Risk, Trust & Strengthening Belonging

The Cultural Strategist-in-Government program is made possible by funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and a unique partnership between the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation and the Cultural Affairs Division in the City of Oakland.

Mellon Foundation   CITY OF OAKLAND   Oakland Fund for Public Innovation

About the Cultural Affairs Division

The Cultural Affairs Division is housed in the City's Economic & Workforce Development Department. The division includes the City's cultural funding program, which provides approximately $1.6 million in grants to support the arts in Oakland; the public art program, which has more than $1 million in funds currently dedicated for public art installations across Oakland, and staff working on special events and film production permitting. The Division works with the Cultural Affairs Commission who serve as advocates and ambassadors for arts and culture in the city. It is guided by the 2018 Cultural Development Plan, "Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan."

About the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation

The Oakland Fund for Public Innovation's mission is to improve the prosperity, safety, and quality of life for all Oaklanders by establishing innovative public-private partnerships in our most vulnerable communities.

About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through their grants, they seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive.

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The cover design created by Studiosilog honors the importance of Oakland's legacy in shaping the CSIG projects. From top to bottom, the source images were accessed via: 1. https://placesjournal.org/article/imagining-a-past-future/ 2. https://oaklandlibrary.org/content/gentrification-and-displacement/ 3. https://twitter.com/DrinkSolaPop/status/1288220818552639488

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Operationalizing Belonging through Culture

In September 2018, the City[1] of Oakland's Cultural Affairs Division within the Economic & Workforce Development Department released the City Council adopted cultural development plan, *Belonging in Oakland*.[2] The plan leverages culture to advance the City's stated equity mandate, passed by ordinance in 2015.[3] Most succinctly, the plan and Division are organized around the guiding statement: "Equity is the driving force. Culture is the frame. Belonging is the goal." The goal of City government to foster belonging in Oakland residents through equity and culture is an ambitious one that focuses the Division's efforts on the complex, layered work of interrupting othering, disbelonging, and inequities (with all their related historical roots) in civic life.

Government can play a huge role in fostering these conditions, but it requires a shift in practice and cultural norms, not just outcomes. How then would the Cultural Affairs Division create these shifts in practices?

As an effort to operationalize belonging in City government, the Cultural Strategist-in-Government (CSIG) program is concerned with the practice of government, or governance.

As an effort to operationalize belonging in City government, the Cultural Strategist-in-Government (CSIG) program is concerned with the practice of government, or governance. In *Making Waves: A Guide to Cultural Strategy*, the authors from the Culture Group explain that "We change culture through culture. That means that culture is both the agent of change and the object of change."

The Oakland Cultural Plan states:

"Belonging is tied to people's ability to lead meaningful lives, to be connected to the place they live in and the people they live among, and to feel a part of something larger than themselves. To cultivate belonging, there must be more equitable racial and socioeconomic conditions for self-expression, mutual respect, empathy, and acceptance. These conditions cannot be fulfilled without an understanding of the breadth of cultural diversity in Oakland and how different forms of expression have different needs."

The CSIG program embedded cultural strategists — people who work through culture — for 12-18 months in government departments, to shift the cultural conditions and practices of government. The proposition is that these cultural strategy partnerships catalyze new conditions for innovation, trust-building, resident empowerment, and responsiveness — all of which are essential factors for equitable, effective governance that fosters belonging in any city. In this program, Cultural Strategists were not charged with creating belonging directly through their projects — instead, they fostered practices that create reliable, hospitable, and sticky conditions for equity and belonging to take root.

About the Program

Cultural strategists are cultural workers and organizers, creatives and professionals, and long-term proud residents of Oakland. They have deep roots and networks within historically marginalized communities in Oakland, including BIPOC[4] communities who have experienced civic neglect, disinvestment, socioeconomic precarity, and institutional and historical racism. CSIGs use a broad range of cultural practices and approaches — including but not limited to the arts — to create meaning, value, recognition, engagement and empowerment, and material possibilities for Oakland residents.

