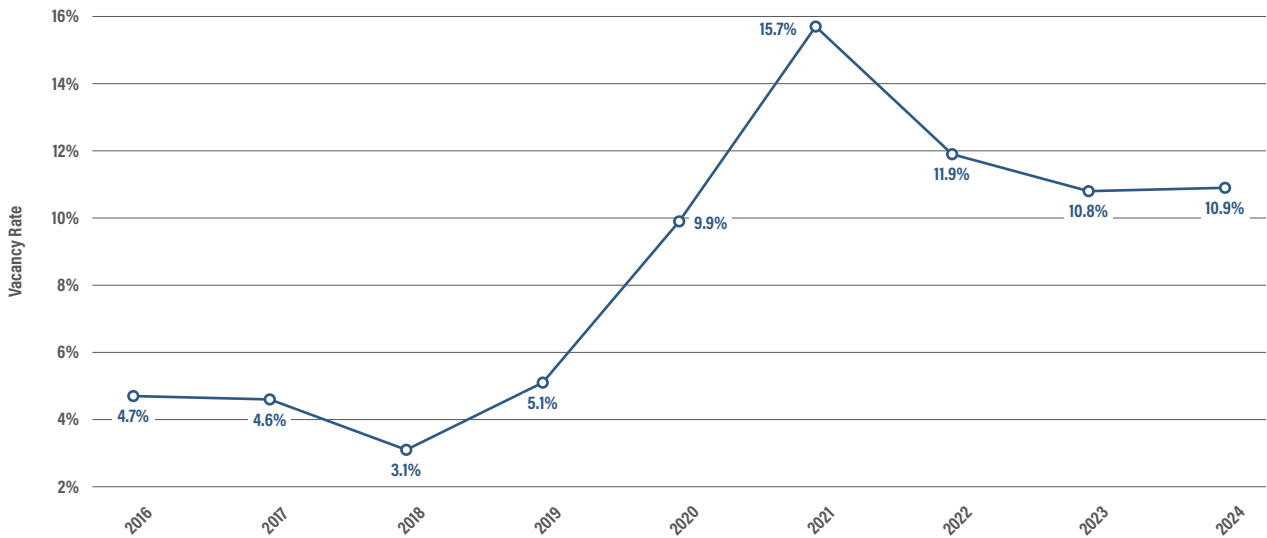
<sup>12</sup> Lily Janiak. “Can Bay Area Theaters Make Subscriptions Sexy Again? A Quick Survey Shows Subscription Declines of 23% to 61% Since the Pandemic.” Datebook/San Francisco Chronicle, July 26, 2023. <https://datebook.sfchronicle.com/theater/bay-area-theater-subscription-18197863>.

### Ecosystem Challenges

These financial and audience pressures are compounded by the broader struggles facing Berkeley's urban environment. Empty storefronts, shuttered restaurants, and declining foot traffic have weakened the vibrancy that cultural districts depend on to attract and sustain audiences. As one stakeholder noted, "The Downtown area, like many downtown areas, is visibly struggling to retain tenants and drive foot traffic, which is concerning." "In 2024, Downtown Berkeley's ground floor commercial vacancy rate sat well above pre-pandemic levels (Figure 21). At 10.9%, the vacancy rate was more than double its 3.1% rate in 2019 — driven in large part by the enduring shift to remote and hybrid work, which has sharply reduced demand for traditional office space across the Bay Area. Fewer daily office workers have also meant fewer customers to nearby restaurants, cafés, and shops, which has in turn contributed to a rise in retail vacancies. These economic pressures are compounded by heightened safety concerns and ongoing transportation limitations, which have further reduced accessibility. The result is a more difficult operating environment for cultural organizations: even well-resourced institutions face added headwinds, while smaller and midsize groups struggle most to regain stability.

Across all of these challenges, the recent suspension of Aurora Theatre Company activities in mid-2025 exemplifies how these pressures converge: leadership has pointed to attendance never fully recovering from the pandemic, skyrocketing costs, and shifting philanthropic priorities as factors threatening its future.<sup>13</sup> The theatre joins a growing list of Berkeley organizations that have already closed or gone dormant—including the Bay Area Children's Theatre, TheatreFirst, and the Youth Musical Theatre Company. The precarity extends to the city's remaining flagship organizations as well: Berkeley Repertory Theatre faces a \$5 million deficit, Berkeley Symphony is operating with a reported \$500,000 structural deficit, and Freight & Salvage has a \$200,000 deficit—illustrating how fragile the ecosystem remains.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 21: Downtown Berkeley Groundfloor Commercial Vacancy Rate | 2016–2024



Note: Includes office and retail properties.

Source: City of Berkeley Office of Economic Development, CVL Economics.

<sup>13</sup> Lily Janiak, "Bay Area theater moves to lay off staff, vacate downtown Berkeley venue," San Francisco Chronicle, August 12, 2025, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/entertainment/article/aurora-theatre-layoffs-venue-vacate-20813096.php>

<sup>14</sup> Stakeholder interviews.

## THE CITY OF BERKELEY'S RETURN ON INVESTMENT IN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY DURING THE PANDEMIC (2020-2022)



While revenues across Berkeley's arts and culture ecosystem remain below pre-pandemic levels, it is important to consider not only what was lost but also what was preserved. Every organization that received Arts Organization Continuity Grant or BARG funding was required to demonstrate clear financial hardship as a condition of eligibility. In the case of Arts Organization Continuity Grants, for example, applicants had to show at least a 25% decline in earned revenue. Half of the grantee organizations experienced revenue loss of over 40%, and some organizations experienced a 100% decline in earned revenue.

Survey results highlight the critical role of the City of Berkeley's funding intervention. More than one-quarter of grantees (28%) reported receiving no other pandemic relief. For these organizations, the City's programs were their only source of external support. Without this funding, it is reasonable to assume that many would have been unable to sustain operations in Berkeley—likely joining the 17 organizations that ultimately closed between 2020 and 2024.

Over a five-year period (2020–2024), **the absence of City relief and recovery support would have resulted in an estimated additional \$12.9 million in revenue losses across the local arts and culture ecosystem by 2024.<sup>15</sup> As such, the preservation effect of the City of Berkeley's \$2.5 million investment in pandemic relief and recovery support to arts and culture organizations in Berkeley extended far beyond the immediate crisis.**

<sup>15</sup> CVL Economics quantified the value of organizations preserved by City funding using organizational operating revenue as the basis, drawing from a master grantee revenue dataset compiled by our firm. This dataset integrates IRS Form 990 filings for each organization and supplementing with revenue data from the City of Berkeley's grant application database and grantee survey responses to fill in gaps. Applying the 28% figure of Berkeley grantees who reported receiving no other pandemic relief to the revenue data as a baseline, and weighting by organizational size (since smaller groups found Berkeley's funds more impactful), \$12.9 million is the estimated total revenue value of the at-risk organizations.



When taking into account direct and ripple effects across the local supply chain, **every \$1 in City funding leveraged at least \$5.64 in ongoing arts and culture economic activity.** This figure was derived using IMPLAN (Impact Analysis for Planning) input-output modeling, which captures not only the direct impacts on grantee organizations and their employees, but also the supply chain effects on local vendors, contractors, and service providers, as well as the induced effects of household spending by arts and related workers.<sup>16</sup> In this way, the estimate reflects the broader ecosystem value preserved by the City's relief and recovery efforts—

extending beyond the prevention of immediate closures to safeguarding a network of organizations that continue to generate jobs, sustain community programming, and contribute to local tax revenues today.

While emergency relief and recovery support alone cannot address the sector's long-term structural challenges—particularly around rising costs and audience recovery—the City of Berkeley's intervention illustrates how targeted municipal support can serve as an effective bridge during periods of acute disruption, maintaining cultural capacity that might otherwise be permanently lost.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix A.2 for more details on return on investment methodology.



# PANDEMIC RELIEF AND RECOVERY FOR ARTS & CULTURE INDIVIDUALS

In addition to pandemic relief and recovery grants awarded to arts and culture organizations, the City of Berkeley awarded \$523,089 across three grant programs between 2020 and 2022 for Berkeley-based individuals engaged in the arts (Figure 22).

These programs aimed to sustain the livelihoods of artists, performers, and cultural practitioners who faced significant income loss due to COVID-19 disruptions. In particular, they prioritized support for lower-income individuals and those from historically underrepresented communities, providing direct financial assistance at a time when creative work opportunities were severely limited.

## THE EAST BAY/OAKLAND RELIEF FUND FOR INDIVIDUALS IN THE ARTS (2020)

This program was a regional emergency grant launched in May 2020 to support artists and cultural workers in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Administered by the Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI), the fund included \$49,000 directly from the City of Berkeley, which ultimately leveraged a total of \$64,500 in awards to Berkeley artists. The additional dollars came from unrestricted contributions by local foundations,<sup>17</sup> meaning Berkeley's participation drew in more resources to benefit the local community than the City invested directly. In total, 515 individuals received grants of up to \$1,500—including 47 Berkeley artists. The program prioritized BIPOC, immigrant, disabled, and trans individuals and was designed to provide fast, non-taxable relief without requiring tax or citizenship documentation.

## THE BERKELEY ART WORKS PROJECTS GRANTS (2021)

First launched in 2021 by the City's Civic Arts Program, the Berkeley Art Works Projects (BAWP) grants awarded nearly \$182,339 in grants to 32 Berkeley-based artists, performers, and community members to create temporary public art projects. These works addressed themes of public health, economic resilience, and community belonging. The program's name was a deliberate play on the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the New Deal-era initiative that employed artists to create public works during the Great Depression. In a similar spirit, BAWP was designed not simply as relief funding but as an employment initiative—providing income to artists while generating public benefit through new creative works.

Funded through the City's Cultural Trust Fund (Fund 148) BAWP supported creative responses to the emotional and social toll of the pandemic and produced public artworks across the city. Unlike the other pandemic grant programs for individual artists and cultural workers, these awards functioned more like compensation for services rendered, including related material costs—ensuring that artists were paid to create projects that directly engaged and benefitted the Berkeley community.

## BERKELEY ARTS RECOVERY GRANTS (BARG) FOR ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS (2022)

Aimed at supporting individual artists and cultural practitioners impacted by the pandemic, this program was administered in partnership with the CCI and funded through ARPA. In 2022, it awarded \$276,250 to 114 Berkeley-based recipients, with grant amounts ranging from \$1,250 to \$8,000. Priority was given to those experiencing significant financial hardship, particularly from historically marginalized communities, and applicants were evaluated based on income loss from arts-related work, geographic distribution, and residence in underserved neighborhoods. Grants were unrestricted and designed to sustain creative practitioners during a period of prolonged economic instability.

<sup>17</sup> Berkeley Relief Fund, "About the Berkeley Relief Fund," <https://berkeleyrelieffund.org/about/>.

Figure 22: Summary of Berkeley Pandemic Relief and Recovery Grants for Individuals in Berkeley

|                                                                             | PROGRAM YEAR | RECIPIENT TYPE                                        | NUMBER OF GRANTEES | TOTAL AMOUNT AWARDED | AVERAGE GRANT AWARDED |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| EAST BAY/OAKLAND RELIEF FUND FOR INDIVIDUALS IN THE ARTS*                   | 2020         | Individual artists and arts workers                   | 47                 | \$64,500             | \$1,372               |
| BERKELEY ART WORKS PROJECT (BAWP)                                           | 2021         | Individual artists, performers, and community members | 32                 | \$182,339            | \$5,698               |
| BERKELEY ARTS RECOVERY GRANTS (BARG) FOR ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS | 2022         | Individual artists, culture bearers, teaching artists | 114                | \$276,250            | \$2,423               |

\*Table includes only the program's Berkeley allocations.  
Source: City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.

### Pandemic Relief and Recovery Grant Impact for Arts & Culture Individuals in Berkeley

These awards reached artists across a wide range of creative disciplines spanning visual and performing arts, literary arts, design, digital media, education, and folk/traditional practices. This diversity highlights how the relief and recovery programs not only sustained individual incomes, but also helped preserve the city's rich and multifaceted cultural landscape during a time of widespread disruption.

Direct-to-artist pandemic support played a vital role in stabilizing household budgets during an unprecedented crisis. The awards—ranging from an average of \$1,372 through the East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund to \$5,698 through the Berkeley Art Works Projects—provided a critical bridge for individual artists, teaching artists, and culture bearers to cover essential living costs. For many, this meant helping to cover essential household expenses, such as rent or mortgage payments, groceries, utilities, or medical bills, at a time when other income sources had collapsed. In this way, relief and recovery dollars not only stabilized artists and their families but also circulated quickly back into Berkeley's local economy, sustaining neighborhood grocery stores, restaurants, landlords, and service providers during a broader period of contraction.

To put their value into context, the scale of the grants becomes especially clear when measured against local housing costs. The median monthly individual housing payment (including renters and owners) for Berkeley arts and culture workers is \$1,100.<sup>18</sup> Housing is often the single largest expense for artists and cultural workers, and in the context of widespread income loss, even short-term support provided critical stability.

In May 2020, the East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund arrived during the immediate aftermath of shutdowns when uncertainty was at its peak. The average \$1,372 awarded to each individual



<sup>18</sup> This is the median per capita housing payment for Berkeley arts and culture workers, which adjusts for household size. This figure is calculated from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 5-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), which averages data collected between 2019 and 2023.

represented the equivalent of just over one month of rent (Figure 23). Although smaller in size than the other individual grants, this was a meaningful bridge for artists facing a sudden collapse of earned income, helping them cover essential living expenses when opportunities were limited.

The Berkeley Art Works Projects (2021) provided the most substantial lifeline for awarded individuals, with average grants of \$5,698. Assuming 25% of each grant was allocated toward material costs, the BAWP grant covered nearly four months of average individual housing costs. At a moment when the sector was still struggling with

extended closures, this level of support allowed artists to stabilize their personal circumstances while working on their creative practice and benefiting the general Berkeley public by improving the public realm with works of art and performances.

Finally, the Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants (2022) offered average awards of \$2,423, or the equivalent of more than two months of rent. While smaller than the BAWP program, this support was still critical in providing paid opportunities for artists at a time when many venues remained closed and other sources of work were scarce.

**Figure 23: Average Grant Value in Terms of Individual Housing Costs**

|                                                                             | AVERAGE GRANT AWARD | EQUIVALENT MONTHS OF INDIVIDUAL HOUSING COSTS * |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| EAST BAY/OAKLAND RELIEF FUND FOR INDIVIDUALS IN THE ARTS**                  | \$1,372             | 1.3 Months                                      |
| BERKELEY ART WORKS PROJECTS (BAWP)                                          | \$5,698             | 3.9 Months***                                   |
| BERKELEY ARTS RECOVERY GRANTS (BARG) FOR ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS | \$2,423             | 2.2 Months                                      |

\* Based on the median monthly per capita housing payment for Berkeley arts and culture workers, averaged across 2019–2023.

\*\*Table includes only the program's Berkeley allocations.

\*\*\* Since BAWP grants covered paid public art projects, this reflects the assumption that 25% of the grant covered material costs for the project.

Source: City of Berkeley, U.S. Census Bureau 5-Year American Community Survey Public-Use Microdata Sample (2023), CVL Economics.

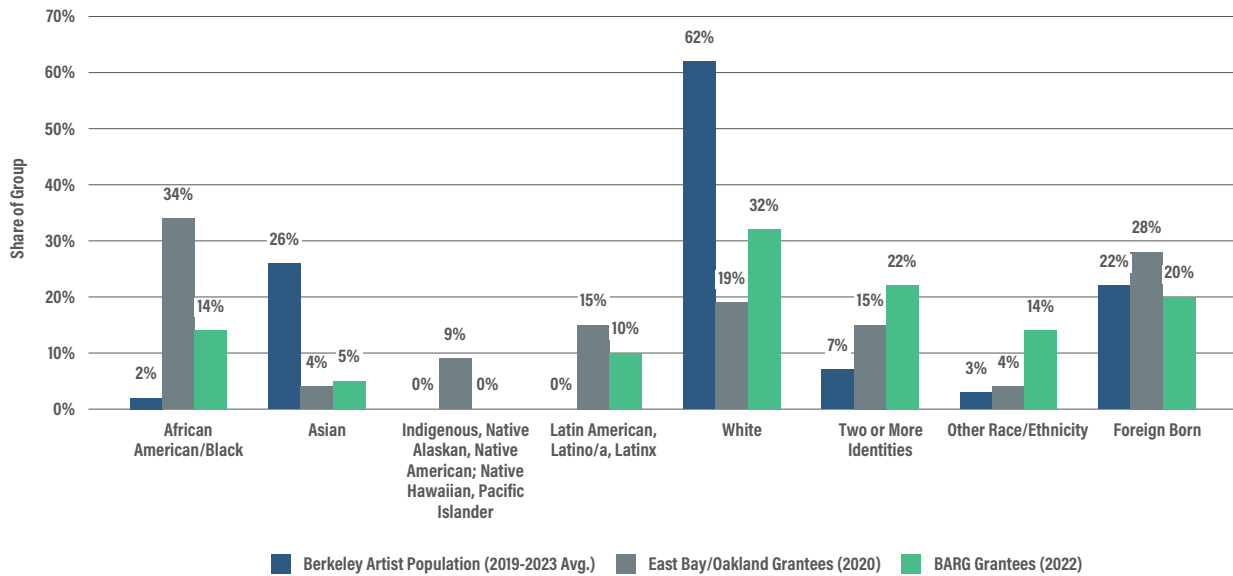
## AN EQUITABLE FUNDING APPROACH

The demographic makeup of individual artist grantees in Berkeley reflects the City of Berkeley's commitment to cultural equity and inclusion in its pandemic relief and recovery efforts. In terms of race and ethnicity distribution, while African American or Black residents make up just 2% of Berkeley's artist population,<sup>19</sup> they represented 14% of BARG grantees and 34% of East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund grantees (Figure 24). Similarly, individuals identifying as Latinx, Indigenous or Native, and those of two or more racial identities were represented at significantly higher rates than their proportions in the general population, suggesting that relief and recovery funds were effectively prioritized for historically marginalized communities.

Although Asian residents comprised only 5% of BARG and 4% of East Bay/Oakland grantees while accounting for 26% of Berkeley's general population, this disparity reflects the composition of the applicant pool, and awards largely mirrored the share of Asian-identifying applicants. Additionally, foreign-born individuals made up 28% of East Bay/Oakland grantees and 20% of BARG grantees, compared to 22% of Berkeley's artist population.

These trends highlight how the City of Berkeley's cultural relief and recovery programs for individual artists during the pandemic not only addressed economic precarity, but also advanced racial and cultural equity by investing in artists who have been historically excluded from opportunities and in communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Figure 24: Demographic Distribution of Pandemic-Era Grantees Compared to Berkeley's Total Artist Population | 2019–2023



Note: Includes grantee data for the BARG and East Bay/Oakland programs; these were the two largest programs in terms of number of grant recipients. See Appendix A.3 for detailed methodology on defining the Berkeley artist population.  
 Source: City of Berkeley, U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (2023), CVL Economics.

<sup>18</sup> The Berkeley artist population is defined as individuals working in selected occupations identified by the federal Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes, which includes jobs in visual arts and design; media and communications; performing arts; film, television, and digital media; and other creative technical roles. See Appendix A.3 for a detailed methodology and list of SOC codes.



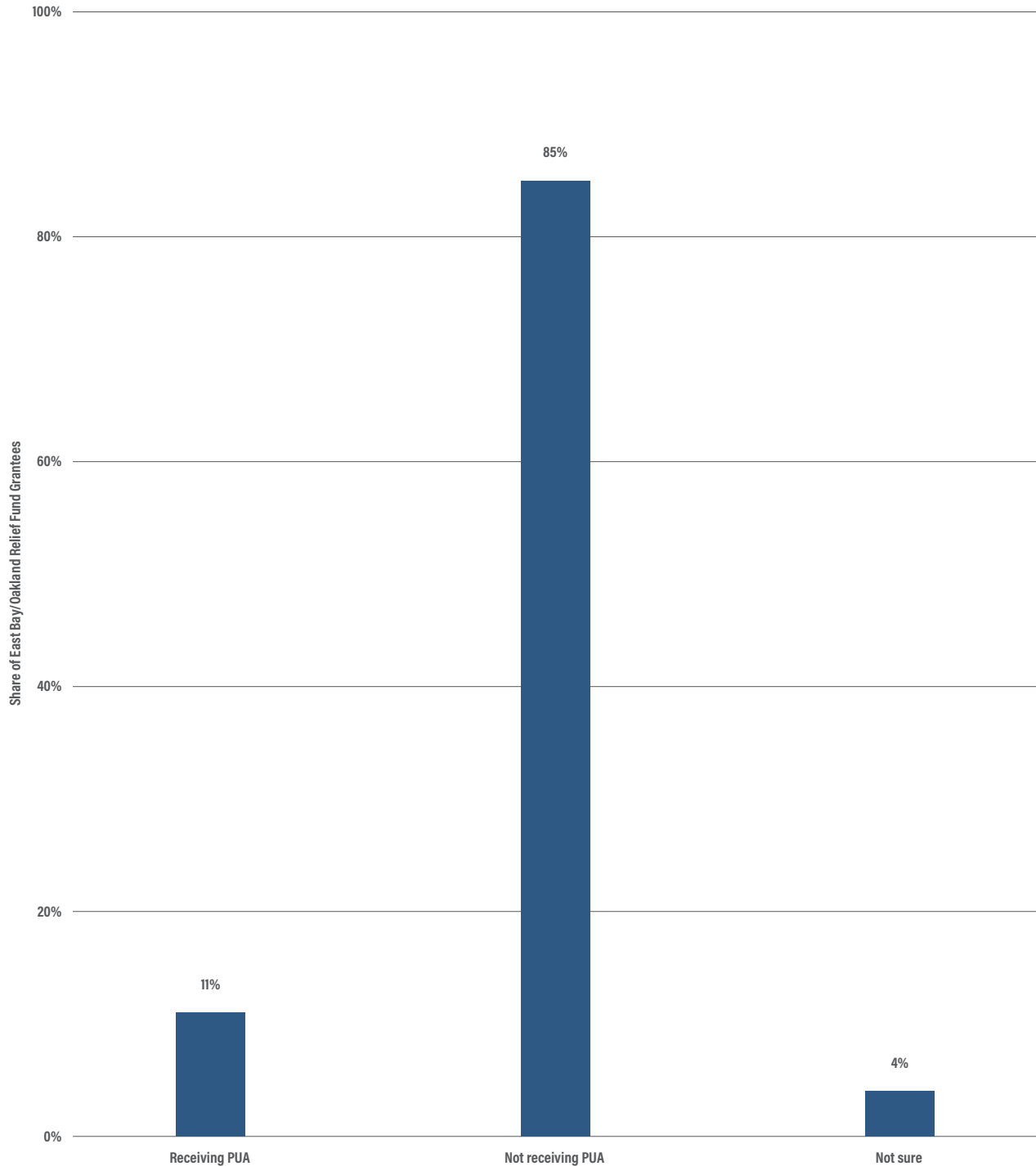
### Understanding Artist Needs

Creative work is often characterized by freelance, gig-based, or self-directed employment—forms of labor that typically fall outside traditional systems of worker protections and public benefits. During the pandemic, federal programs like Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) were created to extend eligibility to independent contractors and self-employed workers, offering critical relief for many in the arts. Yet in the earliest months of the shutdown, PUA was slow to roll out and many applicants faced delays or administrative hurdles before receiving payments.

This made the City of Berkeley’s early intervention in funding this population all the more vital. Nearly 85% of East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund grantees reported they had not yet received PUA at the time of their City of Berkeley grant application (Figure 25). By moving quickly, Berkeley’s contribution to this regional relief effort ensured that artists received immediate support when other aid was not yet available. These local grants filled a critical gap, helping to cover housing, food, and other essentials at the peak of uncertainty, and allowing many artists to remain in Berkeley when displacement was a real risk.

