

Culture and Life-long Learning

Strategic Outcome:

Being enriched by Austin’s unique civic, cultural, ethnic, and learning opportunities.

Council Indicators:

- Life-long Learning
- Quality, accessibility, and diversity of civic and cultural venues, events, programs, and resources
- Vibrancy of creative industry ecosystem
- Appreciation, respect, and welcoming of all people and cultures
- Honoring of historical and ethnic heritage

Challenges (DRAFT):

1. How do we inclusively honor and preserve Austin’s unique and diverse history, culture, and traditions?
2. How do we foster and model relationships of trust, incorporate diverse viewpoints, and work to undo discrimination and racism at all levels (personal, cultural, and institutional) in our community and in our organization?
3. How do we create systems that recognize the ability of underrepresented communities to co-create solutions with local government and with each other?
4. How do we ensure Austin is equitably and effectively supporting lifelong learning?
5. How do we ensure the creative ecosystem has equitable access to capacity building and revenue development resources and capital?
6. How do we increase the supply of affordable public and private spaces (e.g., housing, work, studio, performance) for our creative ecosystem to survive?

CULTURE AND LEARNING CHALLENGE #1

How do we inclusively honor and preserve Austin’s unique and diverse history, culture, and traditions?

Nature of the Challenge

In 2017, U.S. News and World Report ranked Austin the No. 1 place to live because of its vibrant culture. This includes tangible and intangible aspects of culture, including the City’s cultural institutions, traditions, food, music, historic landmarks, storytelling, performing arts, and festivals. Austin continues to grow because people are drawn to the essence of this city’s character, and in order to sustain the unique qualities that make Austin special, attention is needed to support the infrastructure that can preserve and bolster Austin’s cultural vibrancy.

While visitors and future residents benefit from the expansion of our city, development and market pressures contribute to the displacement of communities, especially for those who currently live here, and have lived here for generations, particularly communities of color. This displacement weakens community spirit, integrity, and sense of place. How do we then ensure that Austin preserves and promotes a network of successful and sustainable cultural spaces that reflect Austin’s diversity and multicultural heritage, while supporting the needs of both current and future residents?

Evidence

- The East Austin Historic Resources Survey (2016) identified 6,600 historic resources east of IH-35, but also outlined a story of loss, particularly in the last decade and a half. This includes a loss of people and cultural heritage. The Austin History Center’s Community Archivist Program and the Cultural Arts Division’s Cultural Asset Mapping Project are two examples of City initiatives that address this public concern.
- Austin is the only city among the ten fastest growing U.S. cities where general population growth and African American growth point in opposite directions (U.S. Census, 2010)

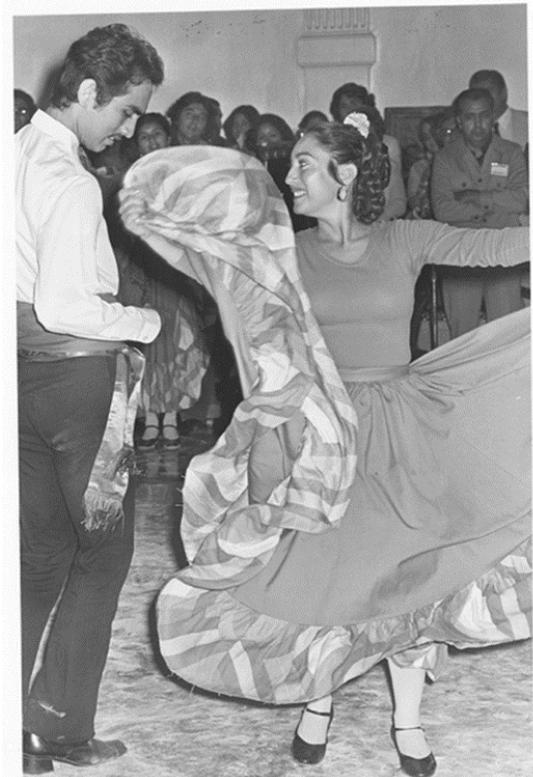


Photo Credit: Austin History Center
Roy Lozano and Patsy Haynes Guerra dance Baile Folklórico in 1977. Roy Lozano’s Ballet Folklórico de Texas was founded in 1982 and remains a vibrant part of Austin’s cultural heritage.