12 Cultural Strategists-in-Government

1. **Candice Wicks-Davis** × Department of Race and Equity
2. **Celia Peters** × African American Museum and Library at Oakland
3. **David Peters** × Planning & Building Department
4. **Jamica El** × Mayor's Office
5. **Kev Choice** × Citywide Communications & Engagement Division in the Office of the City Administrator
6. **Maddy Clifford** × Environmental Services Division of Oakland Public Works
7. **Pacita Rudder** × Sustainability & Resilience Division in the Office of the City Administrator
8. **Sabereh Kashi** × Oakland Head Start and Human Services Department
9. **Sorell Raino-Tsui** × Public Art Program in the Cultural Affairs Division (Economic & Workforce Development Department)
10. **Tanisha Cannon** × Office of Council President/District 2 Councilmember Nikki Fortunato Bas
11. **Umi Vaughan** × Department of Violence Prevention
12. **Walter Wallace** × Department of Transportation (OakDOT)

Cycle 2 Cultural Strategists and City partners, 2023.

The CSIG program has operated in two complete cycles at the time of this report's publishing with a third in progress for 2024. In the pilot phase, three cultural strategists received $10,000 in professional fees and a modest stipend for materials using city funds allocated to the Cultural Affairs Division. In cycle two — the focus of this report — $900,000 in private funding was secured from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, an arts and cultural philanthropic foundation. Eleven cultural strategists were funded by this grant and two were funded directly by City partners.[5] The cultural strategists, working across ten departments and divisions, received a $40,000 stipend, up to $8,000 in material reimbursements, and the option for a $15,000 extension (See The 12 Cultural Strategists-in-Government Projects for a description of each partnership). The program was conceptualized by Roberto Bedoya, and designed and managed by Vanessa Whang, who was also the lead author of the 2018 Cultural Plan. The fiscal management of the CSIG program has been through the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation (OFPI), which creates infrastructure for nimble partnerships between private funding and public projects in Oakland. OFPI has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Cultural Affairs Division, which made this partnership possible. OFPI works with the City and private partners to build a more trustworthy and responsive government; to allow Oaklanders to stay rooted and thrive in our city; and to create a more vibrant and connected Oakland for all who live, work, and play here.

Watch CSIG Program Video ↗

View 3-min short film and highlight reel of CSIG program at: bit.ly/OakCSIG

About this Report

This report tells the story of the City of Oakland's new and unique approach to operationalizing belonging by mobilizing cultural strategies in government. Over Cycle 2 of the program from 2022-2023, the documentation team followed the activities and development of the Mellon-supported CSIG partnerships, with a deep dive focus on four projects. The documentation process was organized around the core questions:

> What did Cultural Strategists bring to the table and what did City Departments learn from them?
>
> Did the program and projects contribute to more effective, equitable governance practices?
>
> Did they advance the goals of the Oakland Cultural Plan? If so, how? If not, how?

Report Form & Structure

The report primarily uses narrative to examine these guiding questions. The Executive Summary encapsulates the high-level themes, recommendations, and tensions emerging across the partnerships. The Mosaic Voices from the Cultural Strategy Program — compiled from the breadth of the research data — represent composite perspectives of the three key stakeholder groups: Cultural Strategists, City employees, and residents. The four Project Deep Dive Profiles provide a more in-depth analysis of the what, how, and impacts of featured projects.

While all Cycle 2 projects are described and represented across the report, the four featured projects were selected as a representative sample across the cohort with considerations on diversity in: demographics; types of arts and cultural strategy approaches (photography and film, public art, community development, music); type and modality of partnerships; ranges in experimentation with trust, risk-taking, relationship-building, and resident empowerment; as well as ranges in types of issues and civic problems being addressed. The appendix includes an overview of the research methodology, along with a selected bibliography.

Audience

Although the intended audience for this report are stakeholders and decision-makers in Oakland — City employees, City officials, funders, cultural workers, creative professionals, artists, residents, and partner organizations — we hope it will prove instructive and inspiring for cities across the country who are experimenting with how cultural work in government can foster equity and belonging.

This report does not include program impact data and is deliberately *not* a programmatic evaluation report.

Executive Summary

Overall, in an 18-month period, the CSIG program engaged over 10,000 Oaklanders and City staff and generated over 1.1 million dollars in direct income to Oakland residents, while simultaneously fostering shifts in government practices and outcomes that increased civic engagement and empowerment, trust-building, risk-taking, and equity.