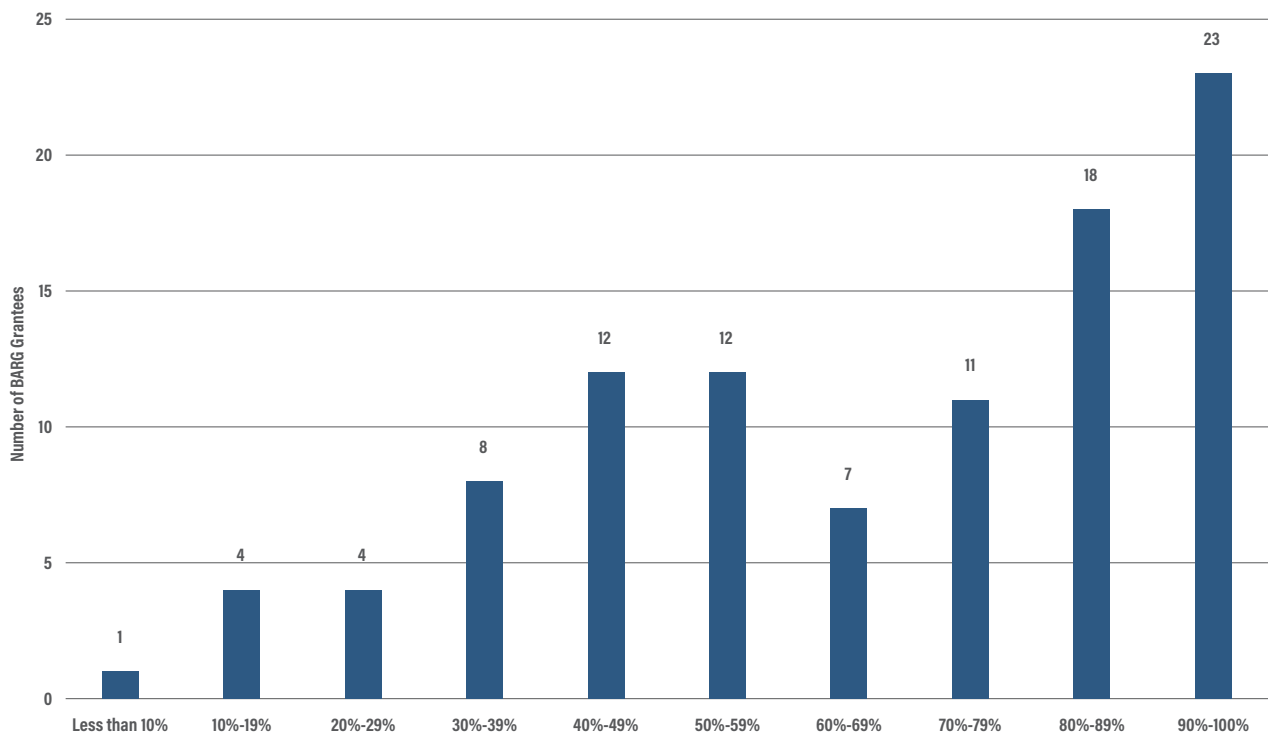
Berkeley's pandemic relief and recovery grants reached artists who were among the hardest hit by the crisis. More than half of all grantees experienced a loss of 50% or more in their arts-related income between 2019 and 2020, including nearly one-quarter who lost 90% to 100% of their income during that period (Figure 26). Indeed, two-thirds of grantees reported making less than \$10,000 in arts-related income in 2020, and over 90% earned under \$30,000 that year (Figure 27).

**Figure 25: Share of Grantees Receiving Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) Benefits at Time of Grant Application | May–June 2020**



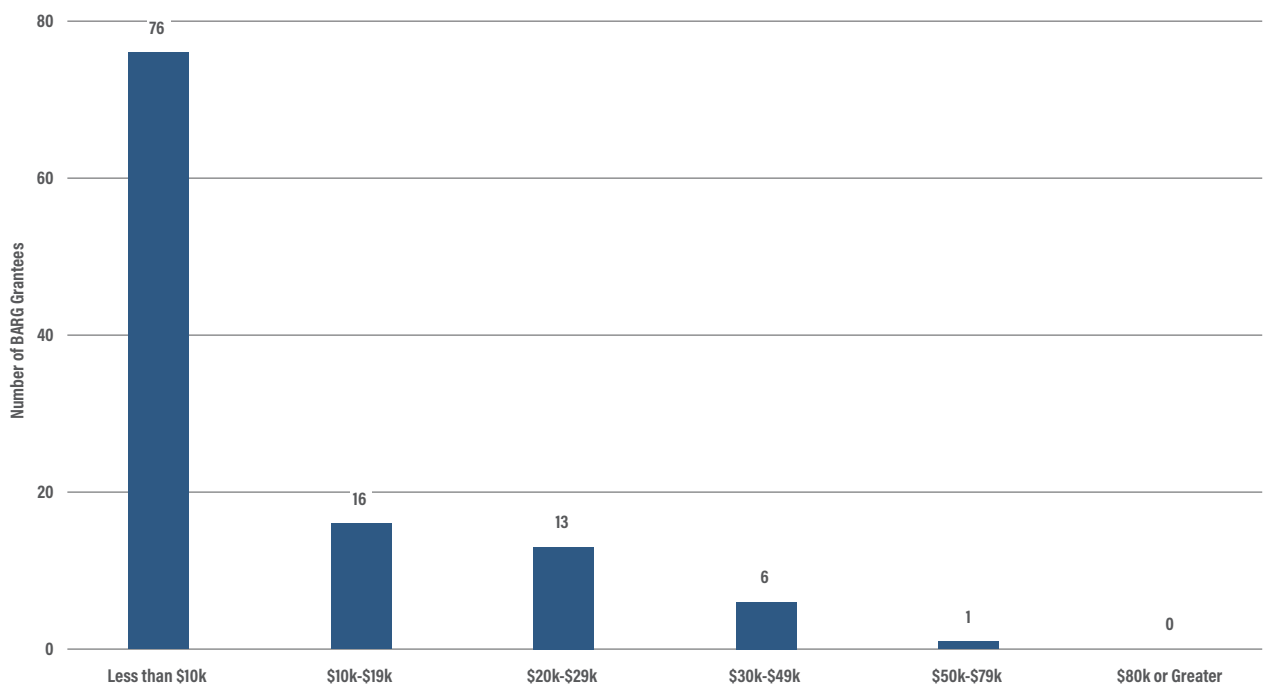
Note: Includes grantee data for the East Bay/Oakland Relief Fund program.  
Source: City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.

Figure 26: Number of BARG Grantees by Percentage of Arts-Related Income Lost between 2019-2020



Source: City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.

Figure 27: Number of BARG Grantees by 2020 Arts-Related Income Bracket



Source: City of Berkeley, CVL Economics.

# CONCLUSION: SUSTAINING BERKELEY'S ARTS & CULTURE ECOSYSTEM

Arts and culture form a vital part of Berkeley's community life—shaping the city's identity, enriching public spaces, and providing opportunities for connection, creativity, and expression.

A thriving cultural ecosystem depends on many interlocking parts from individual artists and small collectives to established organizations and major venues. When this ecosystem is under strain, the effects ripple outward, limiting opportunities for participation, weakening creative networks, and eroding the cultural vibrancy that defines the city.

The stability of cornerstone cultural institutions is critical not just for their own survival, but for the vitality of the entire artistic ecosystem. When even established organizations are at risk, it threatens Berkeley's identity as a cultural center and sends discouraging signals to smaller companies and emerging artists working to establish themselves. Protecting these institutions is therefore about more than sustaining current programming—it is about safeguarding pathways for future generations and ensuring that the region continues to foster creativity, innovation, and community engagement.

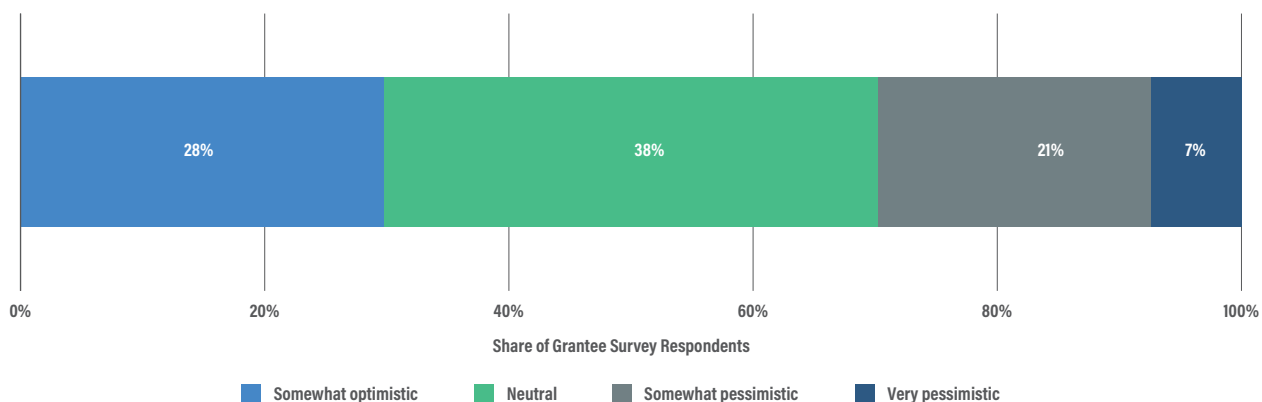
Berkeley's pandemic relief and recovery efforts were extraordinary in both scale and impact. By mobilizing more than \$3 million for both individuals and organizations in emergency grants, the City provided lifelines to dozens of arts and culture organizations and nearly 200 individual artists during one of the most disruptive crises in modern history. These funds helped prevent permanent closures, sustained creative practices, and ultimately enabled Berkeley to prevent its creative fabric from completely fraying.

Yet the road ahead remains uncertain. One-time relief and recovery funding helped many organizations and artists survive the immediate crisis, but long-term sustainability will require ongoing attention and investment. High operating costs—commercial rents, wages, utilities, insurance—remain a persistent burden. At the same time, philanthropic support is tightening and public funding sources remain limited and highly competitive.

Survey responses reflect both resilience and fragility on the outlook of Berkeley’s arts & culture sector (Figure 28 and Figure 29). Many see renewed energy, community

demand, and resilience across Berkeley’s cultural landscape. At the same time, others remain deeply concerned about financial sustainability, affordability, and the slow pace of recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020. This split outlook underscores the importance of funding continuity: without sustained support, hard-won gains may erode, but with targeted continued investment, the City of Berkeley can solidify its reputation as a cultural hub while ensuring equitable access to arts for future generations.

Figure 28: Outlook on Berkeley’s Arts & Culture Sector from Grant Recipients | June 2025



N = 30  
Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

Figure 29: Detailed Outlook on Berkeley’s Arts & Culture Sector from Grant Recipients | June 2025

| OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOKS                                                                  | UNCERTAIN OUTLOOKS                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strong interest and engagement in the arts; hopeful audiences are returning.         | Many feel it’s “too early to tell” which direction things are headed.                                          |
| Community demand and momentum despite challenges.                                    | Concerned about long-term sustainability, closures, and diminished philanthropy.                               |
| Commitment from City of Berkeley and collaborative spirit cited as positive drivers. | Rising Bay Area costs, lack of viable performance space, and drying up of public support noted as major risks. |
| Seeing demand for mid-size venues and opportunities for new spaces.                  | Downtown struggles (e.g., reduced foot traffic, empty storefronts, crime) hurting recovery.                    |
| Confidence in sector resilience, innovation, and interdependence.                    | Audiences slower to return; uncertain policy environment and ongoing affordability crisis.                     |

N = 30  
Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

# APPENDIX

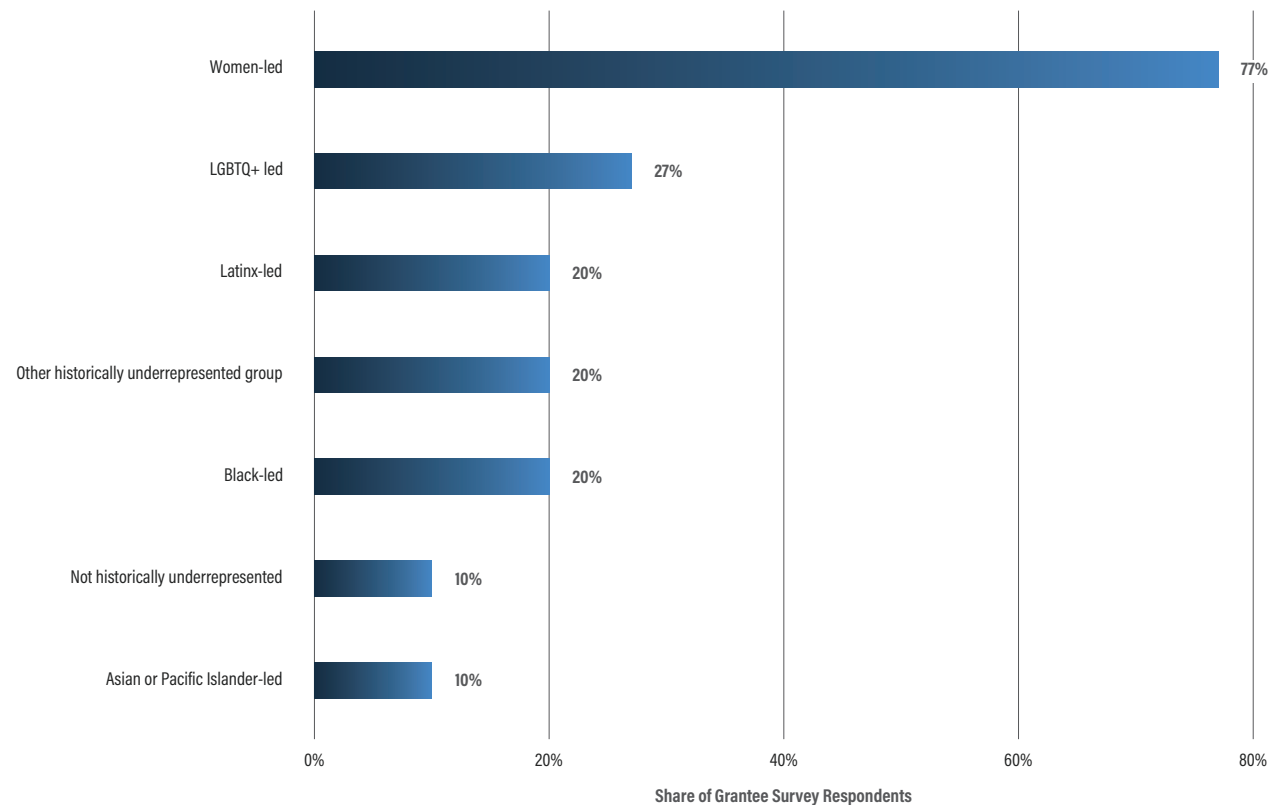
## A.1: SURVEY OF BERKELEY ARTS & CULTURE ORGANIZATION GRANT RECIPIENTS

To better understand how Berkeley's pandemic relief and recovery funding shaped the local arts ecosystem, CVL Economics surveyed grantee organizations. Of the 88 organizations that received support through the Arts Organization Continuity Grants (2020) or the Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants (BARG, 2022), 30 (34%) completed the survey, providing valuable insights into both the immediate and lasting effects of the City's investment.

The survey captured a diverse mix of organizations in terms of size, discipline, and leadership demographics. Respondents ranged from very small, community-based nonprofits with annual budgets under \$100,000 to larger institutions with multimillion-dollar operations. Disciplines represented included performing arts, visual arts, festivals, and educational organizations, reflecting the broad spectrum of Berkeley's creative ecosystem. Responses also included organizations led by people of color, LGBTQ+ leaders, and women, ensuring that a range of perspectives and experiences were reflected in the findings.

Additional survey responses can be found below.

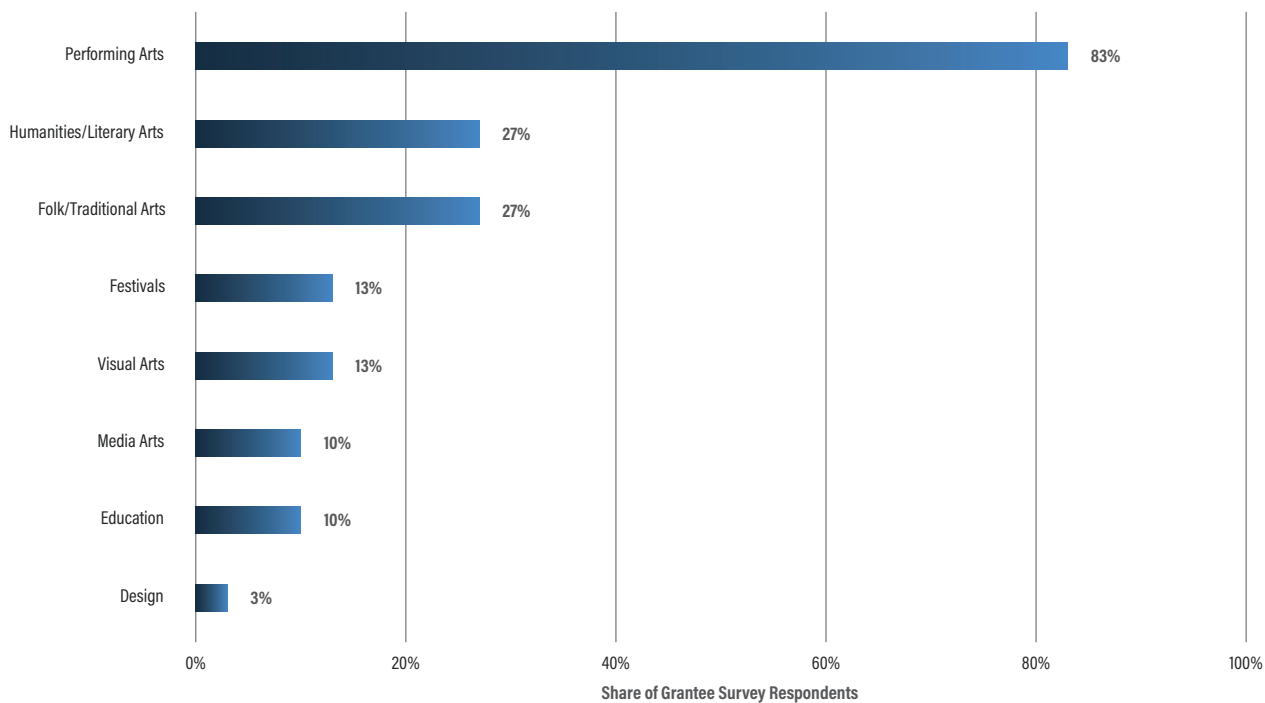
Figure A.1.1 Share of Respondents by Leadership Demographics



N = 30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

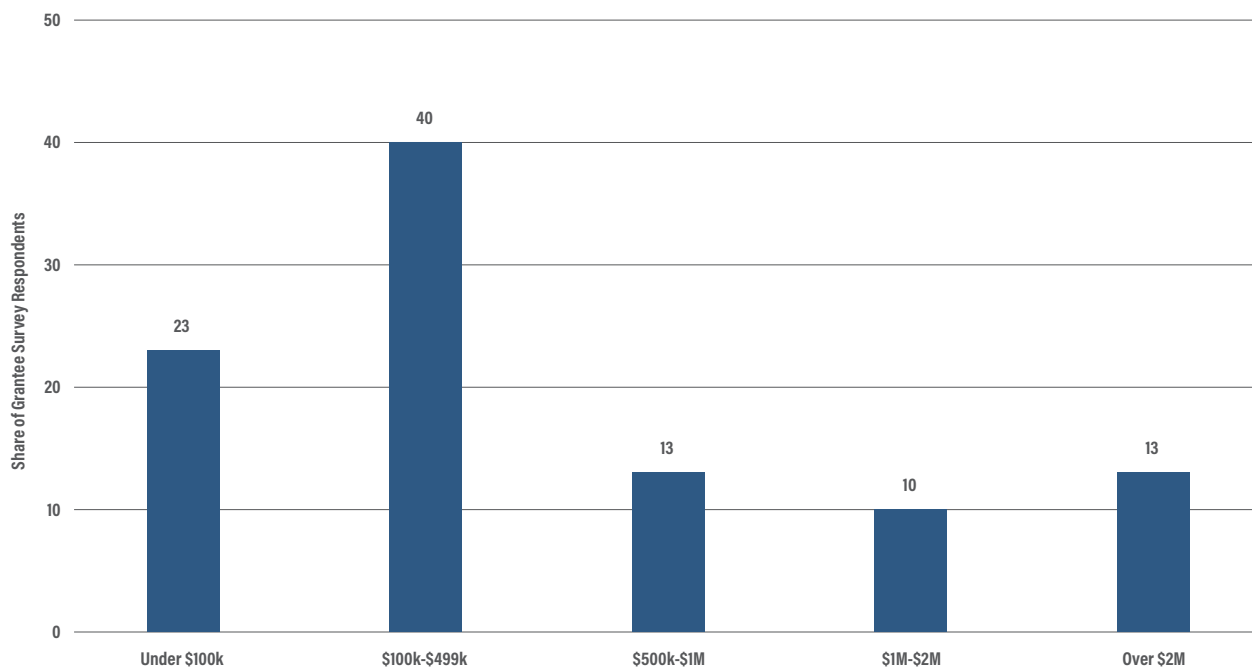
Figure A.1.2 Share of Respondents by Arts & Culture Discipline (Multi-Choice)



N = 30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

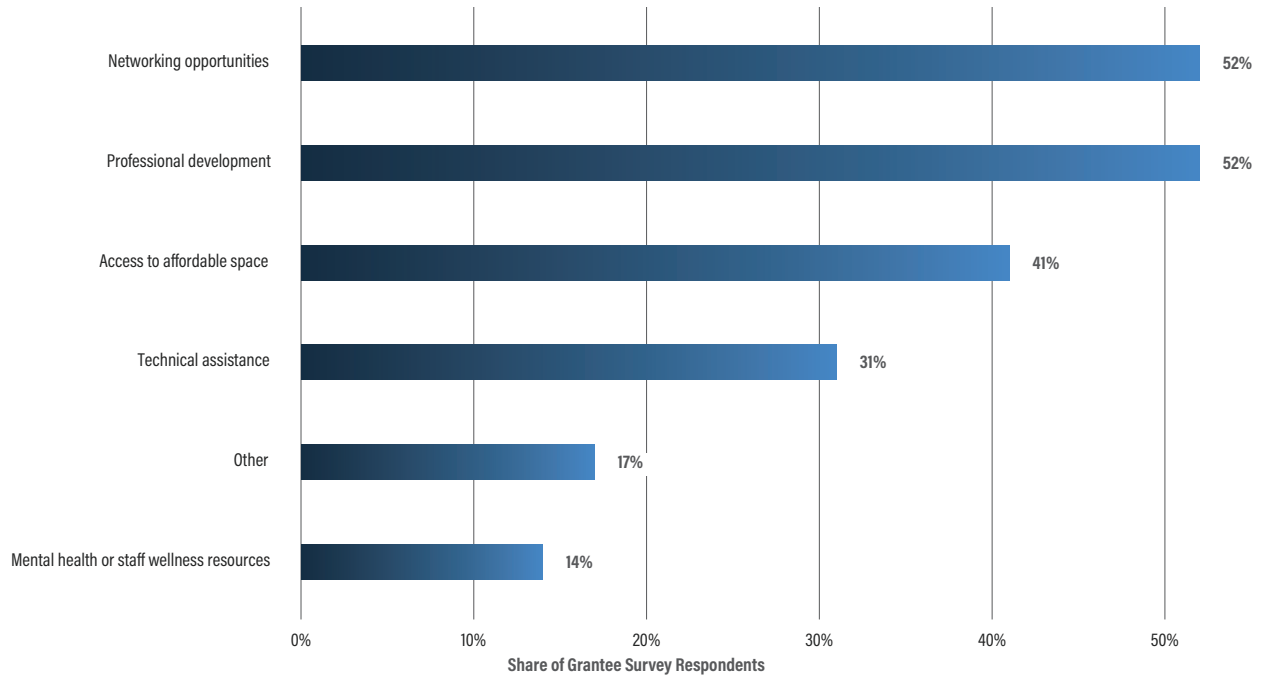
Figure A.1.3 Share of Respondents by Organization Size



N = 30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

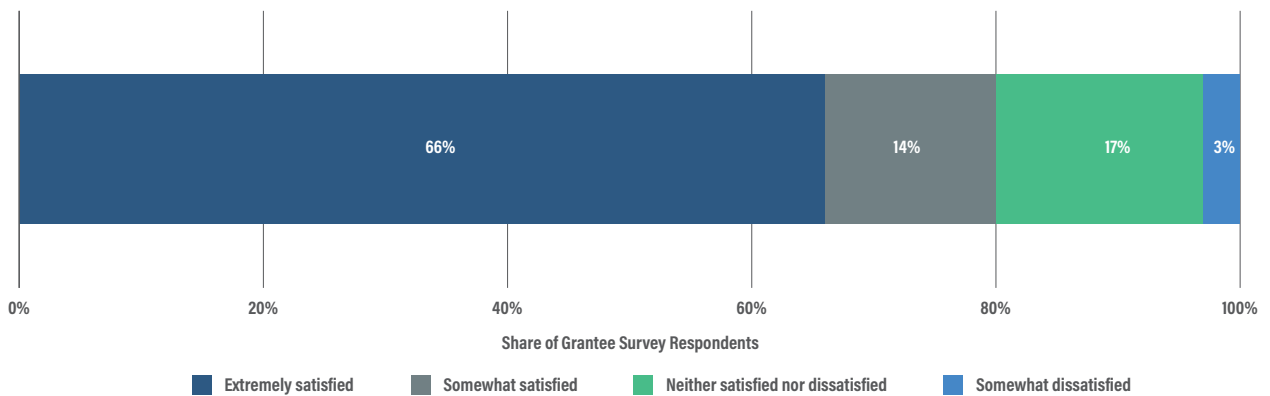
Figure A.1.4 Top Organizational Support Needs Beyond Funding for 2025–2030



N = 30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

Figure A.1.5 Degree of Satisfaction with Administration of Pandemic Relief and Recovery Grants in Berkeley | 2020–2022



N = 30

Source: CVL Economics Survey (2025).

## A.2: BERKELEY'S RETURN ON INVESTMENT ON PANDEMIC RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUNDING TO ARTS AND CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS

The City of Berkeley's relief and recovery funding for arts and culture organizations was evaluated through a return on investment (ROI) framework, designed to measure not only immediate stabilization but also the longer-term value preserved in the local economy.

