



FOCUS AREA 11: Revitalize and strengthen communities through arts, culture, and history●

WHAT AND WHY Arts, culture, and history enhance the quality of life for residents in many ways, from fostering community pride and identity to boosting local economies by creating jobs, attracting tourists, and spurring business investment. Equitable development is informed by culture, recognizing shared, interdependent values and practices that shape the quality of our lives. With prosperity relying on embracing inclusion, it ensures opportunity for all and honors diverse communities' wisdom, voice, and experiences. Whether a bustling business district or a rural hamlet, any community in North Jersey can draw on unique local culture, local talent, and engaged design to create distinct and inclusive places, a process known as Creative Placemaking. Through Cultural Placemaking and planning, artists can aid representatives with developing comprehensive community plans and implementation plans for future cultural programming. Creative Placemaking elevates the unique nature of Northern New Jersey through arts, culture, historic preservation, and community-engaged design as a necessary economic and social policy goal.

Artists are experts in critical, creative thinking and finding innovative solutions for entrenched problems. Artists, designers, and cultural planners should shape public investments to aid Creative Placemaking efforts to foster local art districts. Cultural workers provide contextual nuances within existing artistic activities in diverse neighborhoods and have a unique insight to guide investments in Urban Enterprise Zones to support local entrepreneurship. Communities should call upon their local artists and historians to revive public spaces, strengthen community bonds, ideate around and develop solutions to intractable problems, and attract and guide investments. Leveraging these opportunities and others requires policy change built on partnerships and alliances, with a new vision intersecting equity, culture, community, and economic development within our region undergoing historic demographic change.

Integrating arts, culture and history into planning and designing projects results in outcomes that better reflect and celebrate local culture, heritage and values and more effective use of collective resources.

HOW The following strategies can help our region utilize the arts as a tool for community development and revalorization: funding and financing artistic and cultural activities; integrating cultural leaders and artists in all levels of planning and strengthening arts education programs; implementing arts as a solution to community challenges; and improving stewardship and programming of historic places and assets. These strategies will also provide intentionality to advance equity and justice and assure that cultural policies center on racial equity in decision-making, programs, and procedures. Integrating therapeutic and racial equity approaches into placemaking processes will shape ideas about urban design's role in creating physically and psychologically healthy communities.



STRATEGY 11.1: Increase funding and financing for arts, history and cultural programming

Developing a wider variety of financial tools, such as enhanced tax increment financing, tax credits and cooperative purchasing programs, can help creative and cultural sector organizations grow—especially in low-income areas. Our region should provide density bonuses that would allow developers to build extra floor space in excess of zoning restrictions in return for the inclusion of artistic and cultural amenities such as a gallery, sculpture garden, or performance space. Municipalities should also include arts programming as an allowable expense to state agencies' grant opportunities in transportation, health, human services, community development and labor.

We can also increase funding by supporting proposed legislation that would restore funding for the arts. The proposed legislation would increase funding over a three-year period to the minimum levels of dedicated support from the NJ Hotel/Motel Occupancy Fee to the level originally intended in the 2003 law.

STRATEGY 11.2: Integrate arts, culture and design into economic development and planning efforts

For North Jersey communities to reap the benefits of the arts, cultural leaders and artists, culture bearers, and designers must be invited to the planning tables when developing economic development plans, municipal master plans, redevelopment plans, special improvement district plans and regional and statewide plans. Therefore, our region should work to bring together artists, developers and planners to discuss improved collaboration and integration of arts into planning and development. We should encourage the redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties for arts-related activities, such as studios and theaters, and create incentives/requirements for developers to include arts elements in other types of new development.

Arts and culture-related activities are also important economic engines, attracting jobs, innovation and community redevelopment. To connect municipalities to the economic and community development benefits of the arts, local officials should create a creative team (or arts council), a broadly-defined assets inventory, and a creative placemaking plan. Municipalities and counties should also invest in local arts engagement through already existing budgets and provide training/guidance to municipal staff and officials on equitable and inclusive approaches to incorporating arts into their communities.

STRATEGY 11.3: Fund arts education for all New Jersey students

New Jersey has a unique mandate to provide all students with sequential arts instruction by qualified teachers in all four art forms through K-12 education. Despite this mandate, arts education is not being adequately funded and therefore not adequately provided in all schools in the state. Various studies have identified links between involvement in the visual and performing arts and improved attendance, school engagement, increased academic performance, decreased dropout and discipline rates, and higher levels of college attendance. Creative education prepares students with the skills needed for innovative work, including advanced problem-solving skills, collaboration, communication, and leadership skills. We should fully fund arts education in all five core disciplines - visual arts, media arts, dance, theater and music in our region's schools. Local arts organizations can also support arts education by providing field trip opportunities and on-campus engagement.



STRATEGY 11.4: Promote the arts as a solution to community challenges

While the arts are important in and of themselves, they can also play a critical role in addressing a wide variety of other community challenges, especially in community development, economic development, mental/psychological health, and community safety and empowerment. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the arts helped mitigate the negative mental health impacts of social isolation. Artistic expression has also been an important outlet for those who have faced trauma, poverty, or other significant hardships during their lives. As such, programs that focus on addressing these issues – economic development, community development, housing, transportation, mental/physical health – should be adapted to include arts components. Grants and funders need to think more broadly about how they distribute funding – and who they distribute to – in order to create programs that are more inclusive of arts and tools for a variety of community challenges. Our region needs to educate community members, local government officials, and philanthropic/financial sectors on the potential of the arts to heal and rebuild communities after crises and at all times.

STRATEGY 11.5: Enrich communities through improved preservation, stewardship and programming of historic sites and resources

With the 250th anniversary of the American Revolutionary War around the corner, history organizations across the region are preparing for increased focus on North Jersey's historic sites. History programming and preservation organizations recently received some of the largest funding appropriations in their histories, enabling funding for critical work to stabilize, rehabilitate, and improve historic sites and provide world-class programming and amenities to drive tourism to these sites. These funding levels must continue, with programs through the NJ Historical Commission and NJ Historic Trust receiving adequate funding every year. Counties should establish historic preservation grant programs through their Open Space, Farmland, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust funds. Existing county-level preservation grant programs, such as those in Somerset and Morris counties, can serve as models for the region. Municipalities should enforce local property maintenance ordinances that prevent historic properties from falling into disrepair, often resulting in demolitions.

North Jersey's historic places have powerful stories to tell, but they cannot speak for themselves. Historic sites need to be properly and justly interpreted to teach citizens about the past in ways that resonate with all community members. In addition, a greater diversity of historic sites is needed to better highlight and honor the diverse contributions from historically marginalized people in our society. Proper interpretation, well-trained volunteer and paid staff, and welcoming amenities are essential in making historic sites visitor attractions appealing to a greater variety of visitors while promoting economic activity from tourism. Funding from the NJ Historical Commission, the NJ Historic Trust and other state sources should assist not-for-profit and publicly owned historic sites in bringing their stories to life and provide amenities to make these sites tourist-ready, enjoyable destinations.