While the majority of the funds — $618,000 — were paid directly to 11 Cultural Strategists via the Mellon Foundation's grant of $900,000, the projects also generated work for a diverse, creative ecosystem of arts and cultural workers including videographers, artists, educators, fabricators, and administrators. CSIGs supplemented their project budgets through advocacy at City Hall (for example, $80,000 was allocated to support Love Life efforts) and through other grants, fellowships, and matching professional funds. CSIGs implemented their visions for projects by leveraging these monetary resources as well as their own trusted community-based relationships. Most projects resulted in expanding the civic engagement potential and equity implications for the partnering departments.

In the most impactful demonstration of the program's economic potential, the $40,000 stipend paid to CSIG Sorell Raino-Tsui led to the development of a Public Art workshop series that diversified the representative pool of City-commissioned artists, and supported four new artists in securing an additional $510,000 in commission fees. In another, the Climate Justice Supper hosted by CSIG Pacita Rudder in partnership with the Sustainability and Resilience Division raised an initial investment of $60,000 for a new Climate Justice Fund at OFPI. The CSIG program also generated over a dozen new cultural products and public experiences that fostered deeper understanding of government services and civic life, including a music album, exhibitions, films, two concerts, social media storytelling, impact reports, workshops,

healing circles, and more. Combined, the projects engaged over 10,000 Oaklanders and City staff in person and online.

In relation to advancing the goals of Oakland's Cultural Plan, three major themes surfaced across the CSIG program. Combined, these begin to create the conditions for more meaningful, responsive, efficient, and equitable practices of government. The road isn't even close to paved, but the CSIGs have contributed immensely in wayfinding a path towards the goal of belonging articulated in the City's Cultural Plan.

Core Themes & Possibilities

The three key themes across the CSIG projects were:

1. **Risk as a Foundation for Improved Civic Engagement & Equity**

2. **Arts & Culture Bring Value to Government Practice**

3. **Trust as a Pathway to More Equitable and Effective Governance**

Roberto Bedoya, Cultural Affairs Division Manager, see the CSIG program as "risk capital" that can support experimentation and innovation within City departments to help catalyze conditions for belonging and equity.

Cultural Strategists brought different dimensions of 'risk capital' to their partnerships. Often inherent to artistic practice, risk took the form of experimentation, creativity, play, futurist thinking, collaboration, power-sharing, listening, and even vulnerability. It also reflected a willingness to take risks from the City side, (despite many constraints within government and a general cautionary stance with risk-taking), with the majority

momentary, and largely bridged by the CSIGs, these examples nonetheless provide important insight into the value of reframing and shifting the purpose of community engagement from one of increasing awareness about City services or moving people towards a predetermined outcome, towards one of reciprocal learning, listening, and capacity-building for civic understanding and empowerment. (Read more <u>Project Deep Dives, Page 37</u>)

> "CSIGs can go places and do things that an Oakland government employee cannot do. Not having a fear of failure allows the CSIG to go out and explore the community, find new ways to connect the community with government, and hopefully create something special." — Walter Wallace, CSIG with OakDOT

Roberto Bedoya, Cultural Affairs Division Manager, see the CSIG program as "risk capital" that can support experimentation and innovation within City departments to help catalyze conditions for belonging and equity.

of City staff enthusiastic about following the leadership of Cultural Strategists and treating them as thought partners rather than fee-for-service contractors. As a whole, risk was leveraged most successfully in two ways.

Improvements in Community Engagement Strategies

Several Cultural Strategists and their City partners reported shifts in understanding, approach, mindsets, and tangible decisions related to community outreach and engagement. For example, a more open, listening stance to community engagement grounded in curiosity and inquiry shifted how City *and* resident participants approach the divide between City and community, moving from "us vs. them" towards an approach of shared understanding and working together If this was only

Added Capacity to Advance Equity

All of the CSIGs were BIPOC Oakland residents who had lived experiences, work expertise, skill sets, and capacities around equity-building in their own professional and creative careers. As a result, partnering with them allowed City partners to leverage the CSIGs' skills, labor, vision, and relationships to try — and follow through — on new, unconventional, and culturally resonant approaches to advancing equity goals. Without this added risk capital, the City is largely constrained to formal and established structures and processes – such as committees, open-calls for contractors, anonymous feedback systems, or written reports — that have limitations in resonance with residents as well as a history of reinforcing racial, ethnic, class, and gender disparities.