The first step was to define the scope of the creative economy in order to capture impacts across the entire creative ecosystem. Economic data are reported using the standardized North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which allows for consistency and comparability across datasets. Because no single NAICS code fully captures this sector, CVL Economics developed a curated set of industries spanning performing arts, visual arts, film, media, design, and related support services (see below for a detailed list of NAICS codes).

We quantified the value of organizations preserved by City funding using organizational revenue as the basis, drawing from a master grantee revenue dataset compiled by CVL Economics. This dataset integrates IRS Form 990 filings for each organization and supplementing with revenue data from the City of Berkeley's grant application database and grantee survey responses to fill in gaps. Grantee surveys and applications also established a baseline of financial hardship: all recipients of Arts Organization Continuity Grants and Berkeley Arts Recovery Grants (BARG) documented significant revenue losses. Survey results further revealed that 28% of grantees received no other

pandemic relief, making the City of Berkeley's support their sole external lifeline.

Using the master revenue dataset and the 28% figure as a baseline for the additional organizations that would have closed without funding (and weighting by organizational size to reflect the greater impact of funding on smaller groups), we estimate that the combined annual revenues of these at-risk organizations totaled \$12.9 million.

To translate these preserved revenues into economic ROI, we employed IMPLAN's input-output modeling system. IMPLAN is widely used by governments and researchers to quantify the total value of an investment, capturing not only the direct benefits to grantees, but also the indirect benefits to vendors, contractors, and service providers, as well as the induced effects from household spending by arts workers. This analysis found that these preserved arts organizations generated a total of \$14 million in economic output in the City of Berkeley, reflecting the full ripple effects across the local economy.

Through this framework, we estimate that every \$1 invested by the City leveraged at least \$5.64 in ongoing arts and culture economic activity. This ratio represents the ROI of Berkeley's \$2.5 million in relief and recovery funding to arts and culture organizations.

Figure A.2 Creative Economy Industry Classification Codes

| INDUSTRY CATEGORY AND DESCRIPTION                                                                  | NAICS  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| <b>ARCHITECTURE &amp; DESIGN</b>                                                                   |        |
| Ornamental and Architectural Metal Work Manufacturing                                              | 332323 |
| Architectural Services                                                                             | 541310 |
| Landscape Architectural Services                                                                   | 541320 |
| Drafting Services                                                                                  | 541340 |
| Interior Design Services                                                                           | 541410 |
| Industrial Design Services                                                                         | 541420 |
| <b>COMMUNICATION DESIGN</b>                                                                        |        |
| Graphic Design Services                                                                            | 541430 |
| Advertising Agencies                                                                               | 541810 |
| Photography Studios, Portrait                                                                      | 541921 |
| Commercial Photography                                                                             | 541922 |
| <b>ENTERTAINMENT &amp; DIGITAL MEDIA</b>                                                           |        |
| Motion Picture and Video Production                                                                | 512110 |
| Motion Picture and Video Distribution                                                              | 512120 |
| Teleproduction and Other Postproduction Services                                                   | 512191 |
| Sound Recording Studios                                                                            | 512240 |
| Software Publishers                                                                                | 513210 |
| Radio Broadcasting Stations                                                                        | 516110 |
| Television Broadcasting Stations                                                                   | 516120 |
| Media Streaming Distribution Services, Social Networks, Other Media Networks and Content Providers | 516210 |

| INDUSTRY CATEGORY AND DESCRIPTION                                       | NAICS  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| <b>FASHION</b>                                                          |        |
| Fiber, Yarn, and Thread Mills                                           | 313110 |
| Broadwoven Fabric Mills                                                 | 313210 |
| Narrow Fabric Mills and Schifflli Machine Embroidery                    | 313220 |
| Nonwoven Fabric Mills                                                   | 313230 |
| Knit Fabric Mills                                                       | 313240 |
| Textile and Fabric Finishing Mills                                      | 313310 |
| Fabric Coating Mills                                                    | 313320 |
| Apparel Knitting Mills                                                  | 315120 |
| Cut and Sew Apparel Contractors                                         | 315210 |
| Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing (except Contractors)                  | 315250 |
| Apparel Accessories and Other Apparel Manufacturing                     | 315990 |
| Footwear Manufacturing                                                  | 316210 |
| Other Leather and Allied Product Manufacturing                          | 316990 |
| Toilet Preparation Manufacturing                                        | 325620 |
| Jewelry and Silverware Manufacturing                                    | 339910 |
| Jewelry, Watch, Precious Stone, and Precious Metal Merchant Wholesalers | 423940 |
| Piece Goods, Notions, and Other Dry Goods Merchant Wholesalers          | 424310 |
| Footwear Merchant Wholesalers                                           | 424340 |
| Clothing and Clothing Accessories Merchant Wholesalers                  | 424350 |
| Other Specialized Design Services                                       | 541490 |
| <b>FINE ARTS SCHOOLS</b>                                                |        |
| Fine Arts Schools                                                       | 611610 |
| <b>FURNITURE, TOYS &amp; DECORATIVE ARTS</b>                            |        |
| Carpet and Rug Mills                                                    | 314110 |
| Curtain and Linen Mills                                                 | 314120 |
| Textile Bag and Canvas Mills                                            | 314910 |
| Rope, Cordage, Twine, Tire Cord, and Tire Fabric Mills                  | 314994 |
| All Other Miscellaneous Textile Product Mills                           | 314999 |
| Pottery, Ceramics, and Plumbing Fixture Manufacturing                   | 327110 |
| Other Pressed and Blown Glass and Glassware Manufacturing               | 327212 |
| All Other Miscellaneous Nonmetallic Mineral Product Manufacturing       | 327999 |
| Wood Kitchen Cabinet and Countertop Manufacturing                       | 337110 |
| Upholstered Household Furniture Manufacturing                           | 337121 |
| Nonupholstered Wood Household Furniture Manufacturing                   | 337122 |
| Household Furniture (except Wood and Upholstered) Manufacturing         | 337126 |
| Institutional Furniture Manufacturing                                   | 337127 |

| INDUSTRY CATEGORY AND DESCRIPTION                                                 | NAICS  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Wood Office Furniture Manufacturing                                               | 337211 |
| Custom Architectural Woodwork and Millwork Manufacturing                          | 337212 |
| Office Furniture (except Wood) Manufacturing                                      | 337214 |
| Showcase, Partition, Shelving, and Locker Manufacturing                           | 337215 |
| Mattress Manufacturing                                                            | 337910 |
| Blind and Shade Manufacturing                                                     | 337920 |
| Doll, Toy, and Game Manufacturing                                                 | 339930 |
| Furniture Merchant Wholesalers                                                    | 423210 |
| Home Furnishing Merchant Wholesalers                                              | 423220 |
| Toy and Hobby Goods and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers                             | 423920 |
| <b>PUBLISHING &amp; PRINTING</b>                                                  |        |
| Commercial Printing (except Screen and Books)                                     | 323111 |
| Commercial Screen Printing                                                        | 323113 |
| Books Printing                                                                    | 323117 |
| Support Activities for Printing                                                   | 323120 |
| Book, Periodical, and Newspaper Merchant Wholesalers                              | 424920 |
| Newspaper Publishers                                                              | 513110 |
| Periodical Publishers                                                             | 513120 |
| Book Publishers                                                                   | 513130 |
| Directory and Mailing List Publishers                                             | 513140 |
| Greeting Card Publishers                                                          | 513191 |
| All Other Publishers                                                              | 513199 |
| Libraries and Archives                                                            | 519210 |
| <b>VISUAL &amp; PERFORMING ARTS</b>                                               |        |
| Musical Instrument Manufacturing                                                  | 339992 |
| Art Dealers                                                                       | 459920 |
| Theater Companies and Dinner Theaters                                             | 711110 |
| Dance Companies                                                                   | 711120 |
| Musical Groups and Artists                                                        | 711130 |
| Other Performing Arts Companies                                                   | 711190 |
| Agents and Managers for Artists, Athletes, Entertainers, and Other Public Figures | 711410 |
| Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers                                      | 711510 |
| Museums                                                                           | 712110 |

### A.3: DEFINING BERKELEY'S ARTIST POPULATION

To analyze Berkeley's artist workforce, we defined an "artist population" within the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) based on occupational classifications. Specifically, we restricted the dataset to individuals whose Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes align with creative, cultural, and artistic work.

The SOC codes were used to capture a wide spectrum of artistic and creative occupations, including:

- **Visual arts and design fields** (e.g., art directors, fine artists, designers, animators, architects)
- **Media and communication occupations** (e.g., writers, editors, reporters, broadcasters, public relations specialists)
- **Performing arts and entertainment** (e.g., performers, dancers, musicians)
- **Film, television, and digital media production** (e.g., producers, directors, camera operators, sound technicians, editors)
- **Other creative technical roles** (e.g., computer occupations in visual effects/animation, printing workers, sound engineering, lighting technicians).

The following SOC codes were included in our definition:

- **112011** – Advertising and Promotions Managers
- **112021** – Marketing Managers
- **112030** – Public Relations and Fundraising Managers
- **119041** – Architectural and Engineering Managers
- **131011** – Agents and Business Managers of Artists, Performers, and Athletes
- **151251** – Software Developers, Applications
- **151252** – Software Developers, Systems Software
- **151253** – Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers
- **151254** – Web Developers
- **151255** – Web and Digital Interface Designers
- **171011** – Architects (Except Landscape and Naval)
- **171012** – Landscape Architects
- **171020** – Surveyors, Cartographers, and Photogrammetrists
- **173011** – Architectural and Civil Drafters
- **254010** – Postsecondary Teachers, Art, Drama, and Music
- **271010** – Artists and Related Workers
- **271021** – Animators and Special Effects Artists
- **271022** – Fine Artists, Including Painters, Sculptors, and Illustrators
- **271024** – Graphic Designers
- **271025** – Industrial Designers
- **271026** – Fashion Designers
- **272011** – Actors
- **272012** – Producers and Directors
- **272030** – Dancers and Choreographers
- **272041** – Music Directors and Composers
- **272042** – Musicians and Singers
- **272099** – Entertainers and Performers, All Other
- **273011** – Broadcast Announcers and Radio Disc Jockeys
- **273031** – News Analysts, Reporters, and Journalists
- **273042** – Media and Communication Workers, All Other
- **273043** – Public Relations Specialists

- **273099** – Media and Communication Occupations, All Other
- **274021** – Photographers
- **274022** – Camera Operators, Television, Video, and Film
- **274023** – Film and Video Editors
- **274024** – Audio and Video Technicians
- **274025** – Lighting Technicians
- **274026** – Sound Engineering Technicians
- **274027** – Broadcast, Sound, and Lighting Technicians, All Other
- **274028** – Motion Picture Projectionists
- **274029** – Media Equipment Workers, All Other
- **274030** – Television, Video, and Film Camera Operators and Editors
- **393011** – Motion Picture Projectionists
- **393012** – Ushers, Lobby Attendants, and Ticket Takers
- **393013** – Entertainment Attendants and Related Workers, All Other
- **393019** – Miscellaneous Entertainment Attendants and Related Workers
- **515111** – News Analysts, Reporters, and Journalists
- **515112** – Editors
- **515113** – Technical Writers
- **516021** – Commercial and Industrial Designers
- **516031** – Floral Designers
- **516040** – Merchandise Displayers and Window Trimmers
- **516050** – Set and Exhibit Designers
- **516093** – Costume Attendants
- **516099** – Media and Communication Equipment Workers, All Other
- **517011** – Radio Operators
- **517021** – Sound Engineering Technicians
- **517031** – Broadcast Technicians
- **517041** – Media and Communication Equipment Workers, All Other
- **517099** – Media and Communication Workers, All Other
- **519071** – Jewelers and Precious Stone and Metal Workers
- **519194** – Musical Instrument Repairers and Tuners

# Assessment of Berkeley Arts & Culture Pandemic Relief and Recovery Funding

DECEMBER 2025

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



This report was made possible through the leadership and support of the City of Berkeley, including the Office of Economic Development and its Civic Arts Program, the Civic Arts Commission, and Berkeley City Council, whose commitment to advancing the city's creative and cultural vitality guided this work. We also extend our appreciation to the many nonprofit arts and culture organizations, creative practitioners, and community stakeholders who generously contributed their time, insights, and experiences.

## PREPARED BY:



CVL Economics is an economic consulting firm that takes a data-driven, human-centric approach to equitable development and sustainable growth. Founded in 2021, CVL Economics partners with communities, municipalities, organizations, and institutions to address today's most complex challenges and foster bold action. Coupling robust economic models with innovative research methodologies, we provide decision-makers with the actionable insights needed to effect change, expand opportunity, and improve economic well-being.









CONSENT CALENDAR

April 28, 2026

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Disaster and Fire Safety Commission

Submitted by: Greg Murphy, Chairperson

Subject: Support Position on SB 894 (Allen) - California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt an official Support position on Senate Bill 894 (Allen), the California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program, and authorize and direct the Mayor or City Manager or designee to send letters of support to Senator Ben Allen, Senator Jesse Arreguín, representing Berkeley in the California State Senate, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

No direct fiscal costs to the City of Berkeley. The recommended action is limited to communicating a policy position and transmitting letters of support to state legislators; no City appropriation or expenditure is required.

Substantial potential fiscal benefits to the City. SB 894 would establish a state-administered loan program providing financial assistance to Berkeley residents, homeowners, and small businesses for wildfire hardening and defensible space improvements. Increased adoption of such measures citywide would be expected to:

- Reduce the risk and severity of catastrophic wildfire losses within Berkeley, particularly in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) in the hills, where a major fire event could result in billions of dollars in property damage and significant municipal emergency response costs.
- Reduce pressure on the City's emergency response resources and the costs of post-disaster recovery, debris removal, and infrastructure repair.
- Help stabilize the homeowner's insurance market in Berkeley, where increasing non-renewals and premium escalations driven by wildfire risk pose growing fiscal and economic stability concerns for residents and the City alike.
- Complement City investments in emergency preparedness and wildfire mitigation without requiring additional local expenditure.

Because SB 894 operates through state and private financing mechanisms – including loan loss reserves and interest rate buy-downs administered by the California Alternative Energy and Advanced Transportation Financing Authority (CAEATFA) – the

## Support Position on SB 894 (Allen) - California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program

CALENDAR

City of Berkeley would receive these community protection benefits at no direct cost to the City's General Fund.

### CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Berkeley faces a significant and well-documented wildfire risk, particularly in the hillside neighborhoods that border the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) has designated a substantial portion of the Berkeley Hills as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ). This designation reflects the elevated risk posed by the combination of steep terrain, dense vegetation, older housing stock, and the region's characteristic dry and windy seasonal conditions.

The 1991 Tunnel Fire – also known as the Oakland-Berkeley Hills Fire – remains the defining example of the catastrophic potential of wildfire in this urban setting. That event destroyed approximately 3,354 housing units, killed 25 people, and caused over \$1.5 billion in damages. Risk modeling and climate trends suggest that fire weather conditions in the East Bay hills have intensified since 1991, and the probability of a comparable or larger fire event remains a serious public safety concern.

Despite this well-established risk, access to affordable capital for home hardening and defensible space improvements remains a significant barrier for many Berkeley residents. Home hardening projects – which may include ember-resistant vents, fire-resistant roofing and siding, deck replacement, and vegetation management – can cost tens of thousands of dollars, creating inequitable outcomes in which wealthier homeowners are better positioned to protect themselves and their neighbors. SB 894 directly addresses this affordability barrier by leveraging state resources to reduce the cost of private financing for these improvements.

At the same time, the insurance market crisis in wildfire-prone California communities has reached an acute stage. Multiple major insurers have paused or discontinued homeowner's insurance offerings in California, with Berkeley's hillside neighborhoods among the most affected. Reduced insurability further depresses property values, complicates home sales, and threatens the financial stability of existing homeowners. Broad adoption of home hardening improvements, facilitated by accessible financing such as proposed under SB 894, would create a mechanism to improve insurability at the community level, simultaneously with making our community safer from wildfire.

Action:.

Votes: Ayes: 8

Noe's: 0

Abstain: 0

Absent: 1

## BACKGROUND

The DFSC has maintained an active focus on wildfire resiliency in Berkeley for a number of years. The Commission's Wildfire Resiliency Workgroup has examined a range of policy options aimed at increasing the rate of home hardening and defensible space compliance among Berkeley residents, with particular attention to the challenges of affordability and equitable access to improvement resources.

As part of this ongoing work, the DFSC previously reviewed and discussed potential enhancements to the City's Resident Assistance Program, including proposals to expand financial assistance available to lower-income residents for wildfire mitigation improvements. These discussions informed the Commission's understanding of the financing barriers facing Berkeley homeowners and highlighted the limitations of locally funded approaches in achieving the scale of adoption necessary for meaningful community-wide risk reduction.

Most recently, the DFSC recommended – and the Berkeley City Council approved with modifications – a Transfer Tax Rebate program to incentivize wildfire hardening improvements at the point of residential property sale. This program represents an important step toward encouraging home hardening, and reflects the Council's recognition that financial incentives are a necessary component of a comprehensive resiliency strategy. However, the Transfer Tax Rebate is limited in reach, applying only to properties at the time of sale or in the preceding five years, and falling short of mobilizing the broad, proactive investment in fire hardening that the community's risk profile demands.

SB 894 would establish the California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program, administered by CAEATFA – an authority with demonstrated experience managing statewide financing programs that leverage public participation to unlock private capital. The program would establish a loan loss reserve and interest rate buy-down mechanism to make private financing for wildfire hardening and defensible space improvements more accessible and affordable to eligible property owners across the state, including in Berkeley. Eligible improvements would include home hardening measures consistent with California Code of Regulations requirements, defensible space activities, and smoke mitigation retrofits.

Importantly, financial assistance under the program would be available to eligible properties throughout California and would not be restricted by land classification, jurisdiction, or hazard severity zone designation – ensuring that Berkeley homeowners in all risk zones, not only those in the formally designated VHFHSZ, could potentially benefit from the program.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

- The City of Berkeley could independently establish a municipal loan loss reserve or interest rate buy-down program for wildfire hardening improvements. While this approach would allow the City to tailor program design to Berkeley's specific needs and move forward on its own timeline, it would require a significant commitment of City capital and administrative resources, and would operate at a much smaller scale than a statewide program. A locally funded program would also face challenges in leveraging private lending partnerships and achieving the critical mass necessary to materially shift the insurance market. The DFSC finds that this alternative should be deferred pending the outcome of SB 894.
- Berkeley could explore partnering with neighboring jurisdictions – such as Oakland, and other East Bay communities participating in the East Bay Wildfire Coalition facing similar wildfire risk, and perhaps in conjunction with agencies with an interest in property improvements for water and energy efficiency such as EBMUD or AVA – to establish a regional financing program modeled on the structure proposed in SB 894. A multi-jurisdictional approach could achieve somewhat greater scale than a purely local program. However, designing, negotiating, and launching a joint program across multiple jurisdictions would be time- and resource-intensive, and would likely take years to operationalize. This alternative should likewise be deferred pending the outcome of SB 894. If the bill does not advance, the City of Berkeley may wish to revisit this option in a subsequent recommendation.

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager concurs with the content and recommendations of the Commission's Report.

CONTACT PERSON

Keith May, Commission Secretary, Deputy Fire Chief, (510) 510-981-5508

Attachments:

- 1: Sample Letter of Support

Support Position on SB 894 (Allen) - California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program

CALENDAR

**ATTACHMENT A**

*Draft Letter of Support from the Mayor of Berkeley*

[DATE]

The Honorable Ben Allen  
California State Senate, District 24  
State Capitol, Room 2054  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Letter of Support – SB 894 (Allen): California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program

Dear Senator Allen:

On behalf of the City of Berkeley, I am pleased to write in strong support of Senate Bill 894, which would establish the California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program. This legislation represents exactly the kind of bold, statewide financial innovation needed to accelerate home hardening and defensible space improvements in wildfire-vulnerable communities across California.

Berkeley is acutely aware of the wildfire risk facing our community. The Berkeley Hills are designated a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, and the memory of the 1991 Tunnel Fire – which destroyed more than 3,300 homes and claimed 25 lives – shapes our ongoing commitment to wildfire preparedness and mitigation. Despite that commitment, we continue to face a fundamental challenge: the upfront cost of home hardening and defensible space improvements is a significant barrier for many residents, particularly those of moderate means who may not qualify for or have access to affordable private financing.

SB 894's approach – leveraging CAEATFA's proven financing expertise to create a loan loss reserve and interest rate buy-down program – is precisely the right model to address this barrier at scale. By reducing the cost and risk of private lending for wildfire resilience improvements, the bill would mobilize investment that neither government grants nor property-tax-based financing alone can achieve. The program's statewide scope and its availability to properties regardless of hazard zone designation would ensure that communities like Berkeley, with significant WUI risk throughout our hillside neighborhoods, can fully participate.

The City of Berkeley has long worked to advance wildfire resiliency. SB 894 would complement and extend these local efforts by providing the affordable financing infrastructure our residents need to take action. We also recognize that improved home hardening at scale is essential to stabilizing the homeowner's insurance market in California's most vulnerable communities, and we strongly support that goal.

Support Position on SB 894 (Allen) - California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program

CALENDAR

The City of Berkeley urges the Legislature to pass SB 894 and respectfully requests the Governor's signature. We look forward to working with your office and with CAEATFA to ensure that Berkeley residents are well-positioned to benefit from this program upon its enactment.

Sincerely,

Mayor, City of Berkeley

**cc:**

Senator Jesse Arreguín, California State Senate, District 9

Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, California State Assembly, District 14

Berkeley City Council



CONSENT CALENDAR

April 28, 2026

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Disaster and Fire Safety Commission

Submitted by: Greg Murphy, Chairperson

Subject: Support Position on SB 1076 (Pérez) - Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt an official Support position on Senate Bill 1076 (Pérez), the Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act, and authorize and direct the Mayor or City Manager or designee to send letters of support to Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Senator Jesse Arreguín, representing Berkeley in the California State Senate, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

No direct fiscal costs to the City of Berkeley. The recommended action is limited to communicating a policy position and transmitting letters of support to state legislators; no City appropriation or expenditure is required.

Substantial potential fiscal benefits to the City. SB 1076 would require admitted insurers to offer and renew residential property insurance for homeowners whose properties meet state-defined wildfire mitigation standards, effective January 1, 2028. Stabilizing the residential insurance market in Berkeley's wildfire-vulnerable neighborhoods would be expected to:

- Protect property values in the Berkeley Hills and other areas affected by insurance non-renewals and market withdrawals, reducing the risk of a destabilized local housing market with downstream consequences for the City's property tax base.
- Reduce pressure on the California FAIR Plan as an insurer of last resort, which currently underwrites significant risk in Berkeley's hillside neighborhoods at inadequately capitalized rates – a dynamic that poses systemic financial risk to all California ratepayers, including Berkeley residents.
- Create a stronger financial incentive for Berkeley homeowners to invest in home hardening and defensible space improvements, since those investments would now carry a guaranteed path to insurance coverage – thereby reducing the City's wildfire risk exposure and potential emergency response costs.
- Complement City investments in wildfire preparedness and mitigation, including the Transfer Tax Rebate program and the Resident Assistance Program, by

Support Position on SB 1076 (Pérez) - Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act  
CALENDAR

ensuring that residents who complete hardening improvements can secure and maintain insurance coverage.

Because SB 1076 operates through the state insurance regulatory framework – imposing obligations on admitted insurers rather than requiring direct City expenditure – the City of Berkeley would receive these community protection benefits at no direct cost to the City's General Fund.

### CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Berkeley faces a serious and ongoing home insurance crisis driven by wildfire risk. The Berkeley Hills are designated a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and the area's steep terrain, dense vegetation, older housing stock, and fire-weather conditions make it among the highest-risk urban communities in California.

In recent years, multiple major admitted insurers have paused or ceased offering homeowners insurance in California, including in Berkeley's hillside neighborhoods. Statewide, enrollment in the California FAIR Plan – the insurer of last resort – has doubled in just two years as hundreds of thousands of homeowners have lost their original coverage. Berkeley residents have not been immune to this trend, and the insurance availability crisis now threatens property values, home sales, and the financial stability of existing homeowners throughout the hills.

A central and deeply troubling feature of the current insurance market failure is that homeowners who invest in proven fire mitigation measures – home hardening, ember-resistant construction, defensible space – are receiving no meaningful assurance that those investments will secure or restore their access to coverage. Studies from the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, CAL FIRE, and the University of California, Berkeley document broad scientific consensus that home hardening and defensible space significantly reduce the risk of structural damage in a wildfire. Yet insurers have continued to decline coverage and non-renew policies regardless of a property's mitigation status, removing the market incentive for residents to make these investments.

SB 1076 directly addresses this market failure by establishing that, beginning January 1, 2028, an admitted insurer that offers or sells residential property insurance in California may not refuse to offer, sell, or renew a policy for a property that meets minimum home hardening and wildfire mitigation standards as established by the Insurance Commissioner by regulation. The bill provides a limited exception for geographic overconcentration of risk, subject to a public hearing process and six-month renewal requirements, and maintains insurers' ability to apply non-wildfire underwriting criteria. Insurers that habitually violate the bill's requirements, or that elect to exit the residential property market rather than comply, would face a five-year suspension or

Support Position on SB 1076 (Pérez) - Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act  
CALENDAR

revocation of their authority to sell both homeowner's and automobile insurance in California.

