

This meeting summary was produced by City Bureau Documenters, in accordance with our editorial independence policy, with financial support from the city of Chicago. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email City Bureau at documenters@citybureau.org with "Correction Request" in the subject line.

Arts and Culture Meeting #5

October 12, 2021, 4:00PM | 2 hours

Documented by: Izzy Strobandt

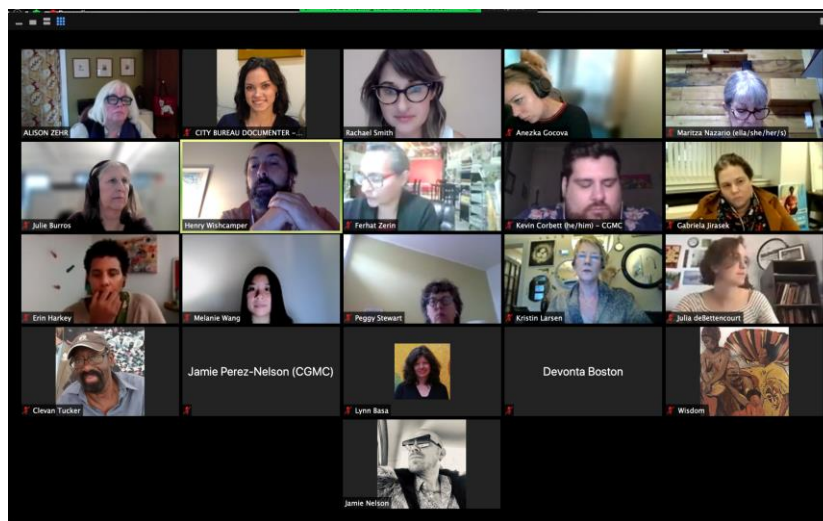
MEETING MATERIALS

[Agenda <Link to Agenda>](#)

[Presentation <Link to presentation>](#)

ATTENDEES

- Rachael Smith (host)
- Anezka Gocova (co-host)
- Alison Zehr
- Maritza Nazario
- Clevan Tucker
- Jamie Nelson
- Julie Burros
- Henry Wishcamper
- Ferhat Zerin
- Kevin Corbett
- Jamie Perez-Nelson
- Lynn Basa
- Devonta Boston
- Gabriela Jirasek
- Erin Harkey
- Melanie Wang
- Peggy Stewart
- Kristin Larsen
- Julia deBettencourt
- Wisdom Baty



MEETING GOAL

This meeting focused on condensing the pillar definition and brainstorming objectives for each of the pillar's questions via Menti.

WHERE WE ARE



Step 1

We Are*Setting the Stage*

Step 2

We Have and Need*Develop A Policy Toolkit*

Step 3

We Will*Set Policy Framework*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1

The Arts and Culture pillar is re-evaluating their definition because of its length. They are paying special attention to the specific wording and language to ensure it captures all the elements they've discussed leading up to this point, while also remaining concise.

2

Historical reckoning and equity are especially important for the pillar participants as they, and the communities they will ultimately engage with, both fear that the long-term damages of historical disinvestment could be repeated yet again.

3

Funding for Arts and Culture has increased significantly, more than three times what it has been in past years, so the pillar participants recognize the importance of doing this work right now and doing it equitably. This is one of the reasons for which they've decided to extend the We Will program further to avoid rushing the process.

CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

“We have to be able to own past mistakes before people will even enter a conversation with us. We’re gonna have some challenges as the community engagement portion of this rolls out if we do not take some ownership of that immediately, upfront—very clearly.”

Erin Harkey | Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, First Deputy Commissioner

“We need to be upfront [...] Some of the things we can name are the choices of how Chicago invested municipal money led to the creation of cultural assets and businesses in the Loop and Navy Pier and, over a period of time, contributed to the loss of cultural assets and businesses in Bronzeville and Pullman and South Shore. We can be specific about spatial differences that were impacted by individual—but also by larger—priorities in the past.”

Henry Wishcamper | Goodman Theatre, Artistic Associate

“With this influx of [American Rescue Plan or ARP] investments that is in the current budget proposal, it looks like we’re going to be able to [grow the capacity of our grants department]. The mayor has also identified \$10 million within the corporate budget to supplement our budget, which means that is an ongoing sustainable revenue source for us that will be available in perpetuity after these [ARP] funds are spent in the next two years. In total, we’re looking at an influx of about \$26 million this year for arts and culture spending.”