2 Arts & Cultural Practice bring Value to Government Practice

"As the Cultural Affairs Manager, my work with artists, community leaders, and elected officials engages me with the entanglements of will at play in civil society—public will, political will, and poetic will— which function as a wind behind the actions of policymaking and imagination."

Roberto Bedoya, Cultural Affairs Manager, Oakland

If will is the wind that drives the actions of policymaking and imagination, government practice is the sail that catches that wind to move the ship called government. In this sense, the practices that CSIGs brought to this work "catch the wind" in different ways, thereby changing the shape of government practice and encouraging culture shifts in governance. CSIGs engaged with a broad and valuable range of arts and cultural practices, ranging from ceremony, music and ritual; to curiosity and intimate inquiry; to listening like a musician; to complex multi-stakeholder bridging and relationship-building, and more. To learn more about the arts and cultural practices that brought value to government practice, read the "Applying Cultural Strategy to Governance" sections of the Project Deep Dives.

The cultural approaches that CSIGs brought generated possibilities for innovation, creativity, and change, and City partners experienced a sense of revitalization and inspiration as a result.

CSIGs used specific, professional skills and capacities from their arts and cultural practices in many ways, which resulted in tangible impacts for government practice and resident experiences. Here are a few examples:

Afro-Fatherism. Umi Vaughn with Eesuu Orundide and ABG Art Group. Installation view, Uptown Station, 2023.

Representation & Dignity

Recognizing that negative stereotypes and devaluation experienced by Black fathers' were due to problematic conceptions of masculinity and violence, **Dr. Umi Vaughn** and photographer Eesuu Orundide developed his project, AfroFatherism for his partnership with the Department of Violence Prevention, which involved joyful and caring photographic representations of Black fathers.

Historic archival photo of Pauline Powell Burns recreated as futuristic image through AI by CSIG Celia Peters. Installation view, AAMLO's Visions Towards Tomorrow exhibit, 2023.

History & Afrofuturism

Responding to the need to reactivate the permanent Visions Toward Tomorrow: The African American Community in Oakland, 1890-1990 exhibit at the African American Museum and Library of Oakland, **filmmaker and Afrofuturist Celia Peters** added an augmented reality dimension to the exhibit that allows residents to view "future" representations of historical figures as a way to connect past, present, and future of Black communities in Oakland.

Exhibit A, Life is Living Festival, DeFremery Park (Little Bobby Hutton Park), West Oakland. Illustrations by Cava and Ajuan Mance, 2022

CSIG Maddy Clifford, screen grab from her short film on her experience of working with the Environmental Services Division.

Hearts & Minds

Musician Candice Wicks-Davis produced an album based on the Department of Race and Equity's 2018 report[6] that showed persistent anti-Black, systemic racism in Oakland. With one song written for each of the 12 indicators in the report, Candice sought to "humanize data and move the hearts and minds of the people who make policy and budget decisions." To address the Department's strategy of "[increasing] awareness of racial inequity, its root causes, and how it is perpetuated by institutions and systems,"[7] Candice collaborated with other predominantly Black artists on her album and in creating Exhibit A, a visual art installation produced by Hodari Davis. Activated twice at Oakland's Life is Living festival, it engaged thousands of additional people with the data and findings from the report.

The cultural approaches that CSIGs brought generated possibilities for innovation, creativity, and change, and City partners experienced a sense of revitalization and inspiration as a result.

Inquiry & Experimentation

Writer, musician and activist Maddy "Madlines" Clifford guided the Environmental Services Division's efforts around electrification and composting in a resonant storytelling and question-based approach. She shared,

"As an artist, culture bearer, or culture keeper, it's highly likely you've learned to lean into experimentation. Taking risks is part of creative work, and so is trusting community. Creative people are similar to scientists in that we come up with a hypothesis and test it. We aren't afraid to be curious. In some ways government can feel like the complete opposite. Government can feel stiff, stale, and bureaucratic. Yet, government is made up of real people who often need a little wake up call."