The bill's enforcement mechanism mirrors a model already operating in California's auto insurance market under Proposition 103, which requires insurers to offer a Good Driver Discount policy to any motorist who meets the state's safe-driving standard. SB 1076 would extend that same principle to homeowners: residents who invest in making their properties fire-safe deserve to know they will be able to insure them.

Action:.

Votes: Ayes: 8

Noe's: 0

Abstain: 0

Absent: 1

### BACKGROUND

The DFSC has maintained an active focus on wildfire resiliency in Berkeley for a number of years. The Commission's Wildfire Resiliency Workgroup has examined a range of policy options aimed at increasing the rate of home hardening and defensible space compliance among Berkeley residents, with particular attention to the challenges of affordability and equitable access to improvement resources.

As part of this ongoing work, the DFSC previously reviewed and discussed potential enhancements to the City's Resident Assistance Program, including proposals to expand financial assistance available to lower-income residents for wildfire mitigation improvements. These discussions underscored a recurring concern: that even when residents are willing and able to complete hardening improvements, the absence of a guaranteed path to insurance coverage undermines the motivation to invest.

Most recently, the DFSC recommended – and the Berkeley City Council approved with modifications – a Transfer Tax Rebate program to incentivize wildfire hardening improvements at the point of residential property sale or in the preceding five years. That program reflects the Council's recognition that financial incentives are a necessary component of a comprehensive resiliency strategy. However, its reach is limited to properties at or near the time of sale, and it does not address the insurance availability barrier that discourages broader, proactive investment in home hardening.

Senator Pérez introduced SB 1076 in response to concerns raised by survivors of the January 2025 Eaton Fire in Altadena, who reported that even newly rebuilt homes constructed to the highest fire-resistance standards faced the prospect of insurance denial. The bill is co-sponsored by the Eaton Fire Survivors Network and Consumer

Support Position on SB 1076 (Pérez) - Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act  
CALENDAR

Watchdog. Polling conducted by Hart Research and FM3 Research found that 85 percent of voters believe home insurers should be required to cover homeowners who meet state fire safety guidelines.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

- The City of Berkeley could take no position on SB 1076, on the grounds that insurance regulation is primarily a state function outside the City's direct jurisdiction. However, the DFSC finds that the insurance availability crisis in Berkeley's hillside neighborhoods is a direct threat to community safety, housing stability, and the City's wildfire mitigation objectives. SB 1076 directly advances those objectives at no cost to the City, and Berkeley's voice in support of the bill could meaningfully contribute to its prospects for passage.

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager concurs with the content and recommendations of the Commission's Report.

CONTACT PERSON

Keith May, Commission Secretary, Deputy Fire Chief, (510) 510-981-5508

Attachments:

- 1: Sample Letter of Support

**ATTACHMENT A**

*Draft Letter of Support from the Mayor of Berkeley*

[DATE]

The Honorable Sasha Renée Pérez  
California State Senate, District 25  
State Capitol, Room [Room Number]  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Letter of Support – SB 1076 (Pérez): Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act

Dear Senator Pérez:

On behalf of the City of Berkeley, I am pleased to write in strong support of Senate Bill 1076, the Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act. This legislation addresses one of the most critical and frustrating failures of the current residential insurance market: the denial of coverage to homeowners who have done everything right – who have hardened their homes, created defensible space, and invested in making their properties safer – and who are still being turned away by insurers.

Berkeley is intimately familiar with wildfire risk. The Berkeley Hills are designated a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, and our community has lived with the memory of the 1991 Tunnel Fire – which destroyed more than 3,300 homes and claimed 25 lives – as a constant reminder of what is at stake. In recent years, we have watched the insurance market retreat from our hillside neighborhoods, leaving residents with limited or no options for affordable coverage. FAIR Plan enrollment has doubled statewide in just two years, and Berkeley residents are among those most affected.

The core problem SB 1076 addresses is not merely an inconvenience – it is a fundamental breakdown of the incentive structure that should be driving wildfire risk reduction. When homeowners invest in fire-resistant roofing, ember-resistant vents, and defensible space, they reduce risk not just for themselves but for their neighbors and their entire community. If those investments do not guarantee access to insurance, the incentive to make them is severely undermined. SB 1076 restores that incentive by ensuring that meeting state-defined wildfire safety standards translates into a right to coverage.

The City of Berkeley has worked hard to encourage home hardening through local programs including a Transfer Tax Rebate for wildfire hardening improvements and ongoing resident assistance initiatives. SB 1076 would powerfully reinforce those local efforts. We strongly support the bill's balanced approach: requiring coverage for compliant properties while preserving insurers' ability to apply non-wildfire underwriting criteria and to seek temporary waivers for genuine overconcentration of risk through a transparent, public process.

Support Position on SB 1076 (Pérez) - Insurance Coverage for Fire-Safe Homes Act  
CALENDAR

The City of Berkeley urges the Legislature to pass SB 1076 and respectfully requests the Governor's signature.

Sincerely,

Mayor, City of Berkeley

**cc:**

Senator Jesse Arreguín, California State Senate, District 9  
Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, California State Assembly, District 14  
Berkeley City Council



CONSENT CALENDAR  
Tuesday, April 28, 2026

**To:** Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
**From:** Jenny Wong, City Auditor *zw*  
**Subject:** Berkeley’s Financial Condition (FY 2016-FY 2025): Structural Deficit Poses Risk to Financial Sustainability

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend City Council request that the City Manager report back by Fall 2026, and annually thereafter, regarding the status of our audit recommendations until reported fully implemented by the Finance Department, Budget Office, and other relevant departments. This audit includes 9 recommendations to formalize the use of more sustainable budget strategies, ensure funds withdrawn from the Section 115 Trust are replenished, improve financial reporting, and develop a capital financing plan that proposes future funding mechanisms beyond existing sources to help address the City’s growing unfunded capital needs. City management agreed or partially agreed to our recommendations. Please see our report for their complete response.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

The audit recommendations intend to help the City achieve long-term financial sustainability and address the financial risks identified in the report. This audit is especially relevant as the City will need to make difficult decisions to close the FY 2027 and FY 2028 structural General Fund deficit.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

This audit assessed Berkeley’s financial condition between FY 2016 and FY 2025 using various financial indicators. Overall, Berkeley’s long-term financial condition is facing ongoing challenges, similar to the findings from our [2022 audit](#). In the near-term, Berkeley’s structural deficit poses additional risk to the City’s long-term financial sustainability. As we stated in our 2022 audit, it will continue to be important for the City to balance its near-term needs and long-term financial obligations.

*Near-Term Financial Indicators*

1. **Revenues and Expenses:** Despite budgetary challenges, the City’s revenues for governmental activities generally covered actual expenses in the past ten fiscal years, except for FY 2020. Berkeley’s largest source of revenue was property taxes. While a smaller portion of revenue, investment earnings saw the largest percentage increase and lease revenue decreased by nearly one half.

2. **Budgetary Practices:** The City's previous one-time balancing strategies can put the long-term sustainability of some funds at risk. Some enterprise funds also faced structural deficits and received millions of dollars from the General Fund and other funds to balance. The City is considering placing a sales and use tax measure on the 2026 ballot to generate new revenues to help address its projected General Fund deficit.
3. **Demographic and Economic Indicators:** The City's economy improved after the pandemic but experienced recent declines. Property value continues to grow, while median household income has not substantially grown. Unemployment recovered to pre-pandemic levels but has trended upward again.
4. **Net Position, Liquidity, and Reserves:** The City's net position increased, and its liquidity ratio is strong. The City is on track to meet its updated General Fund reserves goal.

#### *Long-Term Financial indicators*

5. **Long-Term Debt and Liabilities:** The City's long-term liabilities have grown. General obligation bond debt per resident peaked in FY 2022 and declined in recent years. The City's general obligation bond debt remained at or less than one percent of taxable assessed property value.
6. **Net Pension and Retiree Healthcare Liabilities:** The City's unfunded pension liability is still considered high risk and totaled \$694.8 million as of FY 2025. However, the City made progress in decreasing its unfunded retiree healthcare liability by more than \$100 million. According to the Government Financial Officers Association, Berkeley would have the highest bond rating, and as a result cheaper borrowing, if not for its pension liabilities. The City has not consistently met its annual contribution goal to the Section 115 Trust.
7. **Capital Assets:** The City's unfunded capital and deferred maintenance needs have grown to \$1.8 billion in FY 2024 despite some increased investment. Compared to other jurisdictions, Berkeley lacks advanced planning to finance capital needs in the long term. Advanced planning could help the City better anticipate and communicate plans for future bond measures. Without sufficient investment, these unfunded capital needs will continue to grow. To help address some of these capital needs, the City is considering placing a \$300 million bond measure on the 2026 ballot.

#### BACKGROUND

This audit provides an update on Berkeley's financial condition since our last financial condition audit in 2022. The audit's purpose is to provide a clear, accessible report for the public and City leadership to better understand the City's near-term and long-term financial condition and help inform decision making, especially ahead of difficult budget decisions.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are no identifiable environmental effects or opportunities associated with this report.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Implementing our recommendations will improve the City's long-term financial sustainability. If the City uses more sustainable budget strategies rather than one-time solutions to pass future budgets, the City is more likely to have recurring revenues cover recurring expenses to sustain ongoing operations. If the City explicitly requires the Section 115 Trust to be replenished after Trust funds are withdrawn, the City is more prepared to meet its future pension obligations. If the City develops a capital financing plan that includes proposals to raise new funding, the City is more likely to have sufficient funding to address its unfunded capital and deferred maintenance needs.

CONTACT PERSON

Jenny Wong, City Auditor, City Auditor's Office, 510-981-6750

Attachments:

- 1: Audit Report: Berkeley's Financial Condition (FY 2016-FY 2025): Structural Deficit Poses Risk to Financial Sustainability

Audit Report  
April 8, 2026

# Berkeley's Financial Condition (FY 2016-FY 2025): Structural Deficit Poses Risk to Financial Sustainability



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

Jenny Wong, City Auditor

Caitlin Palmer, Audit Manager

Manami Suenaga, Auditor I



# Berkeley's Financial Condition (FY 2016-FY 2025): Structural Deficit Poses Risk to Financial Sustainability

## Report Highlights

April 8, 2026



### Findings

Overall, Berkeley is facing ongoing challenges regarding its long-term financial condition, similar to the findings from our 2022 audit. In the near term, the City faces a structural deficit, which poses additional risk to the City's long-term financial sustainability.

#### Near-Term

**Revenues and Expenses:** Governmental activities revenues generally exceeded expenses, but the General Fund still faced a structural deficit.

**Budgetary Practices:** The City's one-time balancing strategies can put the long-term sustainability of some funds at risk. Some enterprise funds also have structural deficits and receive transfers from the General Fund and other funds to balance.

**Demographic and Economic Indicators:** The City's economy improved after the pandemic but experienced recent declines. Property value continues to grow, while median household income has not substantially grown. Unemployment recovered to pre-pandemic levels but has trended upward again.

**Net Position, Liquidity, and Reserves:** The City's net position increased, and its liquidity ratio is strong. The City is on track to meet its updated reserves goal.

#### Long-Term

**Long-Term Debt and Liabilities:** The City's long-term liabilities have grown. General obligation bond debt per resident peaked in FY 2022 and declined in recent years. The City's general obligation bond debt remained at or less than one percent of taxable assessed property value.

**Net Pension and Retiree Healthcare Liabilities:** The City's net pension liability is still high risk. Net pension liability peaked in FY 2021 and decreased thereafter. Net retiree healthcare liability decreased. The City set aside resources to pre-fund pension obligations in a Section 115 Trust but has not consistently met its annual contribution goal.

**Capital Assets:** The City's unfunded capital and deferred maintenance needs have grown to \$1.8 billion despite some increased investment. The City lacks advanced planning to finance its capital plan in the long term. Without sufficient investment, these unfunded capital needs will continue to grow.

### Objective

Our objective was to assess Berkeley's financial condition using indicators for the following categories:

1. Revenues and Expenses
2. Budgetary Practices
3. Demographics and Economic Indicators
4. Net Position, Liquidity, and Reserves
5. Long-Term Debt and Liabilities
6. Net Pension and Retiree Healthcare Liabilities
7. Capital Assets

### Why This Audit Is Important

The audit's purpose is to provide a clear, accessible report for the public and City leadership to better understand the City's near-term and long-term financial condition and help inform decision making. This audit is especially relevant as the City will need to make difficult decisions to close the projected \$32 million General Fund deficit in FY 2027 and \$33 million in FY 2028.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This is the structural deficit estimate as of January 22, 2026.



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

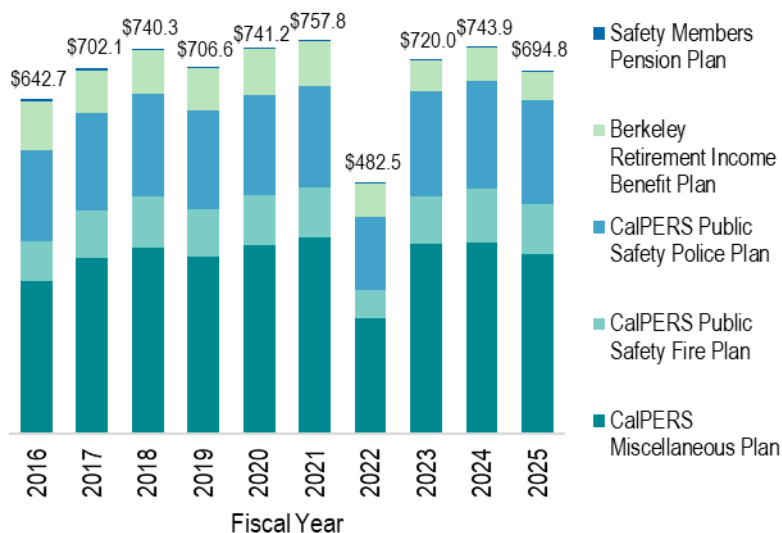
For the full report, visit [the City Auditor's website](#).

## Report Highlights

April 8, 2026

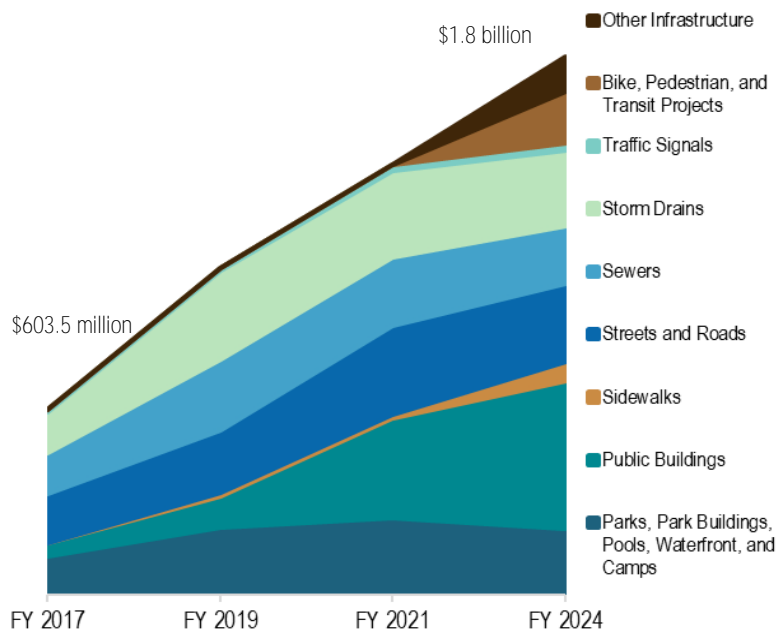
### Findings

#### Net Pension Liability Per Plan (in millions, in 2025 dollars)



Source: Finance Department data

#### Unfunded Capital and Deferred Maintenance Needs (in 2025 dollars)



Source: Berkeley’s unfunded liability reports (FY 2017-FY 2021); Capital Improvement Program (FY 2024)

### Summary of Recommendations

To help the City pass a structurally balanced budget, we recommend City management propose a fiscal policy to City Council to assess whether recurring revenues and recurring expenditures are balanced, and to formalize developing the baseline budget using the prior year’s actual expenditures and projected needs.

To improve the financial sustainability of enterprise funds, we recommend the City adopt a citywide policy to regularly evaluate enterprise fees and establish reserves for each enterprise fund.

To continue to strengthen the Section 115 Trust, we recommend City management amend the fiscal policies to explicitly require the City replenish the Trust after funds are withdrawn.

To improve the City’s ability to anticipate capital infrastructure needs, we recommend City management extend the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) beyond five years.

To address the City’s long-term capital infrastructure needs, we recommend City management develop a capital financing plan that covers a period at least as long as the CIP and proposes future funding mechanisms beyond existing sources.

City management agreed or partially agreed with these recommendations.



For the full report, visit [the City Auditor’s website](#).

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## Introduction

This audit provides an update on Berkeley's financial condition since our last financial condition audit in 2022.<sup>1</sup> The audit's purpose is to provide a clear, accessible report for the public and City leadership to better understand the City's near-term and long-term financial condition and help inform decision making, especially ahead of difficult budget decisions. This audit does not assess the state of the national economy or project the potential impact of recent economic events.

Overall, Berkeley is facing ongoing challenges regarding its long-term financial condition, similar to the findings from our 2022 audit. Berkeley's net pension liability is still considered high risk. The City's unfunded capital and deferred maintenance need has grown to \$1.8 billion. In the near-term, the City faces a structural deficit, which poses additional risk to the City's long-term financial sustainability. As we stated in our 2022 audit, it will continue to be important for the City to balance its near-term needs and long-term financial obligations.

Throughout the report, we compared some of Berkeley's financial indicators to other California cities with similar characteristics. For all the financial indicators that we benchmarked to peer cities, Berkeley is not an outlier and mostly falls in the middle of the range.

## Objective

Our objective was to assess Berkeley's financial condition using financial indicators for the following categories:

1. Revenues and Expenses
2. Budgetary Practices
3. Demographic and Economic Indicators
4. Net Position, Liquidity, and Reserves
5. Long-Term Debt and Liabilities
6. Net Pension and Retiree Healthcare Liabilities
7. Capital Assets

## Scope and Methodology

This audit is an update to our previous financial condition audit, and we relied on a similar methodology for consistency. We used financial indicators included in the International

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<sup>1</sup> [Berkeley's Financial Condition \(FY 2012-FY 2021\): Pension Liabilities and Infrastructure Need Attention](#)

City/County Management Association's (ICMA) *Evaluating Financial Condition* handbook for local governments. We also included some indicators used by peer cities in their financial condition audits. We do not provide an in-depth analysis of causes and impact, but we point out areas of financial risk for the City to evaluate further.

For our audit scope, we examined Berkeley's financial data within the past 10 fiscal years, from FY 2016 to FY 2025, except for a few indicators for which data was only available for limited years. We relied mainly on data from Berkeley's Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports (ACFRs). For some indicators, we also analyzed other sources of city financial data. Where appropriate, we adjusted financial indicators for inflation using the Bay Area Consumer Price Index calculated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to express values in 2025 dollars.

For some indicators, we benchmarked Berkeley to other California cities. We selected Long Beach, Oakland, Pasadena, Santa Clara, Santa Monica, and Palo Alto because these cities were similar to Berkeley across one or more criteria, such as population, general fund expenditures per resident, services provided, and presence of a large university.

For more information on our methodology, see page 43.

## Background

According to the ICMA, financial condition refers to a local government's ability to finance its services on an ongoing basis. To understand Berkeley's financial condition, this audit considers a series of financial indicators tracked over time. These indicators reflect Berkeley's financial decisions as well as external factors outside of Berkeley's control, such as changes in economic conditions, financial markets, and federal funding decisions.

To provide a broad overview of Berkeley's financial condition, our primary source was government-wide financial statements from the City's ACFRs. Government-wide financial statements are also categorized into governmental and business-type activities. This audit report mainly focuses on governmental activities, which fund citywide operations that serve all Berkeley residents and are supported mostly by taxes. Governmental activities include service areas such as general government, public safety, transportation, community development, and culture and leisure. Business-type activities operate like businesses and are supported by enterprise funds, such as the Berkeley Marina and Parking Meter funds.

This audit also takes into consideration Berkeley's unique characteristics. Berkeley has the highest population density of any city in the East Bay. Berkeley's economy is shaped by the

presence of the University of California, Berkeley campus, the high assessed value of property, and a diverse tax base. The City provides residents a full range of services beyond those offered by most similarly-sized cities in California. The City offers its own sanitation, sewer, and waste management services; parks, recreation, and the Berkeley Marina; health, housing, and community services, including city-funded health clinics and mental health services; animal control; and library. Berkeley is also a relatively older city and faces challenges with aging infrastructure.

## Revenues and Expenses: Governmental activities revenues generally exceeded expenses, but the General Fund still faced a structural deficit.

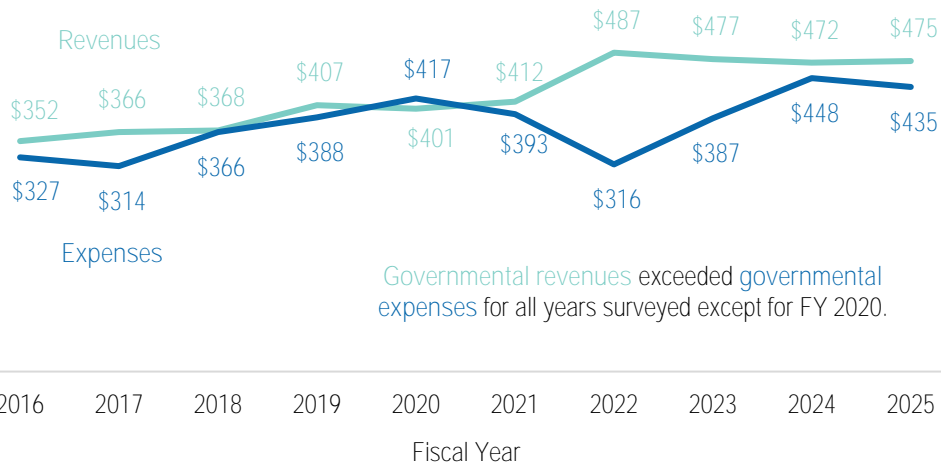
Berkeley's governmental activities revenues exceeded expenses for all years in the audit scope except FY 2020. Governmental activities revenues increased overall, primarily from growth in revenues from property taxes, state and local taxes, and investment earnings. Governmental activities expenses also increased overall, primarily from growth in community development and housing as well as health and welfare. However, the General Fund still faced a structural deficit.

### Revenues

#### Governmental activities revenues generally exceeded expenses.

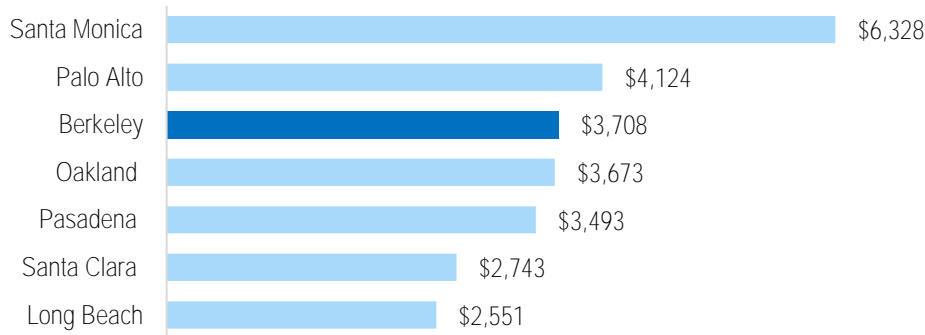
Governmental activities revenues exceeded governmental activities expenses for all years except FY 2020 (Figure 1). The exception in FY 2020 was because of revenue shortfalls due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 1. Governmental Activities Revenues and Expenses (in millions, in 2025 dollars)**



Source: Berkeley ACFRs

Compared to benchmark cities in FY 2024, Berkeley's governmental revenues per resident were in the middle of the range and nearly the same as Oakland (Figure 2). Similarly, Berkeley was in the middle of the range relative to benchmark cities in our 2022 financial condition audit.

**Figure 2. Governmental Activities Revenues per Resident, FY 2024**

Source: Cities' FY 2024 ACFRs

Note: Not all cities reported population data by fiscal year. Santa Monica and Oakland's ACFR population figures are from calendar year 2024. Pasadena's population figure is from calendar year 2023.

### However, the General Fund still faced a structural deficit.

The General Fund is the largest of all governmental funds and is the City's primary operating fund which pays for services provided by the City. City leaders focus on the General Fund because it is a flexible source of funding and can help address the City's most pressing needs.

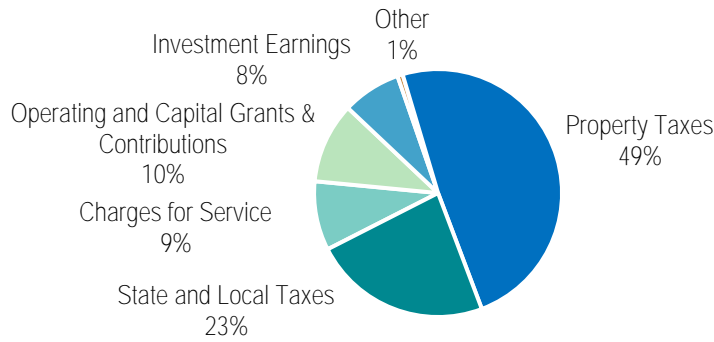
While the City's governmental activities revenues generally exceeded expenses, the City still faced a structural General Fund deficit, with deficits ranging from \$12 million to \$40 million. This is because the City determines whether it has a structural deficit at the start of the budget process. A structural deficit occurs when budgeted revenues are projected to be less than budgeted expenditures. However, Berkeley can balance its budget through one-time measures, such as moving surpluses from other funds into the General Fund. These transfers are recorded as General Fund revenue. The City's actual revenues generally cover its actual expenditures due in part to these balancing measures and adjustments to the City's revenues and expenditure over the fiscal year. Therefore, while the General Fund still faced a structural deficit, the City's governmental activities revenues generally exceeded expenses.