CULTURE AND LEARNING CHALLENGE #2

How do we foster and model relationships of trust, incorporate diverse viewpoints, and work to undo racism and discrimination at all levels (personal, cultural, and institutional) in our community and our organization?

Nature of the Challenge

The City of Austin Equity Assessment Tool (2017) leads with race because it is the primary predictor of access, outcomes, and opportunities for all quality of life indicators. By focusing on racial equity, this tool introduces a framework that can be applied to additional marginalized social identities which intersect with racial identity including age, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ability.

Austin receives the designation of being a liberal and inclusive city, yet reports from the African American, Asian American, and Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Initiatives, in addition to resident interviews demonstrate that not all city residents, particularly those with lower incomes and communities of color, feel welcome, equally represented, or able to afford to live within the city limits. Similar sentiments are noted in the 2015 Austin: Welcoming City Initiative Final Report, particularly in relation to how many in the community continue to experience challenges related to segregation along racial and class lines.

In examining historic missteps in the loss of cultural preservation and the displacement of lower income and communities of color in cities such as Chicago, New York, and San Francisco, Austin has an opportunity to retain its cultural, economic, and social capital and be a city that all Austinites can be proud to call home.

Evidence

- The 2017 Task Force on Racism and Systemic Inequities Report seeks to “dismantle systemic inequities and racism in the Austin region... [to] create a better Austin not plagued by persistent and deep disparities.”
- Austin’s 1928 Plan set the groundwork for decades of legally enforced racial segregation and inequities. Recent City plans like The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (2012), CreateAustin Cultural Plan (2012), and The Spirit of East Austin Initiative (2015) recognize we must reverse a legacy of racial and cultural inequity.
- The top three reasons for Austin’s dwindling Black population are affordability, the need for better schools, and experiences with racist and unwelcoming behavior from various communities within Austin. (University of Texas report, “Those Who Left: Austin’s Declining Black Population,” 2016)



Photo Credit: Austin History Center
The Brown Berets and Austin community members protest the 1970s Aqua Festival boat races.

CULTURE AND LEARNING CHALLENGE #3

How do we create systems that recognize the ability of underrepresented communities to co-create solutions with local government and with each other?

Nature of the Challenge

Community organizations are powerful public involvement tools—but, even the most developed systems struggle to involve the full diversity of people in a community. Civic literacy is the knowledge of how to actively participate and initiate change in your community and the greater society. It is the foundation by which a democratic society functions: citizen power as a check and as a means to create avenues for social change.

According to 2015 Census data, Austin is a majority-minority city, and it is imperative that we engage with and include all Austinites in civic matters. We have an opportunity to co-create inclusive and sustained community involvement. People not only want to be involved in their community, they also want to be seen, listened to, and valued. It is our responsibility to make everyone feel welcome to participate, to provide the tools to know how, when, and where these opportunities exist, and recognize the power of community members' experiences to add valuable contributions to decision-making.

Evidence

- The 2016 Task Force on Community Engagement Final Report states, “quality public engagement offers opportunities for ALL voices to be heard and respected, which leads to better representation of the community, which in turn results in better decisions and policies.”
- The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan includes community/civic engagement as a key component of the complete community. Through the City’s Summer Youth Internship Programs, Youth Council, CityWorks Academy, Austin Conversation Corps, Boards and Commissions, and Citizen Communications available at Austin Public Libraries, the City is actively creating the capacity for sustained community involvement that is culturally rich and can build meaningful relationships.
- In 2015 the City’s Commission on Immigrant Affairs released the *Austin: Welcoming City Initiative Final Report*. This report reflected current perceptions of Austin, conditions that impact Austin’s relative degree of welcome and inclusion of immigrants, and recommendations for how Austin can be a more welcoming city.



Photo Credit: Victor Ovalle
Spirit of East Austin community Engagement Kickoff event September 2015. More than 500 Austin residents participated in a discussion about inequities in East Austin.