Erin Harkey | Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, First Deputy Commissioner

“One of the things I’ve been grappling with too is just the unique opportunity that is posed by having community engagement as part of this process, and what the artist engagement work is doing.”

Melanie Wang | 3arts, Director of Development and Partnerships

NOTES

Kickoff and Introductions

The recording doesn't start until ~15 minutes into the meeting. I was late to signing on and noticed it wasn't being recorded so I reminded the moderator and she began the recording.

Overview

"Looking at every other pillar group's questions, we learned that our definition was a little bit long. So, we did a pass to synthesize it and make it a little bit shorter. [...] Let us know if we've lost anything in that process that we feel like we need to bring back, knowing that our goal is to be a little bit tighter," said Rachael Smith.

Current Definition:

We Will's Arts & Culture pillar affirms that arts and culture are essential to Chicago's quality of life. We will provide a planning framework that supports the creative individuals, organizations, and businesses that contribute to the health and vibrancy of Chicago.

Chicago's arts and culture sector distinguishes the city as an attractive place for people to live, work, do business, and visit; employs a talented workforce that contributes to the economic vitality of our neighborhoods; and is an important form of expression that uplifts the many diverse people that call this city home.

We understand that art and culture include all avenues of creative expression that reflect the character, heritage, and aspirations of Chicago's diverse communities. The We Will Arts & Culture research pillar aims to embrace the full contributions of Chicago's creatives and increase equitable support for those who contribute to the cultural life of our city.

Proposed Update:

- We Will's Arts & Culture pillar recognizes that arts and culture are essential to Chicago's quality of life. Reflecting the character, heritage, and aspirations of Chicago's diverse communities, they distinguish the city as an attractive place to visit, live, work, and do business. We Will's Arts & Culture pillar embraces the full contribution of Chicago's creatives and will foster policies and actions to increase arts and culture activities and provide support for those who contribute to the cultural life of our city.
- Kristin Larsen: "Hung up a little bit on 'full contribution' as the phrasing—seems to lack specificity. I know we're trying to be succinct here. So full contribution just doesn't sit well because of all the things that we're talking about, and is there something really that we want to center here?"
- Rachael Smith: "I think that we want to remember that this is just supposed to be a two-sentence summary of our intention. I do want to make sure things are not getting lost, but I think trying to make sure that it's succinct [is important]. It seems like folks feel that naming the gentrification is important."
- Lynn Basa: "I like the revised version. My concern is that it doesn't reflect some of the main themes brought up by this group, such as addressing gentrification."

- Alison Zehr: “My concern is if we add gentrification as a specific, that there are lots of other things that might be added that are equally important to gentrification and then we begin to build again.”
- Henry Wishcamper: “I was just gonna say, I don't know that we need to add a word but I guess the thing about ‘attractive’ is that it has a value, and I guess the question is whose value, and whether that value centers who we hope to center. Do you know what I mean? That's why I suggested a word like ‘vibrant,’ which is more value-neutral than the word ‘attractive’ [...] I don't personally feel the need to name gentrification. The definition, to me, doesn't capture the equity and historical reckoning aspect of the work directly but maybe that's not its role. But when someone mentioned gentrification, what connected to me was that the word ‘attractive’ sort of links to a history of gentrification.”
- Erin Harkey: “Vibrancy is also something that we can measure. There are like ‘vibrancy indicators’ so it is [...] a measure for us in terms of our success.”
- Melanie Wang: “The last sentence in the original does reference ‘equitable support’ instead of just ‘provide support.’”
- “You've got ‘contribution of’ and ‘can contribute to’ happening in the same sentence. I think there is a bit of redundancy there,” said Kristin Larsen, suggesting a change to “‘We Will Arts and Culture pillar will foster policies and actions.’ So, you're cutting ‘embraces the full contribution of Chicago's creatives and...’”