In the next section starting on page 13, we discuss Berkeley's budgetary practices in the context of the structural budget deficit in further detail.

### Where do revenues for Berkeley's governmental activities come from?

In FY 2025, the largest source of revenue was property taxes (49 percent), followed by state and local taxes (23 percent) and operating and capital grants and contributions (10 percent) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Revenues for Governmental Activities by Source, FY 2025**



Source: Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR

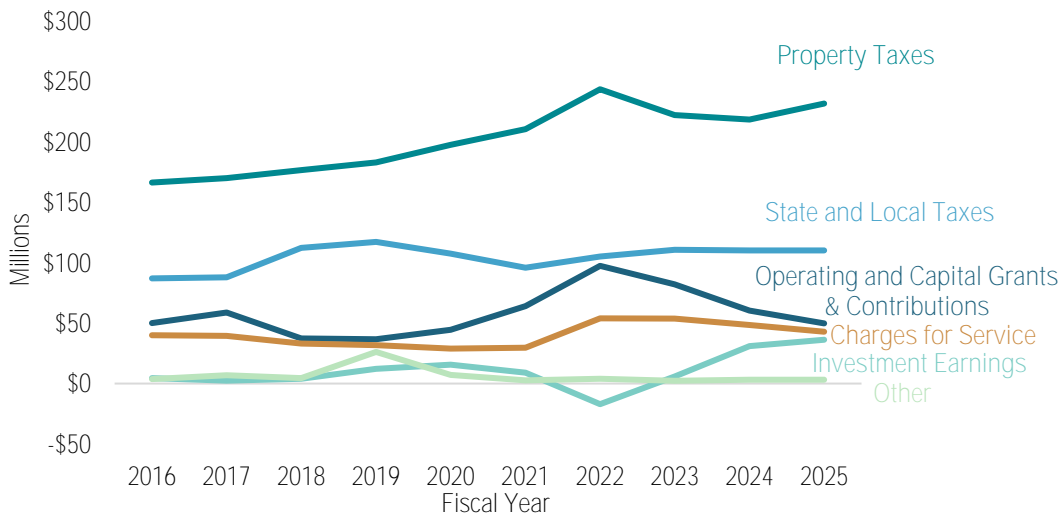
Note: “Other” includes revenues from contributions not restricted to specific programs, revenues (or losses) from the gain or loss on the sale of capital assets, miscellaneous revenues, and revenues from other unrestricted state subventions.

**How have revenues changed over time?**

In total, governmental activities revenues increased by 35 percent, from \$352.0 million in FY 2016 to \$474.5 million in FY 2025, adjusted for inflation.

Berkeley’s largest source of revenue was property taxes, which grew substantially and reached a peak in FY 2022. Between FY 2016 to FY 2025, revenue from property taxes increased by 39 percent, from \$166.5 million to \$231.9 million, adjusted for inflation (Figure 4). The peak in FY 2022 is explained by multiple factors, including increased assessed value of property, increased value of property sales, and the passage of Measure FF in 2020, a special tax to support fire services which was effective in FY 2022, adding more property based tax revenues.

**Figure 4. Revenues for Governmental Activities by Source (in millions, in 2025 dollars)**



Source: Berkeley ACFRs

Berkeley's next largest source of revenue was state and local taxes, which also grew during the audit period. Between FY 2016 to FY 2025, revenue from state and local taxes increased by 27 percent, from \$87.1 million to \$110.3 million, adjusted for inflation (Figure 4).

Operating and capital grants and contributions more than doubled from FY 2019 to FY 2022, but these revenues have since declined (Figure 4). The increase was due in large part to the City receiving American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant funds.

Of all revenue streams, revenues from investment earnings had the largest percentage increase (693 percent) between FY 2016 and FY 2025. Investment earnings dipped in FY 2022, due to increased interest rates set by the Federal Reserve, but recovered above pre-pandemic levels by the end of the audit period.

The Finance Department (Finance) updates City Council on the status of the City's investment portfolio through quarterly investment reports. These quarterly investment reports include the City's investment rate of return for the quarter, indicating the outcomes of the City's investment approach, policies, and other external factors. The reports evaluate performance changes from quarter to quarter within the past fiscal year and do not cover trends across multiple years. Other cities cover past trends across years. For example, the City of Palo Alto's FY 2025 fourth quarter investment report showed their investment portfolio's rate of return for the past twenty three years.

Berkeley's Investment Policy requires Finance to provide an annual investment report to Council in addition to quarterly reports. Finance currently does not submit an annual investment report to Council. However, Finance produced annual investment reports to Council in the past that covered key investment results, such as the rate of return on the City's investments, and compared these results to the previous five fiscal years.

According to the City's Investment Policy, the City's primary investment objective is to achieve a reasonable rate of return on public funds while minimizing the potential for losses. Without reporting that covers the City's investment rate of return over a longer time span, it is difficult for the public to easily access information about past trends in the City's investment performance.

### **How have revenues from leases changed over time?**

During the audit period, Berkeley's revenues from leases decreased by nearly one half. The City receives revenue from rent payments from tenants who lease City-owned properties. Between FY 2016 to FY 2025, the City's revenue from leases decreased by 48 percent, from \$4.9 million

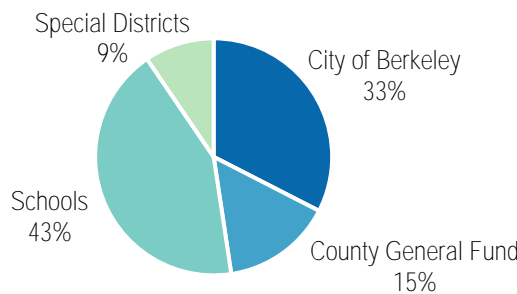
to \$2.5 million, adjusted for inflation.

While we did not investigate the cause of Berkeley’s decreased lease revenue, we do know that City management has opportunities to improve lease management, such as regularly monitoring leases to prevent them from going into holdover. From our Leases Audit Follow-Up report, released in January 2025, we found that the City lacks a clear approach to lease management and lacks a complete repository of leases.<sup>2</sup> By improving tracking of leases, the City could improve revenue generation from leases on City-owned properties.

### Where do your property taxes go?

Alameda County collects property tax revenue from Berkeley taxpayers and distributes them among multiple entities. Ad valorem taxes are one part of the property tax bill and are based on a percentage of the assessed value of property. There are two types of ad valorem taxes: the countywide 1 percent tax and voter-approved debt service taxes. The countywide 1 percent ad valorem property tax amounts to roughly one-half of the total property tax bill.<sup>3</sup> However, this may differ for individual properties based on a variety of factors, such as assessed value and square footage. The other part of the property tax bill is fixed charges and/or special assessments, which include parcel taxes. In FY 2025, Berkeley received an estimated one-third of the countywide 1 percent ad valorem property tax revenue generated within the City limits (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Berkeley’s Countywide 1 percent Ad Valorem Property Tax Distribution by Entity, FY 2025**



Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Alameda County Auditor-Controller/Clerk-Recorder's Office

Note: This figure is an estimate of the distribution of countywide 1 percent property tax revenue within City limits. Special districts include AC Transit, East Bay Regional Park, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Bay Area Rapid Transit and other regional entities. According to Alameda County, this does not include any amount that may be shifted due to the dissolution of Berkeley’s former redevelopment agency.

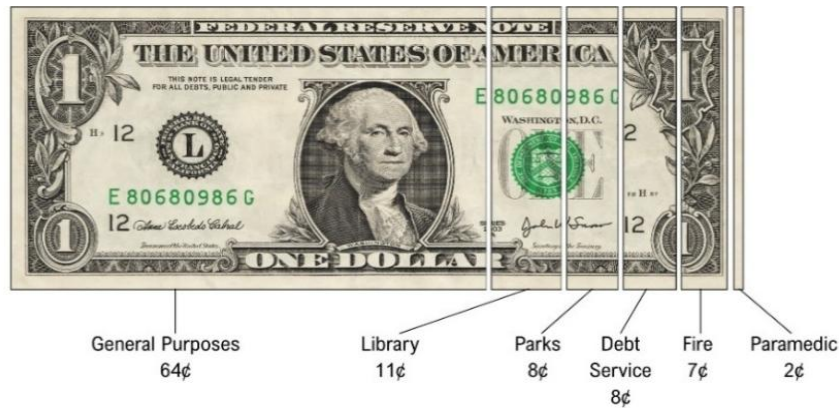
<sup>2</sup> [2009 Leases Audit Follow-Up: Berkeley Faces the Same Risks 16 Years Later](#)

<sup>3</sup> According to a 2025 City management report to Council, this estimate is based on a single-family residence with an assessed value of \$550,000 and 1,900 square feet with a \$7,000 homeowner’s exemption.

## What are your property taxes levied for?

Berkeley receives revenues from property taxes that are levied for specific purposes. For every dollar of property tax revenue Berkeley received in FY 2025, a portion was levied for general purposes, library services, city parks, debt service for voter-approved bond measures, fire department services, and paramedic services. The largest portion was levied for general purposes (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. What are your property taxes levied for? (FY 2025)**



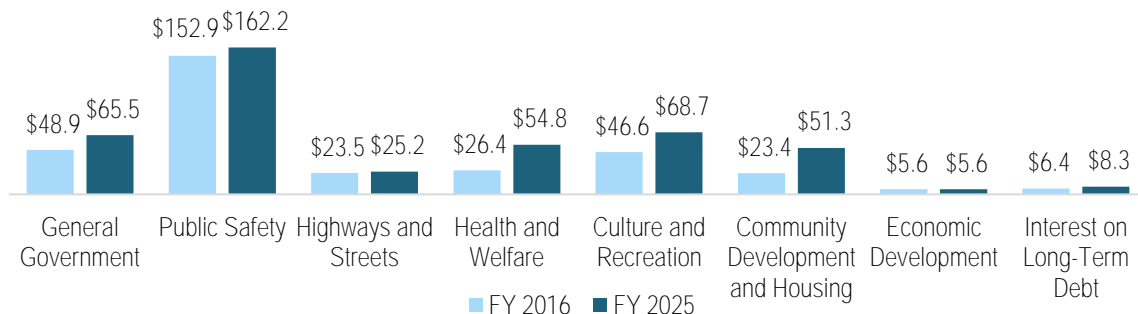
Source: Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR

## Expenses

### How have Berkeley's expenses changed over time?

Overall, Berkeley's government activities expenses increased by 33 percent from \$327.1 million in FY 2016 to \$435.0 million in FY 2025, adjusted for inflation. In FY 2025, public safety represented the City's largest expense by function (Figure 7). Between FY 2016 and FY 2025, City functions with the largest increases in spending were community development and housing (119 percent) and health and welfare (107 percent), adjusted for inflation.

**Figure 7. Expenses for Governmental Activities by Function (in millions, in 2025 dollars)**

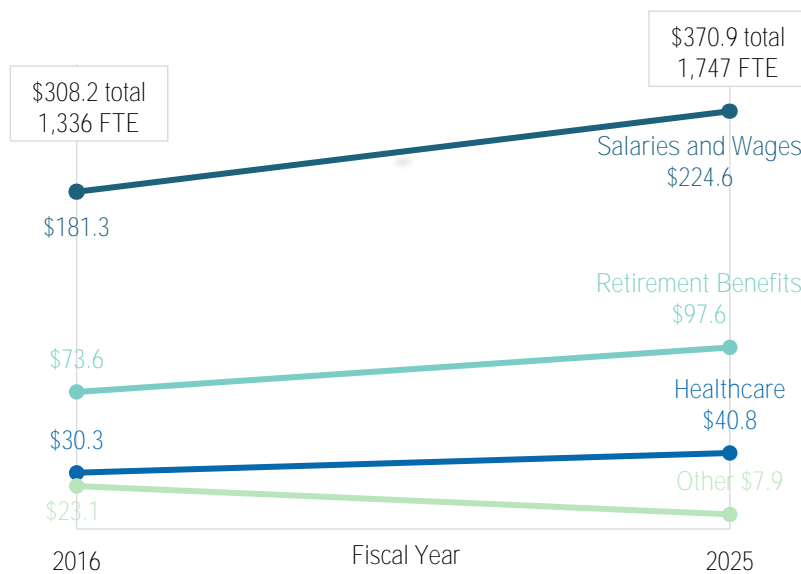


Source: Berkeley ACFRs

## How has personnel expenditure changed over time?

Salaries and benefits represent a large portion of Berkeley’s spending and have increased over time. Salaries and benefits represent approximately half of the citywide budget and about two-thirds of the General Fund budget. Between FY 2016 and FY 2025, Berkeley’s total personnel expenditure increased by 20 percent from \$308.2 million to \$370.9 million, adjusted for inflation (Figure 8). Berkeley’s budgeted full-time equivalent (FTE) employee count increased by approximately 30 percent from FY 2016 to FY 2025, despite total personnel expenditure only increasing by approximately 20 percent.

**Figure 8. Personnel Expenditures by Category (in millions, in 2025 dollars)**



Source: Berkeley City Manager, Budget Office data; Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR

Note: This graphic includes budgeted FTE counts, which include the number of filled and vacant FTEs. “Salaries and wages” include regular and hourly pay, overtime pay, stipends, and workers’ compensation pay. “Healthcare” includes healthcare benefits, such as medical, dental, and vision insurance. “Retirement benefits” include retirement income, such as pensions, and retiree healthcare benefits. “Other” includes life insurance, commuter benefits, terminal payout, contributions to the workers’ compensation fund, and other fringe benefits.

The City’s growth in personnel expenditure is driven by increased spending on salaries and wages, retirement benefits, and healthcare. The City’s spending on salaries and wages had the largest dollar increase (\$43.3 million) from FY 2016 to FY 2025, followed by retirement benefits (\$23.9 million) and healthcare (\$10.6 million) (Figure 8).

Salaries and wages increased from FY 2016 to FY 2025 primarily due to a \$33.3 million increase in regular salary expenditures for employees other than Police, and a \$10.6 million increase in Police and Fire overtime expenditures, adjusted for inflation. Notably, regular salary expenditures for Police decreased by \$4.8 million from FY 2016 to FY 2025, adjusted for

inflation. In our 2022 audit of police overtime, we found the Berkeley Police Department (BPD) relied on overtime to achieve its staffing levels.<sup>4</sup> Consistent with this audit's findings, BPD's actual overtime expenditures exceeded its overtime budget for the last three fiscal years, according to the BPD's FY 2025 budget presentation to the Budget and Finance Committee.

### What is contributing to General Fund expenditure growth?

In January 2026, the Budget Office highlighted General Fund expenditures that have substantially grown, including salaries, pension costs, overtime pay, and public liability insurance. However, these costs vary in their contribution to the General Fund baseline overall. For FY 2027, salaries are projected to represent 34.8 percent of the General Fund baseline, compared to pension costs representing 17.7 percent, overtime pay representing 4.2 percent, and public liability insurance representing 3.6 percent.

According to the City Attorney's Office, cost increases for public liability insurance reflect a statewide trend of increasing insurance or self-insurance costs for public entities. The City's public liability insurance is a self-insurance pool administered by the Bay Cities Joint Power Insurance Authority (BCJPIA), whose members consist of cities, towns, and other public agencies located in the Bay Area. In FY 2025, the City's public liability insurance cost through BCJPIA was \$10.46 million, which included risk management support, claims handling, and general liability coverage, involving the payout of general liability claims.

### Recommendation

- 1.1 To present clear information regarding the City's investment performance, we recommend the Finance Department provide an investment report to Council that compares the City's investment rate of return for the most recent fiscal year to at least the previous five fiscal years, similar to the City's past annual investment reports.

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<sup>4</sup> [Berkeley Police: Improvements Needed to Manage Overtime and Security Work for Outside Entities](#)

## Budgetary Practices: One-time balancing strategies can put the long-term sustainability of some funds at risk.

### General Fund Deficit

Berkeley's General Fund faces a structural deficit. As mentioned previously, a structural deficit occurs when budgeted revenues are projected to be less than budgeted expenditures. Berkeley has faced a structural General Fund deficit for multiple years. The City currently faces a projected structural General Fund deficit that is estimated at \$32 million in FY 2027 and \$33 million in FY 2028.<sup>5</sup>

### Berkeley relied on one-time balancing measures to address its structural deficit in the past.

Berkeley faces an ongoing structural General Fund deficit due in part to one-time balancing measures. For several years, the City used one-time balancing measures to address the structural deficit rather than making structural changes to budgetary practices. While one-time solutions relying on other funds can be appropriate to balance the General Fund temporarily, they do not address the General Fund structural deficit in the long run and can put long-term sustainability of these other funds at risk.

For example, to help balance the General Fund in FY 2025, the City redirected \$4.7 million intended for the workers' compensation fund to the General Fund. At the time, an external actuarial report had previously stated that the City's workers' compensation program did not have enough assets to cover its estimated future liabilities by approximately \$2 million as of June 2024. Using funds intended for the workers' compensation fund put the City at risk of not having enough assets to cover workers' compensation benefits for employees who have suffered a work-related injury or illness. It also did not help address the structural deficit in the General Fund in the long run.

The City also relied on the Section 115 Trust to help balance the General Fund in FY 2025. The City pulled \$3 million from the Section 115 Trust to pay for its pension expenses instead of the General Fund. The Section 115 Trust is a rainy-day fund that allows the City to set aside resources to pay its pension obligations. While the City was authorized to use the Section 115 Trust to pay for pension expenses, it is not sustainable for the City to continuously rely on the

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<sup>5</sup> This is the structural deficit estimate as of January 22, 2026.

Section 115 Trust to meet its pension obligations. By transferring funds out of the Section 115 Trust, the City may be less prepared to meet its required pension contributions in the long term, which can negatively impact the City's financial condition. We discuss the Section 115 Trust in further detail on page 32.

### **City Council's fiscal policies for budget development can be strengthened.**

City Council's fiscal policies for budget development can be strengthened. By law, the City must pass a balanced budget. However, the City can meet the statutory definition of a balanced budget by using one-time solutions rather than sustainable strategies. In a 2022 risk analysis report commissioned by the City, the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) recommended the City adopt a policy that commits to using sustainable strategies to pass a structurally balanced budget, where recurring revenues are equal to or exceed recurring expenditures. GFOA also recommends that city budget policies call for communicating whether recurring revenues and recurring expenditures are balanced. While City Council has a fiscal policy that requires the budget to primarily allocate one-time revenue for one-time expenditures, the Council's fiscal policies do not require a separate assessment of recurring revenues and recurring expenditures.

Some cities have adopted this GFOA best practice in different ways. For example, the City of Long Beach adopted a policy that requires the General Fund budget to be structurally balanced for the fiscal year. If the General Fund is structurally unbalanced, the policy requires the City to explain their approach and time frame for achieving structural balance in the General Fund.

City management has recently used some more sustainable strategies to develop the budget. For the fiscal year 2027 and 2028 budget, the Budget Office used the prior year's actual expenditures and projected needs to develop the baseline budget, rather than using the prior year's adopted budget, which had been the practice for many years. According to the Budget Office, this new baseline budget approach aims to more accurately project the real cost of service. GFOA also states that budgeting based on the estimated cost of services rather than assuming the prior year's budget helps to avoid mid-year budget increases. However, this initiative from the Budget Office has not yet been formally adopted as a requirement for future budgets.

In addition, the City is considering placing a sales and use tax measure on the 2026 ballot to help address its projected General Fund structural deficit and support essential City services. The potential 0.5 percent increase in the City's sales and use tax would provide about \$9 to \$10

million annually for general governmental use until ended by voters, according to sample ballot language for the proposed sales and use tax measure.

## Enterprise Fund Deficits

### Some enterprise funds have structural deficits and receive transfers from other funds to balance.

Some enterprise funds have structural deficits. For example, the Off-Street Parking Fund has a deficit due in part to decreased parking revenues because of the pandemic and increased expenditures from debt service costs for the Center Street Garage Reconstruction Project. The Off-Street Parking Fund uses parking fees to support capital, operation, and maintenance costs of three off-street parking facilities owned by the City: the Center Street Garage, the Oxford Garage, and the Telegraph Channing Garage. In addition, some of the City's parking fees have not been updated in five or more years, which may have slowed down Off-Street Parking Fund revenues. The Off-Street Parking Fund depleted its fund balance in FY 2020 and relies on surplus from the Parking Meter Fund to continue operations. In FY 2025, \$1 million was transferred from the Parking Meter Fund to the Off-Street Parking Fund. The Off-Street Parking Fund also received \$1.9 million in General Fund support in FY 2022 and a total of \$4.1 million in ARPA funds in FY 2022 and FY 2023.

The Marina Fund also has a structural deficit and has received transfers from other funds to help cover operational and capital needs for many years. According to the adopted FY 2025 and FY 2026 budget, the Marina Fund received over \$30 million in total capital funding from the T1 Bond Measure, grants, and General Fund over the previous three years.<sup>6</sup> While not a transfer, the Marina Fund also received approximately \$2.6 million in ARPA funds in FY 2022 and FY 2023 to help balance the fund. According to Parks, Recreation and Waterfront (PRW) leadership, despite an investment in capital funding of more than \$50 million over the last 10 years, unfunded capital infrastructure needs at the waterfront still exceed an estimated \$163 million. Marina Fund revenues primarily come from fees generated from vessels that berth at the Marina, commercial building and ground leases, and recreation programs. According to PRW leadership, revenues have suffered because several commercial tenants have struggled to pay rent, and berth occupancy has not recovered from a safety- and infrastructure-related exodus starting in 2016.

City Council's fiscal policies require enterprise funds to balance. Enterprise funds are intended

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<sup>6</sup> Measure T1 was a \$100 million infrastructure bond passed in 2016 to fund improvements to City infrastructure and facilities.

to be primarily self-supporting and are used for activities which charge fees to customers for goods or services. When enterprise funds have structural deficits, they may rely on transfers from the General Fund to balance and may worsen the overall City budget deficit.

### **Some enterprise funds make annual transfers out to the General Fund.**

Some enterprise funds also make annual transfers out to the General Fund. In FY 2025, the Parking Meter Fund transferred approximately \$1 million to the General Fund for the Public Commons for Everyone Initiative. This initiative was intended to improve Berkeley's public areas and increase access to public toilets, public seating, trash cans, as well as housing and outreach services. The annual transfer out of the Parking Meter Fund to the General Fund may not be sustainable when the Parking Meter Fund surplus is also used to help balance the Off-Street Parking Fund. Other transfers from enterprise funds to the General Fund include indirect cost reimbursements related to the operations of the City as a whole, such as administrative support.

### **The City can further strengthen its policies to address enterprise fund deficits.**

The City has taken some steps to address enterprise fund deficits. For example, for the fiscal year 2027 and 2028 budget, the Budget Office required departments to submit structural balancing plans for any fund projecting a deficit. Another example is that the Budget Office asked departments to evaluate current fees and propose adjustments where appropriate. However, the City does not have a documented citywide policy to regularly evaluate and adjust enterprise fees where appropriate. The City also has not regularly evaluated transfers out of enterprise funds and how these transfers impact the financial sustainability of these funds.

In response to a GFOA recommendation, City management started but did not complete plans to develop reserve policies for enterprise funds. Reserves for enterprise funds can promote operational stability and lessen the need for transfers from other funds. On the other hand, according to department staff and leadership, reserves may not be feasible for some enterprise funds that do not have additional funds to set aside. Some jurisdictions have developed separate reserve goals for their enterprise funds. For example, the City of San Diego has different reserve goals for their enterprise funds based on a percentage of operating revenues or the minimum balance needed to support a specific number of days of operation.

## Recommendations

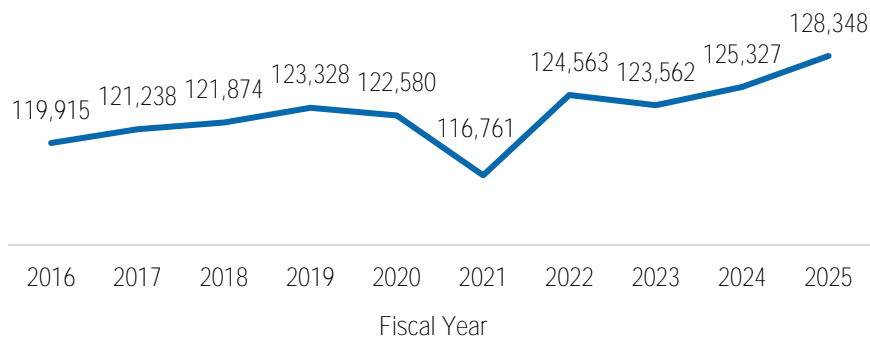
- 2.1 To help the City pass a structurally balanced budget, we recommend City management propose a fiscal policy to City Council to assess whether recurring revenues and recurring expenditures are balanced, and communicate this information to City Council. We recommend this policy also formalize City management's initiative to develop the baseline budget using the prior year's actual expenditures and projected needs.
- 2.2 To ensure sustainable budgetary strategies continue, we recommend the City publicly report in the adopted budget book that departments are required to submit a structural balancing plan to the Budget Office for enterprise funds that project a deficit. As part of this process, we recommend the Budget Office and departments work together to regularly assess the transfers in and out of these enterprise funds.
- 2.3 To improve the financial sustainability of enterprise funds, we recommend the City adopt a citywide policy to regularly evaluate enterprise fees and propose adjustments where appropriate to strengthen revenues and help mitigate the future risk of enterprise fund deficits.
- 2.4 To further improve the financial sustainability of enterprise funds, we recommend the City adopt a policy to establish a reserve for each enterprise fund as appropriate and legally permitted. We recommend the Budget Office and departments work together to determine the appropriate reserve goal for each enterprise fund.