Gathering & Hospitality

Cultural Strategist Pacita Rudder used food, storytelling, and hospitality as a way to build relationships and strengthen understanding around the need for equitable climate readiness in Oakland. Working with storytellers, local chefs, and food producers that drew from Oakland's many diasporic cultures, Pacita produced an evening that connected climate resilience to the strengthening of culture and community.

Attendees of the Climate Justice Fund launch supper, organized by CSIG Pacita Rudder, 2023.

3 Trust as a Pathway to More Equitable and Effective Governance

CSIG Sorell Raino-Tsui works with a Public Art Program participant on a concept design, 2023.

The research showed repeatedly that CSIGs were seen as trusted community members, messengers, translators, and bridges. **This is not the same as saying that CSIGs set out with the stated goal to broker trust between communities of color and local government, or that the program directly created resident trust in local government. But it did open possibilities for new relationships of trust to emerge and form between City government and residents.**

This was facilitated in large part because the CSIG program and City partners imbued the partnerships with the autonomy for CSIGs to show up authentically. This allowed for greater resonance and trust when CSIGs worked directly with BIPOC residents, facilitating more honest, reciprocal engagement and service delivery.

It's worthwhile to repeat the common adage here: *change moves at the speed of trust*. In the case of the CSIG program, the ability for CSIGs to show up authentically rooted in their community relationships and cultural approaches fostered trust. It also contributed to improvements in equity and effectiveness for City departments. There were two factors that influenced this.

First, a lack of trust is a non-starter. It doesn't matter how good an idea is: if there is no trust, there is nowhere to begin.

Second, trust is an essential access point when dealing with legacies of systemic racism.

Due to histories of harm and long-standing mistrust between many BIPOC residents and government, it takes City staff considerable resources and time to bridge with residents, whereas CSIGs were able to connect, build traction, and see impacts almost immediately. This was demonstrated powerfully in the Public Art program's CSIG project, which relied on the art community's trust in Sorell. Without Sorell, it likely would have taken intensive relationship building and intensive boots-on-the-ground outreach — the kind of investments that the Public Art program cannot afford given staffing and budget shortages. (See Deep Dive: Public Art Program, Page 45).

Attendees at the first ever Boards and Commissions Appreciation event, organized by CSIG Kev Choice and Citywide Communications, 2023. Photo by Darius Riley, AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

Oakland rapper, entrepreneur and advocate Mistah F.A.B displays his Key to the City, as one of three honorees at the first Love Life Day Celebration, 2022. Photo by Darius Riley, AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

There were three factors in particular that CSIGs used to build and leverage trust:

1 Time

Many of the CSIGs entered the program, or were chosen, because they were already rooted and trusted in their communities. In that sense, time — the time it takes to know and be known, to build relationships, to learn relevant history, to demonstrate one's integrity and accountability, to make a mistake and repair it — is an invaluable element of what made CSIGs trusted bridge-builders. CSIGs invested a lot of time in their communities *before* they even started their departmental partnerships. The payoff for that time then allowed the projects to have resonance, growth, nuance, and complexity. This also showed up in how CSIGs approached their work by dedicating huge amounts of time to listening and supporting residents, doing the legwork to make outcomes possible, and showing up repeatedly to listen and understand (which counters the negative narrative about government "only coming around when you want something.") (See Deep Dive: Oakland Department of Transportation, Page 55)

2 Dignity, Recognition, Empowerment

Many of the CSIGs approached their work with deep love for Oakland communities historically impacted by systemic racism. Beginning from a stance of recognition, dignity, and affirming the experiences of impacted residents were essential practices. These were made visible throuxsgh how the CSIGs approached listening and inquiry as well as in aesthetic decisions. (See Deep Dive on CityWide Communications for "listening like a musician" and the Deep Dive from the Office of the Council President for "intimate inquiry").