Historical Reckoning Discussion

- “We've been more specific about larger themes of historical reckoning and less specific about actual policy choices that have been made in the arts and culture,” said Henry Wishcamper.
- “How do we feel like historical reckoning plays into arts and culture? What specific policies have changed—as Maritza was talking about in Wicker Park, there have been strategic investments in certain neighborhoods that have led to gentrification. And, a lot of times, gentrification follows artist communities. So, I think there's some things we can dig into there,” said Rachael Smith.
- “People are kind of unwilling to have this conversation with us until we can call it. We have to be able to own past mistakes before people will even enter a conversation with us. We're gonna have some challenges as the community engagement portion of this rolls out if we do not take some ownership of that immediately, upfront, very clearly,” said Erin Harkey.
- “I wonder if there's an opportunity here to draw in some of the elders in our community and our specific community and recognize their role as long standing states people in the sector and sharing with them the progress as well as inviting them in and making this statement of ‘we know that this is probably the 500th conversation you've had,’” Kristin Larsen said.
- “I think we need to be upfront and we need to name it first. Some of the things we can name are the choices of how Chicago invested municipal money led to the creation of cultural assets and businesses in the Loop and Navy Pier. And, you know, over a period of time, contributed to the loss of cultural assets and businesses in Bronzeville and Pullman, and South Shore. We can be specific about spatial differences that were impacted by individual but also by larger priorities in the past,” said Henry Wishcamper.

- “I mean, those investments also created enormous benefits for the city of Chicago and for all of its residents, but they did have inequitable outcomes as well, and I don't think we need to go to a meeting to be able to see that,” Wishcamper added.
- “One of the things I've been kind of grappling with too is just the unique opportunity that is posed by having community engagement as part of this process, and what the artists' engagement work is doing,” Melanie Wang said.
- “There have been many rooms where often BIPOC folks have [shared] what would be a meaningful pathway forward, only to feel like that was their one audience and there wasn't a next opportunity to elevate a concern, or to share feedback about the fact that something did not manifest,” said Julia deBettencourt.
- “Besides city policy, the other actual sector that really impacts arts and culture is philanthropy. They have suffered through the years and the same kinds of things that we're talking about with the city. What I'd like to do is find out more about what the philanthropic community is doing—and they have been doing a lot around this topic—to see if we can look at that together and as Henry was saying, ‘How are we going to bring in the research to the project?’” said Alison Zehr.
- “We could do a land acknowledgement and think about who came before. In some ways, what we're trying to do here would be some kind of acknowledgment of each one of these areas and that we've done it wrong, and we'd like to do it right.” said Peggy Stewart.

Erin Harkey Share-Out

- Harkey: “We've actually been in a process of evaluation and reorganization within our agency. We've been working really, really closely with Bloomberg Consulting. They've been working with other city departments that have been working really closely with us. We have a lot of really smart people who also have spent a lot of time, and government municipal art agencies working with us to sort through some of the agency's challenges and opportunities as we move forward.”
- Harkey: “We have commissioned several studies designed to equip us with the data that underscores how important public sector investment in the arts is. Chicago has historically, primarily focused its attention on program delivery—or for the last 10 years or so—without a lot of focus on our grantmaking or policymaking or professional services or arts education and public art, which are all really critical functions of local arts agencies. So we're trying to build that capacity.”
- Harkey: “Our primary objective this past year has been to grow the capacity of our grants department to increase resources to the field. Good news is that with this influx of [American Rescue Plan or ARP] investments that is in the current budget proposal, it looks like we're going to be able to do that. The mayor has also identified \$10 million within the corporate budget to supplement our budget, which means that is an ongoing sustainable revenue source for us that will be available in perpetuity after these [ARP] funds are spent in the next two years. In total, we're looking at an influx of about \$26 million this year for arts and culture spending.”
- Harkey: “That's a two-year commitment to get those finances out and then the \$10 million is

going to be recurring so our baseline grants budget now has increased from \$2.7 to \$12.7 million; that is now our floor. Then we have \$16 million on top of that to have some focused investments. I just wanted to kind of highlight that for all of you because we are going to be doing some community engagement and outreach around specifically the growth to our grants department, which is really important. As we grow, [we need to] meet the challenge of getting these funds out so that we start to create a grant programs that does the things that we need it to do; so, prioritizing community where there's a history of disinvestment, breaking down barriers to applications and processes so that more organizations and individual artists can participate in these programs."

Policy Framework and Objectives

- What the information from the We Will process could accomplish:
 - Establish criteria and metrics based on equity and resiliency
 - Standards for neighborhood and regional plans for City adoption
 - Aligned budgets, capital projects and policy priorities
 - Innovative public financing tools based on equity and resiliency
 - Standards for civic and community engagement in public decision-making
- "Since we're still relatively early in the process, it's difficult to imagine what the final policy framework could look like and how we will build on that work we are doing on the guiding questions and objectives. We recognize that many of us are eager to get into the more detailed policy recommendations, and we wanted to take just a couple minutes to talk about how doing this work now sets the stage for a robust policy framework that addresses the core issues of our pillar. To help in this we wanted to share policy frameworks used in three recently completed citywide plans that exemplify equitable planning, New York's [ONENYC 2050], Memphis [3.0] and Edmonton [City Plan]," said Alison Zehr.