## Demographic and Economic Indicators: Berkeley’s economy improved after the pandemic but experienced recent declines.

Berkeley’s population returned to pre-pandemic levels and continued to grow.

Berkeley’s population grew during the audit period between FY 2016 and FY 2025 (Figure 9). Population has exceeded pre-pandemic levels after the decline between FY 2020 and FY 2021 that coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 9. Population**



Source: Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR

## UC Berkeley is the City’s largest employer and attracts thousands of students and staff to the City.

During the audit period, University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) brought an average of about 44,000 students to Berkeley each year. Between 2016 and 2025, the student population increased by about 6,000 students. UC Berkeley was the City’s largest employer, employing approximately one-fifth of the City’s workforce, or an average of 14,000 people each year over the audit period. University students and staff have contributed to local consumer spending and increased sales and use tax revenues. The university presence also generates expenses for the City of Berkeley due to students and staff using city services.<sup>7</sup> In 2021, UC Berkeley agreed to pay the City \$82.6 million over 16 years to support city expenses, including fire and other city services.

<sup>7</sup> UC Berkeley is a tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3).

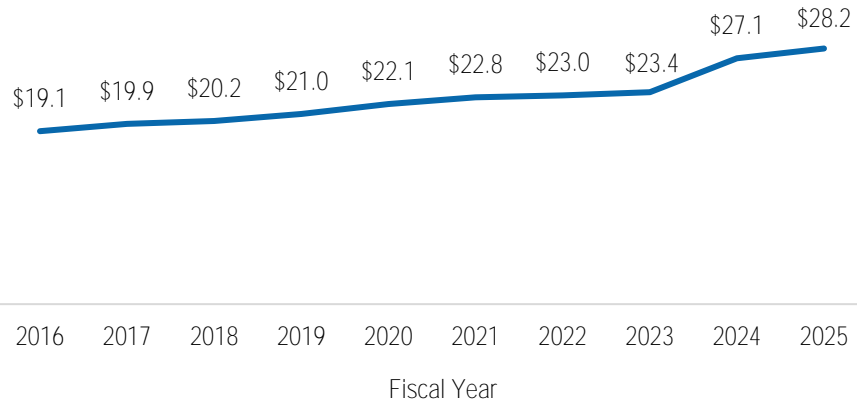
## Unemployment recovered to pre-pandemic levels but has trended upward again.

The City’s unemployment rate increased more than three-fold from 3.1 to 13.5 percent between FY 2019 and FY 2020. However, the unemployment rate recovered to pre-pandemic levels in FY 2022. More recently, the unemployment rate has trended upward again, from 3.1 percent in FY 2022 to 5.0 percent in FY 2025.

## Property value continues to grow, while median household income has not substantially grown.

Property values remain a strong and growing source of city revenues. Between FY 2016 and FY 2025, the assessed value of taxable property in Berkeley increased by 48 percent, from \$19.1 billion to \$28.2 billion, adjusted for inflation (Figure 10).

**Figure 10. Total Taxable Assessed Property Value (in billions, in 2025 dollars)**



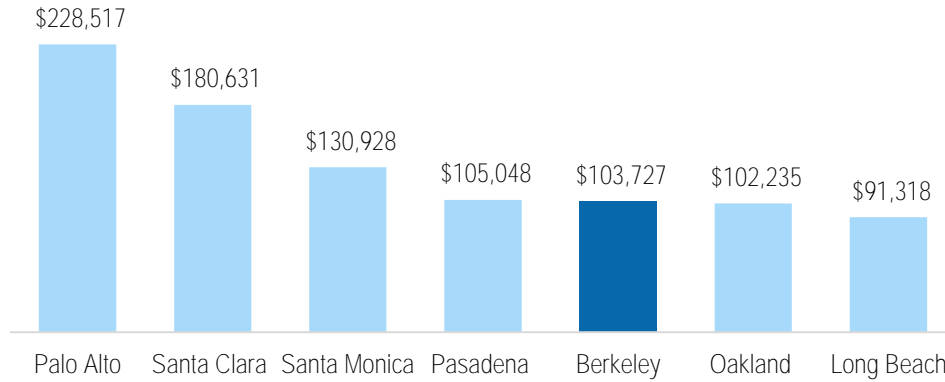
Source: Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR

Property values are integral to Berkeley’s overall financial health. Growth in taxable assessed property value corresponds to growth in property tax revenues because a portion of property taxes are based on a percentage of the assessed value of property, otherwise known as ad valorem property taxes. Berkeley residents who are renters and do not benefit from increased property values may also face higher rents passed down from property owners as a result of increased taxes on property.

While property value grew, median household income has not substantially grown. The median household income in Berkeley increased by only 1 percent between 2016 and 2024, after adjusting for inflation. In 2024, Berkeley's median household income fell roughly in the middle of benchmark cities (Figure 11). This may mean that some Berkeley households, especially new homeowners, are paying higher ad valorem property taxes while their incomes may have not

substantially grown after adjusting for inflation. Due in part to Proposition 13, owners of identical properties may pay different amounts of property taxes depending on their time of purchase. Under Proposition 13, the assessed value of property is generally determined by the purchase price and year of purchase. Therefore, new homeowners, whose properties have been recently reassessed at current market value, tend to have higher ad valorem property taxes.

**Figure 11. Median Household Income, 2024**



Source: 2024 American Community Survey (reported in calendar year)

## Net Position, Liquidity, and Reserves: Berkeley's net position, liquidity, and reserves indicate improvements.

Net position measures the difference between the City's assets (what it owns) and its liabilities (what it owes). The City's assets include cash and investments as well as resources such as capital assets that are not easily converted into cash. The City's liabilities include debt and other obligations, such as accounts payable, accrued salaries and wages, and unfunded pension and retiree healthcare liabilities. Net position reflects a government's financial condition at a point in time and can be thought of as the City's remaining resources after its debts are accounted for.

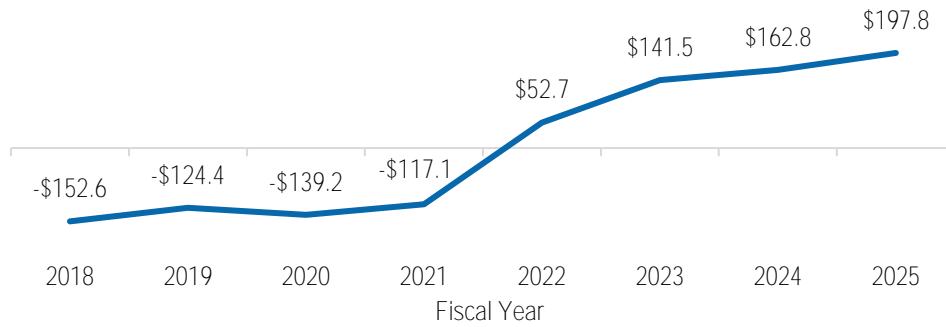
Liquidity measures the City's cash position, which includes cash on hand and in the bank, as well as other assets that can easily be converted into cash, such as short-term investments. Liquidity tells us about the City's ability to pay its short-term obligations, while net position represents a longer-term view of the City's financial condition because it includes assets not easily converted into cash.

Reserves are funds set aside for future use and are built up over time from operating surpluses. Strong reserves allow cities to weather economic downturns more effectively, manage the consequences of outside agency actions that may result in revenue reductions, and address unexpected emergencies like natural disasters and other catastrophic events such as pandemics.

### The City's net position related to governmental activities increased, indicating an improvement.

The City's growth in net position indicates an improvement but may also reflect factors outside of the City's control, such as changes in the financial market. Between FY 2018 and FY 2025, Berkeley's net position related to governmental activities increased significantly from -\$152.6 million in FY 2018 to \$197.8 million in FY 2025. Specifically, the largest change in net position took place between FY 2021 and FY 2022, when the City's net position increased by \$169.8 million (Figure 12). The large increase in net position between FY 2021 and FY 2022 was specifically due in part to a decrease in net pension and retiree healthcare liabilities from a gain in net investment income. In a later section of this report, we cover the City's net pension and retiree healthcare liabilities in greater detail (see page 30).

**Figure 12. Governmental Activities Net Position (in millions, in 2025 dollars)**



Source: Berkeley ACFRs

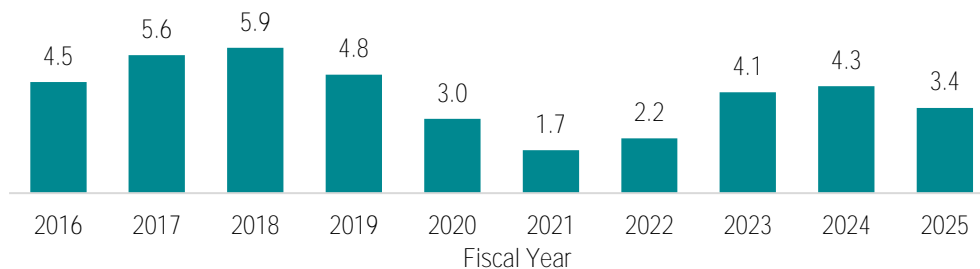
Note: We modified the scope of this figure to start in FY 2018, instead of FY 2016, to take into consideration a GASB accounting change that impacted net position beginning in FY 2018.

**Berkeley's liquidity ratio, or cash position, is strong and has increased since a dip in FY 2021.**

The liquidity ratio, otherwise known as cash position, measures the City's ability to pay its short-term obligations. According to the ICMA, the liquidity ratio is calculated by dividing cash and short-term investments (assets that can be easily converted to cash) by current liabilities (short-term obligations). A liquidity ratio of greater than one indicates that cash and short-term investments exceed current liabilities. A ratio of one or less than one would be a cause for concern, particularly if this trend persists for more than three years.

Berkeley's liquidity ratio is strong and has increased since a dip in FY 2021. Between FY 2021 and FY 2025, the liquidity ratio increased because cash and short-term investments increased while current liabilities have decreased. Berkeley's increased liquidity ratio suggests that Berkeley's capacity to pay its bills in the short term has improved. However, Berkeley's liquidity ratio in FY 2025 was not as strong as it was in FY 2019, which suggests Berkeley's capacity to pay its bills in the short-term has not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels (Figure 13).

**Figure 13. Governmental Activities Liquidity Ratio (Current Assets Compared to Current Liabilities)**



Source: Berkeley ACFRs

## Berkeley has contributed annually to its reserves since our 2022 audit.

In FY 2017, the City created the Catastrophic Reserve and the Stability Reserve following a city audit of the General Fund reserve policy. The Catastrophic Reserve is intended to support General Fund operations in the event of a public emergency defined as extreme, one-time events, such as an earthquake, fire, flood, civil unrest, terrorist attack, public health emergencies, and pandemics. The Stability Reserve is intended to help the City maintain services and reduce financial risks associated with unexpected revenue shortfalls during a single fiscal year or prolonged period of recession.

Since our 2022 financial condition audit, the City has contributed annually to its reserves. Our previous audit found that the City was not on track to meet its previous reserve balance goal of 30 percent of budgeted General Fund revenues by FY 2027. This was due in part to the City borrowing from the reserves to balance a General Fund deficit caused by COVID-19. Since then, the City has made annual contributions and increased its overall reserve levels.


## The City updated its reserves goal to balance the need to save with the need to use funds for alternative uses.

In July 2025, the City Council passed a resolution to update its General Fund Reserves policy based on a GFOA risk assessment of the City’s reserves. GFOA used a risk model to recommend a reserves goal that would enable Berkeley to cover projected risks within a ten-year period with sufficient confidence. GFOA recommended a range of 20 to 30 percent for the new reserve goal to balance the need to save with the need to use funds for alternative uses. Following GFOA’s recommendation, the City Council set a new reserves goal to achieve 20 to 30 percent of budgeted General Fund revenues within ten years. The new goal starts in FY 2026.

## The City is on track to meet its updated reserves goal.

The City is on track to meet its updated reserves goal. As of FY 2025, the reserves level was at 21.3 percent of General Fund revenues (Table 1).

**Table 1. The City is on track to meet its new reserves goal in FY 2026.**

| New reserves level goal                          | FY 2025 reserves level                        | On track to meet goal in FY 2026?                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 20 – 30 percent of adopted General Fund revenues | 21.3 percent of adopted General Fund revenues | YES<br> |

Source: Berkeley City Manager, Budget Office data; Council Resolution No. 71,908-N.S.

While FY 2026 is outside of our audit scope, City management estimates that the City is on track to achieve its new reserves goal in FY 2026, with reserves projected to be at 22.1 percent of adopted General Fund revenues. However, the City's reserves level may change before the end of FY 2026 if the City decides to use the Stability Reserve to help address the FY 2027 and FY 2028 structural General Fund deficit.

## Long-Term Debt and Liabilities: Long-term debt and liabilities have grown overall but general obligation bond debt per resident has decreased in recent years.

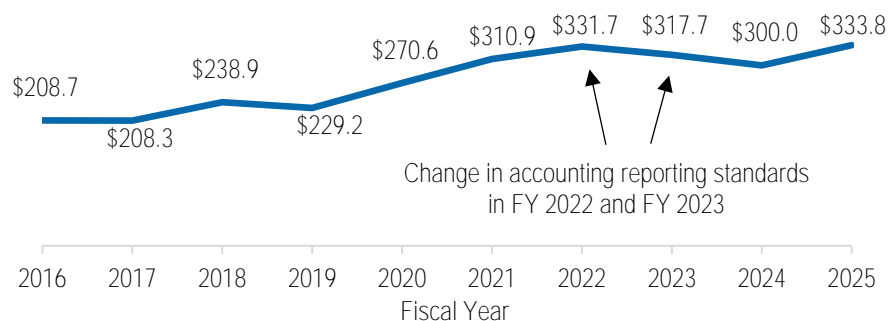
### (Not Including Pension and Retiree Healthcare Liabilities)

An accounting liability is an obligation to make a payment in the future as a result of a past event. Long-term liabilities include debts, in addition to other long-term obligations like accrued vacation and sick leave, accrued workers' compensation claims and judgments, and accrued public liability claims and judgments. Long-term liabilities can include unfunded pension and retiree healthcare liabilities, but they are not included in this section and instead discussed starting on page 30.

### Berkeley's long-term liabilities have grown but still fall in the middle of the range compared to benchmark cities.

Between FY 2016 and FY 2025, the City's total long-term liabilities increased by 60 percent from \$208.7 million to \$333.8 million, adjusted for inflation (Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Governmental Activities Long-Term Liabilities (in millions, in 2025 dollars)**

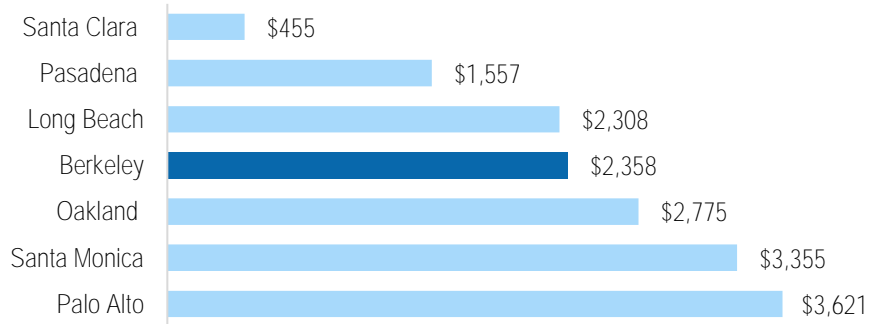


Source: Berkeley ACFRs

In FY 2022, a change in Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) standards required government entities to report leases payable as a long-term liability. In FY 2023, another change in GASB accounting standards required government entities to also report Information Technology (IT) subscriptions, such as software licenses, as a long-term liability. The addition of leases and IT subscriptions did not substantially alter the City's total long-term liabilities, except in FY 2025 when the addition of new leases accounted for more than half of the increase from FY 2024 to FY 2025 (Figure 14).

Compared to benchmark cities, Berkeley’s long-term liabilities were in the middle of the range at \$2,358 per resident in FY 2024 (Figure 15). In our 2022 financial condition audit, Berkeley was also in the middle of the range.

**Figure 15. Governmental Activities Long-Term Liabilities per Resident, FY 2024**



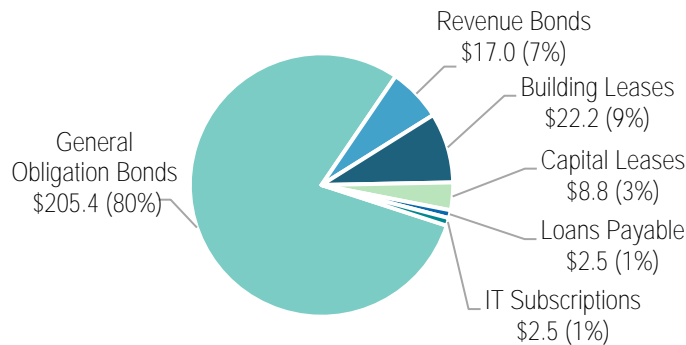
Source: Cities' FY 2024 ACFRs

Between FY 2016 and FY 2025, Berkeley’s long-term liabilities increased primarily due to increased bond debt from general obligation bonds. General obligation bonds are a form of long-term debt that cities use to finance capital infrastructure projects and are paid back through property taxes based on assessed value. General obligation bonds are approved through bond measures that must have at least two-thirds voter approval to pass.

**Most of Berkeley’s debt comes from general obligation bonds.**

In FY 2025, debt represented more than three-fourths of Berkeley's long-term liabilities. Eighty percent of Berkeley’s debt comes from general obligation bonds (Figure 16). The remaining twenty percent of Berkeley's debt comes from revenue bonds, building leases, capital equipment leases, loans payable, and IT subscriptions.

**Figure 16. Governmental Activities Debt by Type, FY 2025 (in millions)**



Source: Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR

Note: This figure does not include unfunded pension and retiree healthcare liabilities, workers' compensation, or other long-term obligations.

## Berkeley’s general obligation bond rating remained favorable.

Berkeley’s general obligation bond ratings have been consistently favorable. The City’s general obligation bond ratings from Standard and Poor’s remained at its second highest rating of AA+ over the audit period (Table 2). The City’s general obligation bond ratings from Moody’s improved from Aa2 to Aa1 in FY 2019, the second highest rating offered by Moody’s. Bond ratings issued by credit agencies are a measure of the certainty that the City will pay all interest and principal owed to investors. The higher the bond rating, the lower the cost of borrowing. The lower the cost of borrowing, the more savings the City can pass on to taxpayers.

**Table 2. Berkeley’s General Obligation Bond Ratings**

|                             | Fiscal Year |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-----------------------------|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|                             | 2016        | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
| Standard and Pooors' Rating | AA+         | AA+  | AA+  | AA+  | AA+  | AA+  | AA+  | AA+  | AA+  | AA+  |
| Moody's Rating              | Aa2         | Aa2  | Aa2  | Aa1  | Aa1  | Aa1  | Aa1  | Aa1  | Aa1  | Aa1  |

Source: Berkeley ACFRs

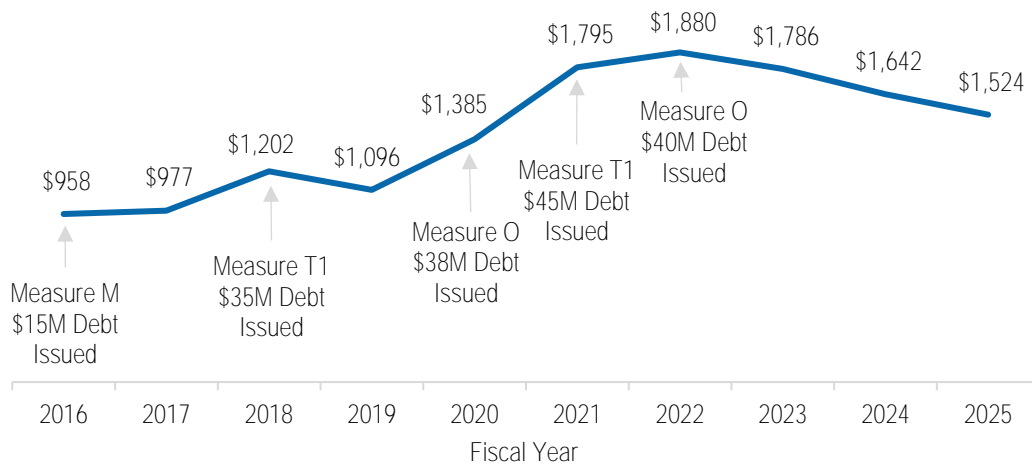
## Berkeley’s general obligation bond debt remained at or less than one percent of taxable assessed property value.

To help ensure proper debt management, cities can limit how much general obligation bond debt they issue based on a set percentage of total taxable assessed property value.

During the audit period, the City’s general obligation bond debt remained at or less than one percent of taxable assessed property value. In our previous financial condition audit, Berkeley’s general obligation debt as a percentage of taxable assessed property value was significantly lower than the City’s threshold of 15 percent at the time. As a result, we recommended the City update its debt management policy to set the general obligation threshold to a more locally appropriate level. The Finance Department then decreased the general obligation bond threshold from 15 percent of assessed value to a more locally appropriate threshold of 6 percent.

## Berkeley’s general obligation bond debt per resident peaked in FY 2022 and declined in recent years.

General obligation bond debt per resident peaked in FY 2022 and declined after the City did not issue more general obligation bond debt (Figure 17).

**Figure 17. General Obligation Bond Debt per Resident (in 2025 dollars)**

Source: Berkeley ACFRs

### If Berkeley issued more general obligation bonds, debt service tax rates would increase in the near term.

Debt can be a reasonable financing strategy for local governments. General obligation bond debt allows Berkeley to borrow money for capital projects and spreads the cost burden over time so that taxpayers who will benefit from the asset now and in the future can help pay for it. Debt service is the amount that borrowers are required to pay back for issued debt. Voters approve general obligation bonds that are paid back through specific property tax rates based on assessed value, which are known as voter-approved ad valorem debt service taxes.

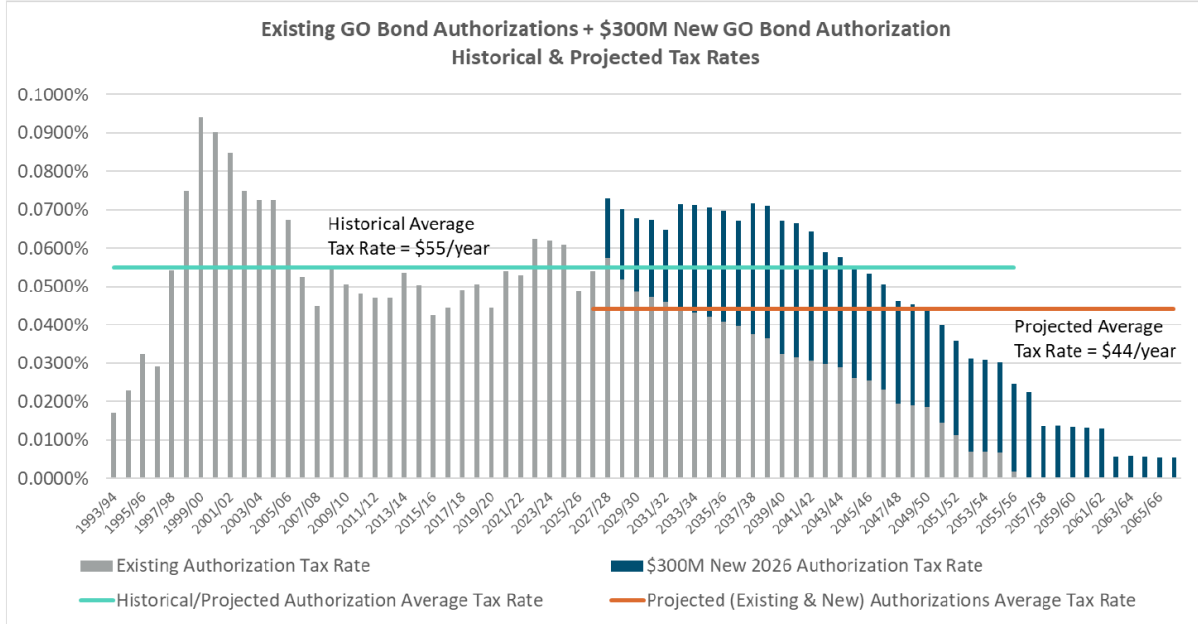
With current resources alone, Berkeley does not have sufficient funding to fully address its unfunded capital and deferred maintenance needs, as we will cover in greater detail starting on page 34. The longer the City leaves unfunded capital needs unaddressed, the more expensive they will be to address in the future.