3 Civic Understanding and Communication

A general lack of understanding of what City government is and how it works can create and reinforce distrust. **Residents interviewed for this research, when asked to describe their experience of City government with metaphors, shared responses such as fog, phantom, wires that don't connect, or message in a bottle lost at sea — indicating experiences of obscurity, inaccessibility, confusion, and hopelessness. Many of the CSIGs were skilled communicators, translators, and navigators — and they helped residents see and understand otherwise opaque information or arduous public processes.** Many CSIGs also began their projects by strengthening their own civic understanding of how their City partner works. They then imbued their projects with intention to translate and create more accessible information for residents, which increased resident civic understanding and trust.

Beyond the three core themes described above, this report contains many more insights and achievements than can be captured in an executive summary. The depth that follows in the full report seeks to honor the labor, creativity, and complexity that CSIGs, City staff, and residents brought to this exciting proposition for governance that explicitly engages the role of cultural strategies in creating belonging for Oaklanders.

The 12 Cultural Strategists-in-Government Projects

Candice Wicks-Davis × Department of Race & Equity

Artist, entrepreneur, and activist Candice Wicks-Davis combined music and public art at community events to create new connections, urgency, and human connection to the Department of Race and Equity's 2018 racial equity report, which revealed the persistence of anti-Black bias in Oakland. Using each of the 12 equity indicators in the report as motivation, Wicks-Davis created a 12 song album that offers a new resource to access, feel, and understand the report findings. Working with other Black creatives, the partnership supported the creation of Exhibit A, produced by Hodari Davis, and was exhibited at the *Life is Living* festival.

Celia Peters × African American Museum and Library at Oakland

Celia C. Peters is a filmmaker, storyteller, educator and futurist who works within a range of audiovisual and immersive media (virtual and augmented reality). Peters partnered with the African American Museum and Library at Oakland (AAMLO), a branch of the Oakland Public Library, to create engaging multimedia storytelling products integrated into its long-term exhibition, *Visions Toward Tomorrow: The African American Community in Oakland, 1890-1990*. Peters created an augmented reality experience for the exhibition as well as futuristic portraits based on Black Oaklanders included in the exhibit. Peters also worked to digitize elements of the collection and developed a short film focused on the life of Huey P. Newton.

David Peters × Planning & Building Department

A third-generation Hoover-Foster (West Oakland) resident, **David Peters** is the creator of the Black Liberation Walking Tour (BLWT). Peters built on this experience in his partnership with the Planning & Building Department who recognized that even though the department is quite diverse racially and ethnically, their interpretation of neighborhoods is different than how communities living in them experience and perceive them. Peters created a 10-stop, self-guided car/bike tour through Oakland's predominantly BIPOC, flatland neighborhoods. The tour audio and media include interviews with legacy residents, archival material, video, and key points of interest in the neighborhoods.

Jamica El × Mayor's Office

As a creative technologist, researcher, strategist, artist, and social entrepreneur, Jamica El partnered with the Mayor's Office to increase the reach and effectiveness of AssistHub, an online platform that assists people in more easily discovering and obtaining the public benefits available to them in California, given that billions of public assistance dollars go unclaimed every year. El provided thought partnership, and research and communications design to support AssistHub in tackling the perception barriers that impact applicants for public benefits, such as distrust, social shame, negative stereotyping and concerns with providing sensitive information. El conducted a "community dreaming" public online session to surface positive visions of an equitable community; co-designed and analyzed a survey of AssistHub users; and designed a communication tool template to make information sharing about AssistHub more accessible and user-friendly.

CSIG Pacita Rudder (far left) with Climate Justice Supper chefs and collaborators, 2023.

Image of a Pullman Porter recreated as a futuristic image through AI by CSIG Celia Peters. Installation view, AAMLO's Visions Towards Tomorrow exhibit, 2023.

Kev Choice × Citywide Communications and Engagement Division in the Office of the City Administrator

Kev Choice is an Oakland raised musician, activist, educator, composer, band leader, and Oakland Cultural Affairs Commissioner. Kev worked with the Citywide Communications Team to expand understanding of and engagement with the City's motto, "Oakland Love Life," adopted in 2016 in memory of 16-year-old Lo'Eshé Lacy and the decades-long advocacy of her father Donald Lacy to make her legacy one that uplifts a more loving, thriving, and peaceful Oakland. Kev led the creation of a suite of activities that engaged thousands of Oakland residents and City staff, including establishing Love Life day and week, developing a Love Life Acknowledgment read at City meetings (modeled after land acknowledgements), commissioning a Love Life poem, hosting a cross-departmental Commissioners Appreciation event, and sparking numerous instances of organic activation of the motto.