CULTURE AND LEARNING CHALLENGE #4

How do we ensure the creative ecosystem has equitable access to capacity building and revenue development resources and capital?

Nature of the Challenge

Imagine Austin identified creativity as an engine of Austin's prosperity, and that arts, culture, and creativity are essential keys to the city's unique and distinctive identity. If Austin is to attract and retain its creative community, artists and arts organizations need to be able to sustain themselves as successful small businesses. However, many artists do not know about resources offered and do not have a clear roadmap for securing capital, diversifying their revenue streams, and conducting long-range business planning to sustain their businesses.

The creative sector's need for professional development, including revenue development, is identified in the Austin Music Census (2015) and Building Austin's Creative Capacity (BACC) (2016). Universities' fine arts departments often do not teach these skills in traditional curriculum. Further, there is a severe shortage of seasoned and resourced community organizations who can serve as fiscal sponsors, mentors, and incubate emerging arts growth.

Evidence

- Artists appreciate and take advantage of the variety of support services available in Austin, but they nonetheless report considerable barriers in accessing resources (e.g., time, a range of information delivery types, mentoring, and peer dialogue). ALAANA (African-American, Latino, Asian-, Arab- and Native American) focus groups reported other challenges, such as cultural and language barriers. (BACC, 2016)
- Individual creatives and arts/cultural nonprofits report that there is not enough information about available support services, or the information is not disseminated in ways that are easily received or applied, and they often miss learning opportunities. (BACC, 2016)
- There is a need for musicians to “invest in better, targeted professional development; shift the professional development services focus to methodically and consistently address the needs of existing working professional musicians rather than entry-level or early stage musicians and bands; provide professional, best practices training on expanding revenue opportunities; focus on expanding the connection of Austin's musicians to businesses and revenue opportunities in other cities and countries via investment in better networking, and increase trade export opportunities to connect professional musicians to more revenue.” (Austin Music Census, 2015)



Photo credit: Austin History Center
ABC House of Music was a musician-owned business in East Austin circa 1970 that has now closed.

CULTURE AND LEARNING CHALLENGE #5

How do we increase the supply of affordable public and private spaces (e.g., housing, work, studio, performance) for the creative ecosystem?

Nature of the Challenge

We know that local artists bring both immense economic and social impact to Austin, as shown by the \$4.35 billion in economic activity reported by Economic Impact of the Creative Sector Study by TXP Partners in 2010 and the No. 17 ranking in the National Center for Arts Research Most Vibrant Arts Communities Index in 2017. However, we are also faced with a robust market economy with intense development pressures that is displacing cultural spaces at a rapid rate.

To preserve Austin's unique arts and music scene and our culture of innovation, collaboration, and creativity, cultural producers need access to affordable creative space, both public and private, that includes housing, studio, rehearsal, performance, and administrative spaces. How do we increase this supply, and further, how do we address the isolation and displacement of not only artists, but also underrepresented members of the creative community?

Evidence

- The Austin Music Census (2015), Artspace Market Study (2013), CreateAustin (2012), Building Austin's Creative Capacity (BACC) (2016), and the Fashion and Apparel Industries in Austin Report (2015) reinforce the need to create a greater supply of affordable, accessible creative spaces citywide. It is the No. 1 priority of the Music and Creative Ecosystem "Omnibus" Stabilization Recommendations (2016).
- Design research interviews with local artists and recent data collected through the City's Creative Space Survey and Cultural Asset Mapping Project (CAMP) indicate the vast majority of the creative community lacks resources to buy property or pay rents at market rate.
- Many artists and arts organizations lack the financial capital to qualify for traditional mortgages and loans. Underrepresented members of the creative ecosystem have an even tougher challenge finding financial means to compete and secure space in this market, due to historically lower organizational budgets and disposable income of their audiences and donors. (BACC)
- Recent responses collected through the Creative Space Survey show 52 percent of respondents said they have considered leaving Austin due to creative space-related issues.
- In the 2015 Austin Music Census, 70.8 percent of respondents identified a lack of affordable rental housing.



Photo Credit: The Austin Chronicle

In June 2016, Salvage Vanguard Theater vacated its location on Manor Road that it had called home for 10 years.