If Berkeley issued more general obligation bonds, debt service tax rates would increase in the near term. City management submitted staff recommendations in December 2025 regarding a potential \$300 million bond measure in 2026 to help address unfunded capital needs. According to City management's analysis, if Berkeley issued this proposed general obligation bond, the projected 40-year average debt service tax rate for property owners would be less than the historical average debt service tax rate (Figure 18).<sup>8</sup> This average debt service tax rate assumes that no other general obligation bonds will be issued other than the proposed \$300 million bond. In the near term, Figure 18 shows that debt service tax rates are likely to increase

<sup>8</sup> City management's analysis assumes \$100 million would be issued every five years.

initially. Figure 18 also shows that property owners will not see decreased debt service tax rates in their property tax bill until about 20 years have passed.

**Figure 18. Historical and Projected Average Tax Rates to Pay Back General Obligation Bond Debt**



Source: City Manager's Office

Note: The historical and projected average tax rates are per \$100,000 in assessed property value.

## Net Pension and Retiree Healthcare Liabilities: Berkeley's net pension liability is still high risk and retiree healthcare liability decreased.

### What is a net pension or net retiree healthcare liability?

Berkeley contributes to various employee retirement benefit plans including pensions through the California Public Employees Retirement System (CalPERS). Pension benefits are earned by employees each year to be paid out after they retire. In addition, Berkeley provides other post-employment benefits (OPEB), or earned compensation other than pensions, for employees when they retire. In Berkeley, OPEB refers to retiree healthcare coverage.

A net pension or net retiree healthcare liability occurs when the estimated cost of benefits exceeds the value of the assets that have been set aside to pay for those benefits. The net pension liability or net retiree healthcare liability is the unfunded portion of the City's total pension or retiree healthcare liability, also referred to as an unfunded liability.

Pension and retiree healthcare contributions can place significant pressure on a city's budget. Some factors, such as yearly required contributions for CalPERS plans, are set by CalPERS and are outside the City's control, posing a widespread challenge for California cities. Cities that do not have substantial funds set aside today will likely face impacts to their credit rating and have to make higher contributions to plans later, which could limit funding for other priorities.

### Net Pension Liability

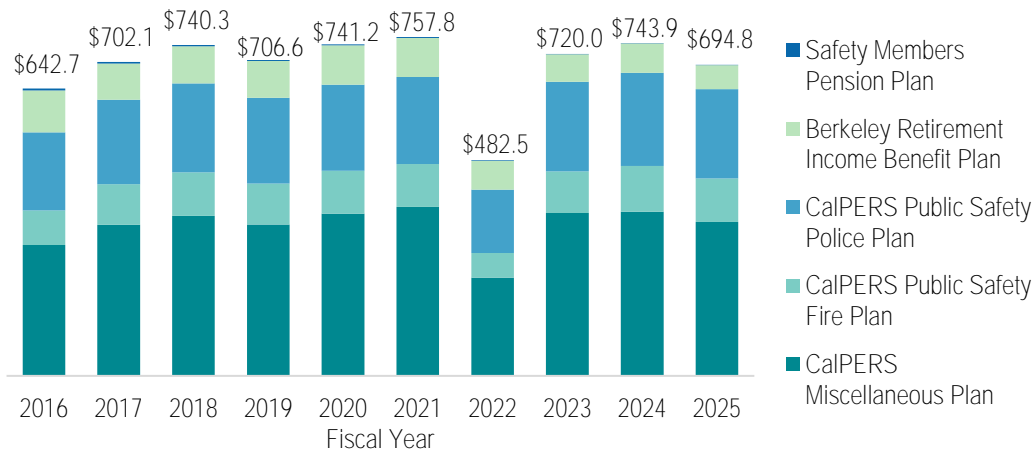
Berkeley has three pension plans administered through CalPERS, which are the Miscellaneous Plan, the Public Safety Fire Plan, and the Public Safety Police Plan. Berkeley also has two older city-sponsored plans that are closed to new members and being phased out: the Berkeley Retirement Income Benefit Plan and Safety Members Pension Plan.

### The City's net pension liability reached a peak in FY 2021 and decreased thereafter.

The City's net pension liability reached a peak in FY 2021, then decreased after the peak as pension assets increased more than pension liabilities. There was also considerable dip in the City's net pension liability in FY 2022 likely due to a large increase in net investment income from the City's CalPERS pension plans (Figure 19). According to the GFOA, Berkeley would have

the highest bond rating, and as a result cheaper borrowing, if not for its pension liabilities.

**Figure 19. Net Pension Liability by Plan (in millions, in 2025 dollars)**



Source: Finance Department data

Decisions from the CalPERS Board impact the City’s net pension liability and required pension contributions. According to the City’s 2023 unfunded liability report, the City’s annual pension payment is estimated to increase from \$76 million in FY 2025 to \$108 million in FY 2034.

**Berkeley’s funded ratio is still high risk.**

Berkeley’s funded ratio is high risk according to past methodology from the California State Auditor’s Fiscal Health of California Cities dashboard, which is no longer published. The pension funded ratio compares the City’s pension plan assets to its accrued pension liabilities. Berkeley’s funded ratio, tied with Palo Alto, is ranked the second highest in risk among benchmark cities (Figure 20). In our 2022 financial condition audit, Berkeley’s funded ratio was also at 66 percent in FY 2020.

**Figure 20. Funded Ratio of Pension Plans, FY 2024**



Source: Cities' FY 2024 ACFRs and previous methodology from California State Auditor's Fiscal Health Dashboard

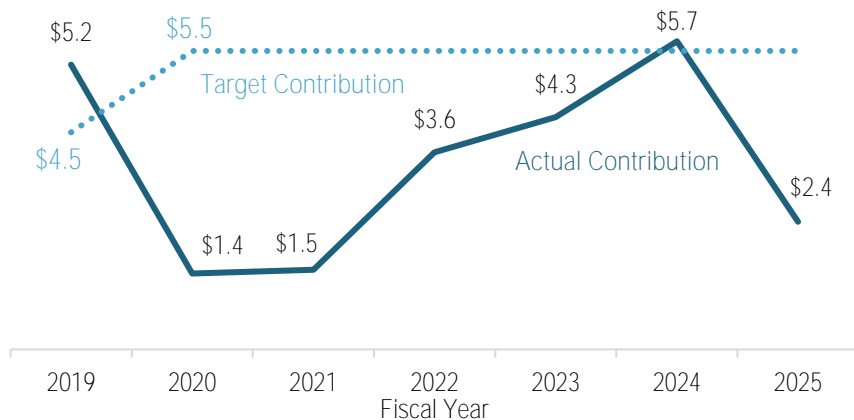
Note: Funded ratios from 81 percent to 100 percent are considered low risk according to past criteria from the California State Auditor's dashboard. None of the benchmark cities had funded ratios in this range in FY 2024, so this category is not represented in the figure.

**The City has increased its pension savings but has not consistently met its annual savings goal.**

Following a city audit of unfunded liabilities, the City authorized an IRS Section 115 Trust Fund (Trust) in FY 2018 to help pre-fund its pension obligations. The Trust acts as a rainy-day fund that allows the City to set aside resources restricted for payment of pension obligations and is intended to prepare for and partially offset increases in contributions in the coming years.

It is important for the City to meet its Trust contribution goal to adequately prepare for projected increases in required pension contributions in the coming years. While the City has made Trust contributions every year since FY 2019, the City has only met its annual Trust contribution goal two out of the seven years (Figure 21). As of June 2025, the City’s Trust had a balance of \$29.5 million.

**Figure 21. Contributions to the Section 115 Trust (in millions)**



Source: Berkeley ACFRs; May 14, 2019 staff report to City Council

Since our previous audit, City Council adopted a new fiscal policy to increase Trust contributions. In June 2022, the City Council adopted a new fiscal policy to allocate one-third of additional revenue earned from the City’s investments that is over the annual baseline of \$6 million to the Trust. Previously, Trust contributions primarily came from annual savings derived from prepayments to CalPERS and transfers from the General Fund and Capital Improvement Fund. This new fiscal policy added a new funding source for Trust contributions starting in FY 2023.

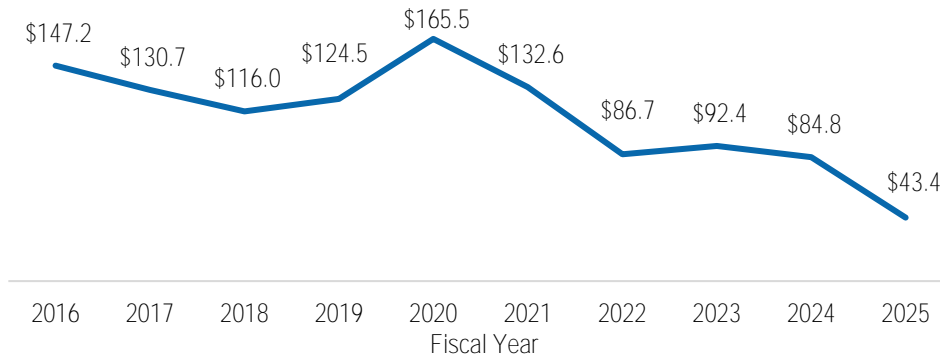
However, City Council’s fiscal policies do not explicitly require the City to replenish the Trust after funds are withdrawn. As previously mentioned, in FY 2025, to help balance the General Fund, the City used \$3 million from the Trust to cover CalPERS contributions. This substantially decreased the net contribution made in that year. While the City’s contributions to the Trust are important, the City also needs to balance its contribution goals with operational needs.

## Net Retiree Healthcare Liability

### Net retiree healthcare liability decreased.

Overall, net retiree healthcare liability decreased by \$103.8 million between FY 2016 and FY 2025 (Figure 22). The City's net retiree healthcare liability decreased because retiree healthcare assets increased while the liabilities decreased from FY 2016 to FY 2025. Notably, the City's net investment income for retiree healthcare substantially increased within the audit period. If the City does not pay its retiree healthcare obligations, this could negatively impact the retirees receiving these benefits and the City's bond rating, according to the Finance Director.

**Figure 22. Net Retiree Healthcare Liability (in millions, in 2025 dollars)**



Source: Finance Department data

## Recommendation

3.1 To continue to strengthen the Section 115 Trust, we recommend City management propose an amendment to the current Council fiscal policies to explicitly require the City to replenish the Trust after funds are withdrawn, as long as contributions to the Trust are needed to address increased pension costs and the City's operational needs are taken into consideration. The policy may be modeled off the City's General Fund Reserve Policy, which requires repayment to begin no more than five years from the date of withdrawal and to be completed within ten years from the date of withdrawal.

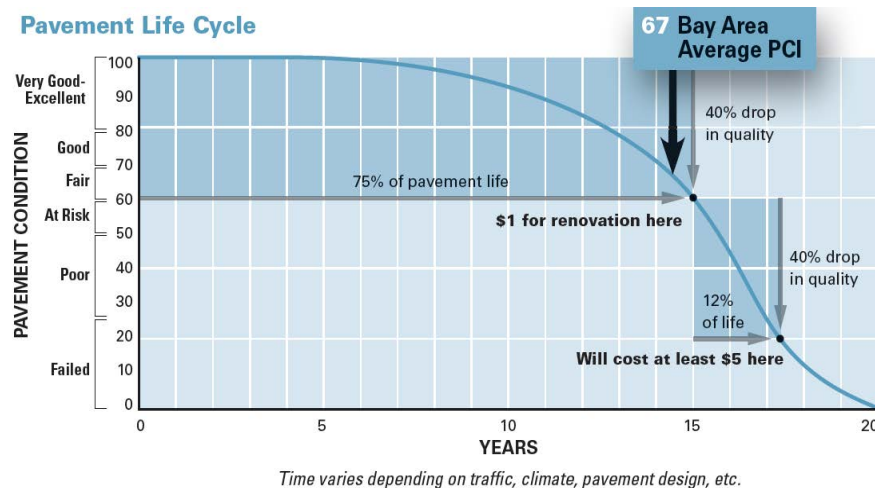
## Capital Assets: Unfunded capital needs have grown despite some increased investment.

### How do the City's capital assets impact its financial condition?

Capital assets are used in city operations and have a life that extends beyond a single financial reporting period. Berkeley owns a wide range of capital assets, including public buildings, streets, sidewalks, sewers and storm drains, traffic signals, and parking infrastructure. The City's responsibility for managing capital assets requires considerable resources and ongoing attention, which impacts the City's financial condition. As a relatively older city, Berkeley faces the added challenges of aging infrastructure.

If a city does not regularly maintain its capital assets, it can face deferred maintenance costs down the line. Addressing capital assets once their condition has severely deteriorated is often more expensive than regular preventative care or maintenance. According to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, regular maintenance of roads is five to ten times cheaper than allowing roads to fail and then paying for the necessary rehabilitation (Figure 23).

**Figure 23. Pavement Maintenance Costs**



Source: Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Pothole Report III 2018

As we reported in our 2020 audit of Berkeley's streets, Berkeley needs significant additional funding to address the growing backlog of deteriorating streets.<sup>9</sup> Since this finding, in November 2024, voters approved Measure FF, a parcel tax expected to generate \$15 million annually for 14 years, with about 45 percent dedicated to street paving. According to Public Works' analysis,

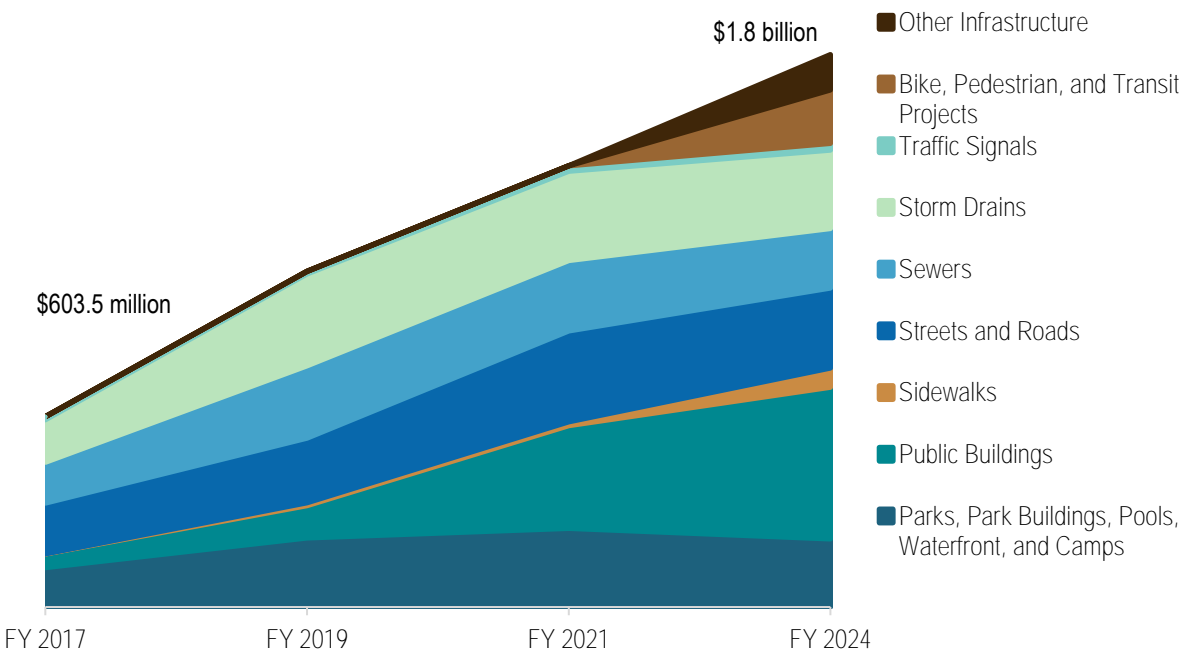
<sup>9</sup> [Rocky Road: Berkeley Streets at Risk and Significantly Underfunded](#)

Measure FF would not generate sufficient revenue to help the City achieve the pavement condition index rating of 70 out of 100, which falls within the good condition range.<sup>10</sup>

## Berkeley’s unfunded capital and deferred maintenance needs have grown to \$1.8 billion.

Unfunded capital and deferred maintenance needs have grown since our 2022 audit.<sup>11</sup> In FY 2024, the City reported about \$1.8 billion in unfunded capital and deferred maintenance needs in the FY 2025-FY 2029 Capital Improvement Program (Figure 24). Without sufficient investment, these unfunded capital needs will continue to grow.

**Figure 24. Unfunded Capital and Deferred Maintenance Needs, FY 2017 to FY 2024 (in 2025 dollars)**



Source: City of Berkeley’s Unfunded Liability Reports (FY 2017-FY 2021); FY 2025-FY 2029 Capital Improvement Program (FY 2024)

Note: We did not include IT-related assets due to incomplete data, and these costs would not significantly change the total amount of unfunded capital and deferred maintenance needs. Unfunded needs for sidewalks were reported starting in FY 2019. Similarly, unfunded needs for bike, pedestrian, and transit projects and other infrastructure were reported starting in FY 2024. Unfunded needs for public buildings included fire station rehabilitation projects but did not include full fire station renovations. Library facilities and facilities leased to other entities at the time of analysis were not included.

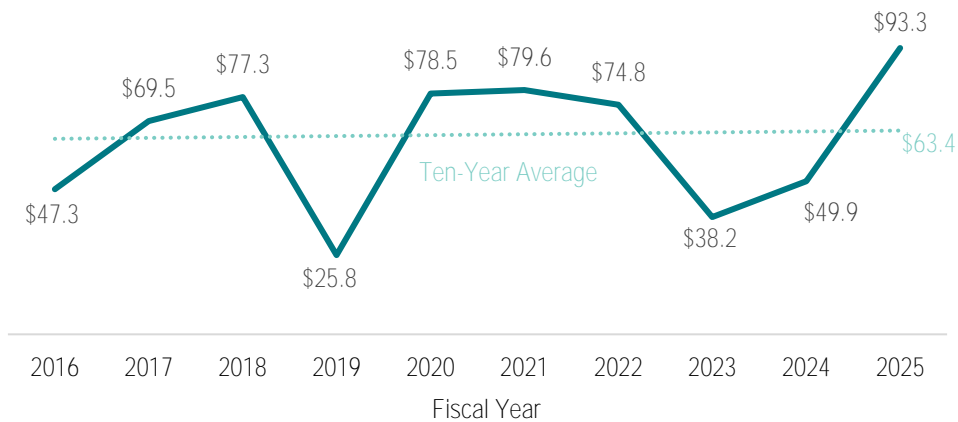
<sup>10</sup> The pavement condition index is a measure that rates segments of paved roadways on a scale of 0 to 100 with condition categories ranging from a low of “failed” to a high of “excellent.” The “good” condition category is the third highest out of seven categories.

<sup>11</sup> Capital and deferred maintenance needs refer to a broad range of necessary activities, including investment in new capital assets, improving existing capital assets, replacing existing capital assets, and repairing existing capital assets.

**Berkeley has increased investment in capital infrastructure, but it is not enough to cover all its unfunded capital needs.**

Overall, Berkeley has increased investment in capital infrastructure. Over the last ten years, Berkeley spent an average of \$63.4 million each fiscal year on capital assets (Figure 25). In FY 2025, Berkeley spent \$93.3 million on capital assets, which was the highest level of investment in capital assets compared to prior fiscal years in our audit scope (Figure 25). While the City has overall increased its investment in capital assets since FY 2016, it does not cover the \$1.8 billion in unfunded capital needs, according to the current Capital Improvement Program.

**Figure 25. Capital Investments (in millions, in 2025 dollars)**



Source: Berkeley ACFRs

**City management did not release an updated unfunded liability report for FY 2025 due to limited staff time.**

An important part of Berkeley’s planning process to address its unfunded capital need is City management’s presentation of a biennial unfunded liabilities report to City Council. In 2012, City Council adopted a resolution requiring the City Manager to report every other year on the City’s current liabilities and projections of future liabilities to provide accurate information to Council and the public ahead of the City’s budget deliberations. Due to limited staff time and competing priorities, City management did not release an updated unfunded liability report for FY 2025. As a result, City Council and the public do not have complete information regarding the City’s unfunded liabilities in a clear, easily accessible format to inform upcoming budget deliberations.

## The City lacks advanced planning to finance its capital plan in the long term.

To ensure effective management of capital assets, the GFOA recommends that local governments prepare and adopt multi-year capital plans that cover a period of five to twenty-five years. The City has a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) that identifies capital needs and funding sources over five years, which is on the lower end of the recommended period. Given that capital assets have life cycles that can last decades, capital plans that cover longer time periods can help to anticipate and plan for these long-term costs.

The GFOA also recommends that local governments develop multi-year financing plans covering the multi-year period of their capital plan to ensure that their plan is achievable within expected funding sources. According to the most recent CIP, the City's local revenues have not kept pace with the investments needed to maintain or update aging infrastructure. This means the City will likely need to raise new funding, through sources such as bonds, to address its unmet capital needs. However, the CIP does not include advanced planning to determine if and when the City should propose new bond measures to address capital needs.

Other jurisdictions have advanced bond planning. For example, San Francisco has a ten-year capital plan that includes a planned general obligation bond schedule that considers the City's debt capacity, election schedule, and capital needs. Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) has a ten-year Facilities Master Plan for school building improvements. Historically, BUSD proposes new general obligation bonds to Berkeley taxpayers every ten years, and the Master Plan helps to identify which capital projects will be financed through bond funding.

As mentioned previously, City management submitted staff recommendations in December 2025 regarding a potential \$300 million bond measure in 2026 to help address unfunded capital needs. Beyond this, developing a multi-year capital financing plan that includes advanced bond planning could help the City better anticipate and communicate long-term funding needs and the proposed timing of future bond measures.

## Recommendations

- 4.1 To provide clear and accurate information on City's current liabilities and projections of future liabilities, we recommend City management resume providing the biennial unfunded liability report to City Council and the public ahead of the FY 2029 and FY 2030 budget.

- 4.2 To improve the City's ability to anticipate capital infrastructure needs, we recommend City management extend the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) beyond five years, such as a ten-year CIP.
- 4.3 To address the City's long-term capital infrastructure needs, we recommend City management develop a capital financing plan that covers a period at least as long as the CIP and proposes future funding mechanisms beyond existing sources. We recommend that the City plan the timing and amount of potential general obligation bonds multiple years in advance, taking into consideration the City's existing amount of authorized debt and capacity to borrow. The timing and amount of future bonds should aim to prevent sharp changes in debt service tax rates when possible.

## Management Response

We provided a draft of this report to the City Manager, Finance, Public Works, and the City Attorney for review and comment. City management agreed or partially agreed with our findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

We will conduct our standard recommendation follow-up process after the audit is issued. We generally expect the City to implement audit recommendations within two years of report issuance. We have not yet confirmed to what extent any recommendations may have been implemented prior to the audit release date.

**Recommendation 1.1:** To present clear information regarding the City's investment performance, we recommend the Finance Department provide an investment report to Council that compares the City's investment rate of return for the most recent fiscal year to at least the previous five fiscal years, similar to the City's past annual investment reports.

**Management Response:** Partially Agree

**Implementation Date:** December 31, 2026

**Corrective Action Plan:** The city is required to file quarterly investment reports. For all 4th quarter reports, staff will add a table showing the rate of return for the previous 5 years.

**Recommendation 2.1:** To help the City pass a structurally balanced budget, we recommend City management propose a fiscal policy to City Council to assess whether recurring revenues and recurring expenditures are balanced, and communicate this information to City Council. We recommend this policy also formalize City management's initiative to develop the baseline budget using the prior year's actual expenditures and projected needs.

**Management Response:** Partially Agree

**Implementation Date:** June 30, 2028

**Corrective Action Plan:** As part of developing the budget, City management currently assesses projected revenues and expenditures to determine whether or not the budget is balanced. This information is communicated to the City Council as part of the budget adoption process and per the City Charter, the City must adopt a balanced budget. For this biennial budget, City management implemented a data driven approach by developing the baseline budget using prior year actuals and projected needs. This change in the process was included in the City's Budget Instructions and will remain part of the

budget process going forward. Staff will evaluate whether a formal City Council fiscal policy is necessary or whether the same objectives can be achieved through the Budget Instructions and possibly by adding a dedicated section in the Budget Book.

**Recommendation 2.2:** To ensure sustainable budgetary strategies continue, we recommend the City publicly report in the adopted budget book that departments are required to submit a structural balancing plan to the Budget Office for enterprise funds that project a deficit. As part of this process, we recommend the Budget Office and departments work together to regularly assess the transfers in and out of these enterprise funds.

**Management Response:** Agree

**Implementation Date:** Implemented for the FY 2027 and FY 2028 Biennial Budget Process

**Corrective Action Plan:** For this Biennial Budget, the City required the Departments that manages special funds experiencing structural deficits or projecting a deficit to submit a balancing plan and a five-year fund forecast. This step is also documented in the Budget Instructions. The Budget Book also has a dedicated section highlighting the City's major funds. Other funds that are projecting deficits not currently included can be added for better visibility.

**Recommendation 2.3:** To improve the financial sustainability of enterprise funds, we recommend the City adopt a citywide policy to regularly evaluate enterprise fees and propose adjustments where appropriate to strengthen revenues and help mitigate the future risk of enterprise fund deficits.