Menti "Throw Spaghetti against the Wall" Objective Exercise

- First question: "How can we foster a resilient sector that embraces and supports a diverse creative workspace, recognizing that past support has not been equitable?"
 - Make grants to low-income creatives for exploration of new works
 - Grants that combine both monetary resources and space/technological resources
 - Help artists with asset building programs so they have reserves to weather lean times
 - Paid commission opportunities for artists for other cross-policy efforts such as what they did for the public health or census
 - Create a mentorship opportunity with elder artists and young people
 - Examine success of programs that expanded during COVID to include gig workers and extend to other policies
 - Cultural centers in all neighborhoods (20-minute walk radius)
 - Paid internships for creatives of all ages
 - Should be more specific to the needs and demographic of each neighborhood and utilize people and programs in the neighborhoods that are already doing the work
 - Workshops on how to access funds

- Second question: “How can we reimagine the support for arts and culture to realize a healthy and sustainable level of interest equitably allocated and driven by community?”
 - Challenge other city agencies to adopt “Percent for Art” ordinance
 - Partner with philanthropic colleagues to create arts-focused pooled funds that harness opportunities toward broad sector goals from private donors
 - Make sure financial support fosters an ethos where everyone involved gets paid
 - Build a participatory budget process for budget dollars allocated by ZIP code, or neighborhood, or region (not by ward)
 - Decentralize public and private sector grantmaking by prioritizing localized decision-making at the neighborhood level
 - Make philanthropy more accountable—help them reimagine their support
 - Recognize that some arts will always need to be supported—won’t recoup through sales like arts education
 - Allocating funds based on the work that is done, not the budget that they have
 - Each neighborhood gets mentorship that walks you through the process from start to finish

- Third question: “How can we ensure that all communities have access to and benefit from the ability of arts and culture to build social capital and provide healing?”
 - “Organize similar big festivals that happen downtown in these black and brown communities. Downtown isn’t always accessible for folks and doesn’t always give off a welcoming vibe”—Devonta Boston in the chat
 - “Access to creative more Inclusive childcare options and stipends”—Wisdom Baty in the chat
 - “Bridge mental health and preventions measures into creative arts curriculum”—Wisdom Baty in the chat
 - Support in the arts and healthcare setting
 - Find programs for non-professional artists
 - Institute artists-in-residence programs throughout the city
 - Remove barriers to access due to income level, i.e. your EBT card gets you free entrance to a performance/event
 - Organize neighborhood events centered around arts, culture, food and community forming
 - Embed artists in city departments and aldermen’s offices
 - Large, direct support for individual artists
 - Shared event insurance policy for neighborhood events

- Fourth question: “How do we provide support and access to culturally responsive arts education for young people, workforce development, and creative engagement for learners?”
 - Fund and implement a Chicago public Schools arts education plan
 - Adult education classes that are free or inexpensive for EBT card holders
 - Identify pool of business owners that will be intentional about entry-level hiring and apprenticeships
 - Ensure every Chicago Public Schools school has at least one art teacher
 - Citywide creative youth internship with City Colleges

- “Get your chops back”—Support formal/informal activities which support nonprofessional creative collaboration with residents
- Union apprenticeships more open to youth for things like set lighting, technology, gaffers
- Encouraging design and art firms around the city to hire youth and mentor students
- Fifth question: “How do we build awareness, promote and remove barriers to access for Chicago’s arts and culture assets across communities, citywide, and beyond borders?”
 - Provide clear goals for World Business Chicago and Choose Chicago related to the arts and culture sector
 - Engage in modern marketing techniques—use social media influencers to help people explore cultural areas or experiences in the city unfamiliar to them
 - Provide grants to local businesses to build neighborhood cultural tourism
 - Parking and transportation equally available to all communities
 - Incentive for free and accessible events
 - Help culture makers access grants
 - The Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) needs a new website
 - Cross-neighborhood collaborations
 - Data on barriers to access would help

RESOURCES

We Will Chicago Arts and Culture survey

[A public survey intended to inform the pillar's guiding questions](#)

NightSeeing

[A 3-part program to enhance safety, economic development, and health in neighborhoods](#)

NEXT STEPS

The We Will facilitators will take this feedback and work it down into objectives that will be discussed next week in breakout rooms. There will be another layer of review and refinement to flag any cross-pillar opportunities. Rachael Smith will send out an email with information and a way to provide more feedback if needed.