**Management Response:** Agree

**Implementation Date:** July 1, 2027

**Corrective Action Plan:** The City can evaluate when it is appropriate for each enterprise fund to adjust its fees by working closely with the relevant departments and fund managers. Because each enterprise fund is unique, establishing a single, coordinated adjustment schedule may not be feasible. However, the City can develop a set of criteria that would trigger a review and potential adjustments of fees.

**Recommendation 2.4:** To further improve the financial sustainability of enterprise funds, we recommend the City adopt a policy to establish a reserve for each enterprise fund as appropriate and legally permitted. We recommend the Budget Office and departments work together to determine the appropriate reserve goal for each enterprise fund.

**Management Response:** Agree

**Implementation Date:** June 30, 2028

**Corrective Action Plan:** The City can establish a Special Fund Reserve Study Working Group to evaluate and research best practices and industry standards. This group can apply those practices to the City's needs, fund specific needs and requirements to develop appropriate reserve targets and policies. Since each enterprise fund is unique, establishing a single reserve target for all funds is not feasible.

**Recommendation 3.1:** To continue to strengthen the Section 115 Trust, we recommend City management propose an amendment to the current Council fiscal policies to explicitly require the City to replenish the Trust after funds are withdrawn, as long as contributions to the Trust are needed to address increased pension costs and the City's operational needs are taken into consideration. The policy may be modeled off the City's General Fund Reserve Policy, which requires repayment to begin no more than five years from the date of withdrawal and to be completed within ten years from the date of withdrawal.

**Management Response:** Agree

**Implementation Date:** To be determined

**Corrective Action Plan:** Council Approval Needed

**Recommendation 4.1:** To provide clear and accurate information on City's current liabilities and projections of future liabilities, we recommend City management resume providing the biennial unfunded liability report to City Council and the public ahead of the FY 2029 and FY 2030 budget.

**Management Response:** Agree

**Implementation Date:** June 30, 2028

**Corrective Action Plan:** The City will resume providing the biennial Unfunded Liability and Unfunded Capital Needs report to the City Council in the second half of FY 2028 and return to a regular biennial schedule thereafter.

**Recommendation 4.2:** To improve the City's ability to anticipate capital infrastructure needs, we recommend City management extend the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) beyond five years, such as a ten-year CIP.

**Management Response:** Partially Agree

**Implementation Date:** To be determined, will consider implementation of this recommendation as part of the FY 29 – FY 30 Biennial Budget.

**Corrective Action Plan:** Developing long-term projections is necessary to plan. For this reason, every two years the City develops a 5 Year Capital Improvement Program. Projections beyond five years can be unreliable. With that being said, as part of the FY 29 – FY 30 Biennial Budget, staff will evaluate the potential to extend the Capital Improvement Program beyond five years.

**Recommendation 4.3:** To address the City's long-term capital infrastructure needs, we recommend City management develop a capital financing plan that covers a period at least as long as the CIP and proposes future funding mechanisms beyond existing sources. We recommend that the City plan the timing and amount of potential general obligation bonds multiple years in advance, taking into consideration the City's existing amount of authorized debt and capacity to borrow. The timing and amount of future bonds should aim to prevent sharp changes in debt service tax rates when possible.

**Management Response:** Agree

**Implementation Date:** June 30, 2028

**Corrective Action Plan:** There is an existing City Council referral that is similar for the current budget cycle that will be implemented.

# Methodology and Compliance

## Methodology

We used financial indicators included in the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) *Evaluating Financial Condition* handbook designed for local governments. Additionally, for a few indicators, we adapted methodology from the California State Auditor's Office used for their Fiscal Health of California Cities dashboard that is no longer available. We also included some indicators used by peer cities in their financial condition audits.

To better understand how some of Berkeley's financial indicators compared to peer cities, we benchmarked Berkeley to other California cities which were selected during our previous financial condition audit. Specifically, we benchmarked Berkeley against Long Beach, Oakland, Pasadena, Santa Clara, Santa Monica, and Palo Alto because they were similar to Berkeley across one or more criteria, such as population, general fund expenditures per resident, services provided, and presence of a large university. We included Palo Alto and did not include Davis in this audit, unlike our previous financial condition audit, because Davis did not publish a FY 2024 ACFR during the audit period. Due to variation in the availability of comparison cities' FY 2025 ACFRs, we used FY 2024 data for the comparisons where possible.

To meet our objective, we reviewed the following:

- Berkeley's Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports (ACFRs),
- Budget Office reports (Unfunded Liability Obligations and Unfunded Infrastructure Needs reports, city budgets),
- City Auditor reports on financial condition, leases, streets, and police overtime,
- City policies on reserves, debt management, and investments,
- Council reports and presentations related to the City's finances, and
- The City's bond rating in the Moody's 2025 Annual Comment Report.

We also conducted interviews with:

- The Director of Finance,
- Staff from the Office of Budget and Fiscal Management (Budget Office) responsible for overseeing the City's budget and spending,
- The Director of Public Works and Public Works staff responsible for overseeing city spending on capital assets and financial management of the Public Works enterprise funds, including the Off-Street Parking Fund and Parking Meter Fund,

- The Director of Parks, Recreation and Waterfront responsible for overseeing the financial management of the Marina Fund, and
- Staff at the City’s external financial auditing firm, Badawi and Associates.

We analyzed financial data from the sources below. For all indicators where we adjusted for inflation, we used the inflation factor as of June 2025 from the Consumer Price Index: San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward Table, 2016-2025, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

| Report Sources                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <p><b><u>Revenues and Expenses</u></b></p> <p><b>Revenues and Expenses (trends)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2016 – FY 2025 ACFRs, Government-Wide Financial Statements: Statement of Activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Revenue per Resident (benchmark)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley, Oakland, Long Beach, Pasadena, Santa Clara, Santa Monica, and Palo Alto FY 2024 ACFRs, Government-Wide Financial Statements: Statement of Activities; Statistical Section: Demographic and Economic Statistics</li> </ul> <p><b>Revenues by Source</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Government-wide Financial Statements: Statement of Activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Revenues by Source (trends)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2016 – FY 2025 ACFRs, Government-wide Financial Statements: Statement of Activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Investment Reporting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley Quarterly Investment Reports FY 2025</li> <li>• City of Berkeley Annual Investment Reports</li> <li>• City of Palo Alto and San Jose Investment Reports</li> </ul> <p><b>Revenues from Leases</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley Finance Department data FY 2016 – FY 2025</li> </ul> <p><b>Berkeley’s Countywide 1 Percent Ad Valorem Property Tax Distribution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alameda County Auditor-Controller/Clerk-Recorder’s Office data FY 2025</li> </ul> <p><b>What are your property taxes levied for?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Government-wide Financial Statements, Statement of Activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Expenses by Function</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2016 and FY 2025 ACFRs, Government-wide Financial Statements: Statement of Activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Personnel Expenditures by Category</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley City Manager, Budget Office data FY 2016 and FY 2025</li> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Statistical Section: Full-time Equivalent City Governmental Employees by Function/Program</li> </ul> <p><b>General Fund Expenditure Growth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley City Manager, Budget Office’s presentation to the Budget and Finance Committee (1/22/2026)</li> </ul> |
| <p><b><u>Budgetary Practices</u></b></p> <p><b>General Fund Deficit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley Budgets: FY 2020 and FY 2021, FY 2022, FY 2023 and FY 2024, FY 2024, FY 2025 and FY 2026</li> <li>• City Council Resolutions to Adopt Budgets</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

| <b>Report Sources</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley City Manager, Budget Office: FY 2027 and FY 2028 Budget Development Instructions</li> <li>• Government Finance Officers Association Report: "A Risk-Based Analysis and Stress Test of Long-Term Debt Affordability for the City of Berkeley, California," 2022</li> </ul> <p><b>Enterprise Fund Deficits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley Budgets: FY 2020 and FY 2021, FY 2022, FY 2023 and FY 2024, FY 2024, FY 2025 and FY 2026</li> <li>• City of Berkeley Departments' presentations to the Budget and Finance Committee</li> <li>• City of Berkeley City Manager, Budget Office: FY 2027 and FY 2028 Budget Development Instructions</li> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Financial Section: Notes to Basic Financial Statements, Interfund Transactions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p><b><u>Demographic and Economic Indicators</u></b></p> <p><b>Population</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Statistical Section: Demographic and Economic Statistics</li> </ul> <p><b>UC Berkeley Presence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of California website</li> <li>• University of California Berkeley: Office of the Vice Chancellor website</li> <li>• City of Berkeley Office of Economic Development 2024 Dashboard</li> </ul> <p><b>Unemployment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Statistical Section: Demographic and Economic Statistics</li> </ul> <p><b>Assessed Property Value</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Statistical Section: Assessed Value and Estimated Values of Taxable Property</li> </ul> <p><b>Median Household Income (benchmark)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2016 American Community Survey, City of Berkeley</li> <li>• 2024 American Community Survey, City of Berkeley, Oakland, Long Beach, Pasadena, Santa Clara, Santa Monica, and Palo Alto</li> </ul> |
| <p><b><u>Net Position, Liquidity, and Reserves</u></b></p> <p><b>Net Position</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2018 – FY 2025 ACFRs, Government-Wide Financial Statements: Statement of Net Position</li> </ul> <p><b>Liquidity Ratio</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2016 – FY 2025 ACFRs Government-Wide Financial Statements: Statement of Net Position</li> </ul> <p><b>General Fund Reserves</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley City Manager, Budget Office data, FY 2017 – FY 2025</li> <li>• City of Berkeley City Manager, Budget Office, First Amendment to the FY 2026 Annual Appropriations Ordinance Presentation to Budget and Finance Committee</li> <li>• City Council Resolution Amending the General Fund Reserve Policy (7/29/2025)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><b><u>Long-Term Debt and Liabilities</u></b></p> <p><b>Governmental Activities Long-Term Liabilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2016 – FY 2025 ACFRs, Notes to Basic Financial Statements: Governmental Activities Long-Term Liabilities Summary</li> </ul> <p><b>Governmental Activities Long-Term Liabilities per Resident (benchmark)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley, Oakland, Long Beach, Pasadena, Santa Clara, Santa Monica, and Palo Alto FY 2024 ACFRs, Government-Wide Financial Statements: Statement of Net Position</li> </ul> <p><b>Debt by Type</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Notes to Basic Financial Statements: Governmental Activities Long-Term Liabilities Summary</li> </ul> <p><b>Bond Ratings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Berkeley FY 2016 – FY 2025 ACFRs, Introductory Section</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

| Report Sources                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standard and Poor's Ratings Guide</li> <li>Moody's Rating Definitions</li> </ul> <p><b>General Obligation Bond Debt as a Proportion of Assessed Property Value</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Statistical Section: Ratios of General Bonded Debt Outstanding</li> <li>City of Berkeley FY 2025 ACFR, Statistical Section: Assessed Value and Estimated Values of Taxable Property</li> <li>City of Berkeley Debt Management and Disclosure Policy</li> </ul> <p><b>General Obligation Bond Debt per Resident</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Berkeley FY 2021 and FY 2025 ACFR, Statistical Section: Ratios of General Bonded Debt Outstanding</li> <li>City of Berkeley FY 2021 and FY 2025 ACFR, Statistical Section: Demographic and Economic Statistics</li> </ul> <p><b>General Obligation Debt Service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City Council Special Meeting Item (12/02/2025), "Discussion Regarding Potential Ballot Measures for the November 3, 2026, General Municipal Election"</li> </ul> |
| <p><b><u>Net Pension and Retiree Healthcare Liabilities</u></b></p> <p><b>Net Pension Liability by Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Berkeley Finance Department data FY 2016 – FY 2025</li> </ul> <p><b>Funded Ratio Risk Level (benchmark)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Berkeley, Oakland, Long Beach, Pasadena, Santa Clara, Santa Monica, and Palo Alto FY 2024 ACFRs, Required Supplementary Information: Schedule of Changes in the Net Pension Liability and Related Ratios</li> </ul> <p><b>Section 115 Trust Fund</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Berkeley FY 2016 – FY 2025 ACFRs, Combining Financial Statements and Schedules: Schedule of Revenue, Expenditures, and Changes in Fund Balances – Budget and Actual PERS Savings Fund – Budgetary Basis</li> <li>City of Berkeley, May 14, 2019 staff report to City Council</li> </ul> <p><b>Net Retiree Healthcare Liability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Berkeley Finance Department data FY 2016 – FY 2025</li> </ul>                                                 |
| <p><b><u>Capital Assets</u></b></p> <p><b>Pavement Maintenance Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Metropolitan Transportation Commission, The Pothole Report: Bay Area Roads at Risk, September 2018</li> </ul> <p><b>Unfunded Capital and Deferred Maintenance Needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Berkeley Unfunded Liability Reports (FY 2017, FY 2019, FY 2021)</li> <li>City of Berkeley FY 2025 – FY 2029 Capital Improvement Program</li> </ul> <p><b>Capital Investments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City of Berkeley FY 2016 – FY 2025 ACFRs, Notes to the Basic Financial Statements: Capital Assets</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

Throughout the report, we use the terms *expenses* and *expenditures*. Government-wide financial statements (including governmental and business-type activities) use the accrual basis of accounting and refer to expenses. The accrual basis of accounting reports revenues and expenses in the period in which the underlying event occurs, regardless of the timing of cash flows. This means that revenues are recorded when earned and expenses are recorded when the liability is incurred, instead of when cash is actually received or disbursed. Governmental fund financial statements (including the General Fund) use the modified accrual basis of accounting and refer to expenditures. Under the modified accrual basis of accounting, revenues are recorded when

measurable and available, and expenditures are recorded when the liability is incurred, except for interest on long-term debt, judgments and claims, workers' compensation, and compensated absences, which are recorded when paid.

### **Data Reliability**

We reviewed information for reasonableness and consistency, and we researched data that needed additional explanation. We did not, however, audit the accuracy of all source documents or the reliability of the data in computer-based systems. As nearly all financial information presented is from the City's ACFRs, we relied on the work performed by the City's external financial auditors.

### **Statement of Compliance**

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

**Mission Statement**

Promoting transparency and accountability in Berkeley government.

**Contributors**

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Caitlin Palmer, Audit Manager  
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Pauline Miller, Auditor II  
Manami Suenaga, Auditor I  
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**City Auditor**

Jenny Wong

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[Copies of our audit reports are available on our website.](#)

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BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR



Internal

CONSENT CALENDAR  
April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Terry Taplin

Subject: Luna Dance Creativity: Relinquishment of Council Office Budget Funds from General Funds and Grant of Such Funds

#### RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution approving the expenditure of an amount not to exceed \$500 per Councilmember, including \$500 from Councilmember Taplin, to support Luna's May Day Gathering and Bazaar event.

#### FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

No General Fund impacts. Up to \$500 is available from contributing Councilmember's Council Office Budget discretionary accounts.

#### CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

In the past year, Luna Dance served 130 families; 1,894 teachers, artists, and caregivers; and nearly 29,000 students, including more than 4,000 young people with disabilities. Programs reached twelve public school districts, six independent schools, and three institutions of higher education, across eleven counties nationwide, reflecting both the depth and growing national reach of Luna's work.

Luna's mission is to bring creativity, equity, and community to every child's life through dance. Grounded in its Theory of Change—*children embody the future, dance cultivates creativity, and policy centers equity*—Luna asks: what becomes possible when we commit to advancing children's freedom?

At the heart of their work is collective action. Through partnerships with artists, educators, caregivers, schools, and social service networks, Luna expands access to high-quality dance education, especially for communities historically and systemically excluded from the arts.

Luna's creativity-based pedagogy continues to integrate research and practice in play theory, neuroscience, child development, and anti-bias, culturally responsive teaching.

#### BACKGROUND

April 28th, 2026

Luna Dance & Creative was founded in Oakland, California, on International Women's Day, March 8th, 1992. Since then, they have grown from a local community dance center with a strong children's program, to a nationally recognized organization that ignites the field of dance education with expectations of increased creativity, equity, and inclusion. Luna Dance's programs bring dance to more than 30,000 children and 400 artists, teachers, and social service providers each year. They work together to develop future choreographers, leaders, and visionaries.

Studio Lab-Kids was their first program, and it remains the only choreography-centered children's dance program in California. Since purchasing and renovating their Berkeley space in 2022, Studio Lab has expanded to serve artists (Studio Lab-Artists) by providing rehearsal space and piloting residency programs. Studio Lab-Community offers public education through showcasing artistic research and scholarship in dynamic ways that challenge the limitations of academia.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

None.

#### CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Terry Taplin, Council District 2 - 510-981-7120

Attachments:

1: Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

AUTHORIZING THE EXPENDITURE OF SURPLUS FUNDS FROM THE OFFICE EXPENSE ACCOUNTS OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCILMEMBERS FOR A GRANT TO PROVIDE PUBLIC SERVICES FOR A MUNICIPAL PUBLIC PURPOSE

WHEREAS, Councilmember Taplin has surplus funds in his office expenditure account (budget code 011-11-102-100-0000-000-411); and

WHEREAS, a private 501(c)(3) non-profit tax-exempt corporation Luna Dance Creativity seeks funds in the amount of \$500 to support their continued fundraising; and

WHEREAS, the provision of such services would fulfill the following municipal public purpose: continuing the education of Berkeley residents in acts of self-expression and the continue teaching observation, inquiry, accessibility, and interconnectivity;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that funds relinquished by the Mayor and Councilmembers from their Council Office Budget up to \$500 amount per office shall be granted to Luna Dance Creativity to support Luna's May Day Gathering and Bazaar event.





Brent Blackaby  
Councilmember District 6

CONSENT CALENDAR  
April 28, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Blackaby (Author), Mayor Ishii (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember O'Keefe (Co-Sponsor),

Subject: Resolution Supporting Megafire Prevention Package

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution supporting the 2026 Joint Megafire Prevention Package in the California Legislature supported by Megafire Action, FireWERX, California Fire Safe Council, and the Karuk Tribe, among others. Send a copy of the Resolution to the six authors, Senator Jesse Arreguín, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, and Governor Gavin Newsom.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The legislative package includes 13 bills from California State Senators Allen, Becker and Stern, alongside California Assemblymembers Bennett, Connolly and Rogers. The bills include resilience loan financing, home hardening, expansion of existing fire mitigation programs, reducing barriers to beneficial fire and more. They are as follows:

1. [SB 894 \(Allen\)](#): Wildfire Mitigation Affordability Act
2. [SB 973 \(Becker\)](#): Wildfire County Coordinator Program
3. [SB 911 \(Becker\)](#): Transfer of real property: compliance documentation
4. [SB 1079 \(Stern\)](#): Fire Innovation Unit Act
5. [SB 1404 \(Stern\)](#): Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan: Implementation Strategy
6. [AB 1699 \(Rogers\)](#): Good Fire Act
7. [AB 1891 \(Connolly\)](#): Beneficial Fire Capacity Program
8. [AB 1934 \(Bennett\)](#): Home Hardening Certification Program
9. [AB 1960 \(Bennett\)](#): Wildfire Prevention Grants Program
10. [AB 1964 \(Bennett\)](#): County Recorder: Home Hardening
11. [AB 1971 \(Bennett\)](#): Home Hardening Retrofitting Improvements
12. [AB 1986 \(Bennett\)](#): Residential Property Insurance – Home Hardening
13. [AB 2013 \(Bennett\)](#): Water Suppliers – Emergency Preparedness Program

## BACKGROUND

Wildfire mitigation is becoming increasingly critical as climate change intensifies fire risk. Fire seasons are growing longer, and wildfires are becoming more frequent and destructive. As a result, many homeowners have lost access to traditional home insurance due to wildfire risk. Many are left with California's FAIR Plan—the insurer of last resort—which often costs significantly more while providing far less coverage.

A wildfire in the Berkeley Hills would have devastating consequences not only for the surrounding neighborhoods but for all of Berkeley and the broader region. The environmental damage, economic disruption, and potential loss of human life would be profound.

For these reasons, it is prudent for government to implement effective strategies to reduce the risk of destructive megafires. Berkeley has long been committed to wildfire mitigation through decades of programs supporting residents, including the Chipper Program and property inspections, as well as newer initiatives such as Firewise Communities, Effective Mitigations for Berkeley's Ember Resilience (EMBER), and the Residential Assistance Program (RAP).

By supporting the Joint Megafire Prevention Package of legislative bills, Berkeley affirms its commitment to comprehensive wildfire mitigation and homeowner assistance for defensible space and home hardening efforts. This package will help restore resilience to our landscapes, provide homeowners with clear guidance and resources to reduce wildfire risk, and accelerate the adoption of new technologies that give firefighters and communities better tools to protect lives and property—here in Berkeley and statewide.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

Wildfire has detrimental effects on air, water and the environment. Passage of legislation to reduce the chances of a wildfire align with the City's goals in environmental sustainability and reducing climate impacts.

## CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Brent Blackaby    Council District 6    510-981-7160

Attachments:

1: Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING MEGAFIRE PREVENTION PACKAGE

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley is no stranger to destructive wildfire, including the 1923 wind-driven fire that burned from the eastern slope of the Berkeley Hills down to the corner of Shattuck and Hearst, destroying 640 structures on the northside of the UC campus, leaving thousands homeless, as well as the 1991 Oakland Hills Firestorm, which included the Berkeley Hills, and killed 25 people; and

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley is steadfast in its wildfire prevention actions including programs for vegetation management, home hardening, and financial assistance; and

WHEREAS, the 2026 Joint Megafire Prevention Package represents one of the most comprehensive wildfire mitigation efforts in recent years—providing homeowners with clear guidance and resources to reduce risk, restoring resilience to our landscapes, and accelerating the adoption of new technologies that equip firefighters and communities to better protect lives and property -- here in Berkeley and statewide; and

WHEREAS, California State Senators Allen, Becker and Stern, and California Assemblymembers Bennett, Connolly and Rogers introduced a comprehensive package of 13 bills, aimed at mitigating destructive megafires; and

WHEREAS, Senator Allen introduced SB 894: Wildfire Mitigation Affordability Act; and

WHEREAS, Senator Becker introduced SB 973: Wildfire County Coordinator Program and SB 911: Transfer of real property: compliance documentation; and

WHEREAS, Senator Stern introduced SB 1079: Fire Innovation Unit Act and SB 1404: Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan: Implementation Strategy; and

WHEREAS, Assemblymember Rogers introduced AB 1699: Good Fire Act; and

WHEREAS, Assemblymember Connolly introduced AB 1891: Beneficial Fire Capacity Program; and

WHEREAS, Assemblymember Bennett introduced AB 1934: Home Hardening Certification Program, AB 1960: Wildfire Prevention Grants Program, AB 1964: County Recorder: Home Hardening, AB 1971: Home Hardening Retrofitting Improvements , AB 1986: Residential Property Insurance – Home Hardening, and AB 2013: Water Suppliers – Emergency Preparedness Program.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the Council strongly supports all of these bills, collectively called the Megafire Prevention Package, urging them to be passed and signed into law this year.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Berkeley City Council thanks the six authors, Senators Allen, Becker and Stern, and Assemblymembers Bennett, Connolly and Rogers. The City Council also thanks all who were instrumental in developing the legislation, including Megafire Action, FireWERX, California Fire Safe Council, and the Karuk Tribe.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that this Resolution be sent to the six authors, Senator Jesse Arreguín, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, and Governor Gavin Newsom.

|                                            |                                                |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Upcoming Worksessions and Special Meetings |                                                |
| Scheduled Dates                            |                                                |
| May 7 (5pm)                                | Public Safety Technology                       |
| May 19 (4pm)                               | Results of Second Community Survey (tentative) |

|                                                |
|------------------------------------------------|
| Unscheduled Presentations and Special Meetings |
| 1. 5-Year Paving Plan & Hopkins Street Paving  |

1. 5-Year Paving Plan & Hopkins Street Paving

|                                             |
|---------------------------------------------|
| Future Information Reports                  |
| 1. Affordable Housing Fee Feasibility Study |
| 2. Berkeley Fire Department Annual Report   |

1. Affordable Housing Fee Feasibility Study


2. Berkeley Fire Department Annual Report

|  |                                                                                                          |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <b>City Council Referrals to the Agenda &amp; Rules Committee and Unfinished Business for Scheduling</b> |
|  | None                                                                                                     |

| CITY CLERK DEPARTMENT                                                                                                                          |                      |                       |                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| WORKING CALENDAR FOR SCHEDULING LAND USE MATTERS<br>BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL                                                                    |                      |                       |                   |
| Address                                                                                                                                        | Board/<br>Commission | Appeal Period<br>Ends | Public<br>Hearing |
| <b>NOD – Notices of Decision</b>                                                                                                               |                      |                       |                   |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
| <b>Public Hearings Scheduled</b>                                                                                                               |                      |                       |                   |
| 600 Gilman Street (establish a public drive-in vehicle wash, incidental food service with a service window, and allow a 30-foot wide driveway) | ZAB                  |                       | TBD               |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
| <b>Remanded to ZAB or LPC</b>                                                                                                                  |                      |                       |                   |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
| <b>Notes</b>                                                                                                                                   |                      |                       |                   |
|                                                                                                                                                |                      |                       |                   |
| ZAB: Zoning Adjustments Board                                                                                                                  |                      |                       |                   |
| LPC: Landmarks Preservation Commission                                                                                                         |                      |                       |                   |

4/1/2026






No Material  
Available for  
this Item

There is no material for this item.

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