Maddy Clifford × Environmental Services Division of Oakland Public Works

A writer, hip hop lyricist, performer, educator, and activist, Maddy Clifford worked with the Environmental Services Division to shift perceptions of how environmental issues impact Black and Brown communities in Oakland. Maddy produced 12 short-form video/social media posts detailing building electrification goals and proper waste sorting practices, which garnered over 5,000 views. She also produced a short documentary about the Cultural Strategist in Government process, sharing her story and her shift in mindsets by working around these sustainability issues.

Pacita Rudder × Sustainability and Resilience Division in the Office of the City Administrator

Pacita Rudder is a cultural strategist and artist who has led national and statewide campaigns around civic engagement. Rudder worked with the Sustainability and Resilience Division to conceptualize and design the Climate Justice Supper as a launch of Oakland's Climate Justice Fund. Hosted by the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation, the event centered around storytelling and featured local chefs and cultural foodways of Oakland communities. The Supper raised an initial $60,000 and provided a relational network to continue fundraising around climate justice. This partnership was funded directly by the Division.

Sabereh Kashi × Oakland Head Start in the Human Services Department

An independent documentary mediamaker from Iran, Sabereh Kashi partnered with Oakland Head Start and the Human Services Department to reactivate their social media page and humanize public experience of their services and programs. Kashi focused on stories of Head Start resident users and staff, captured and shared via short videos and images at community events and Head Start sites throughout Oakland.

Sorell Raino-Tsui ✕ Public Art Program in the Cultural Affairs Division (Economic & Workforce Development Department)

Sorell Raino-Tsui has been curating, showcasing, and producing public art in Oakland for the past decade. Raino-Tsui worked with the Public Art Program to design and deliver a professional development and technical assistance workshop series that significantly expanded the diversity of Oakland's pre-qualified public artist pool, strengthened Oakland's BIPOC and woman artist workforce and supported four artists to secure new commissions.

Tanisha Cannon ✕ Office of Council President

Dr. Tanisha Cannon is a sociologist, educator, and advocate who worked with the Office of the President of City Council to create a more equitable process for addressing conflict and exclusion around the use of Lake Merritt by diverse constituents. The project led to new pathways for vendor representation, simplified permitting processes, and shifts in the City's role in supporting vendors, many of whom are BIPOC and low-income.

Umi Vaughan ✕ Department of Violence Prevention

Umi Vaughan, a percussionist and singer, cultural anthropologist, and photographer Eesuu Orundide created a series of portraits featuring Black fathers in Oakland. The series, entitled *AfroFatherism,* focuses on the power of images and representation to address negative stereotypes and expectations of masculinity for Black men, and to create cultures of peace and respect. In addition to showing the portrait series at one of the Department's Town Nights events, Vaughan partnered with CSIG Sorell Raino-Tsui to mount an exhibition of the works as sculptural objects in downtown Oakland.

Walter Wallace ✕ Department of Transportation (OakDOT)

Videographer, founder of the Black Film Guild, and public relations professional, Walter Wallace worked with OakDOT to create new, more authentic community engagement strategies. Through offering workshops on film and photography to the community, Wallace created a feedback loop for the City through media generated by workshop participants focused on the 311 system. The project generated 11 resident created mini-documentaries that were licensed by the Department and were used for strengthening City staff's understanding of gaps in service delivery. Wallace also created a podcast model for resident and staff conversations about City services, starting with the Abandoned Automobile program and Reimagining Public Safety.

CSIG Walter Wallace leads a photo and video workshop with the Black Film Guild, 2023.

CSIG Umi Vaughan photographing Black fathers at Oakland's Life is Living Festival, 2022.

A vendor at Lake Merritt, 2023.

Program Achievements

The depth and range of these impacts were largely facilitated and made possible by the crucial role that Cultural Strategists played as trusted messengers, rooted in their communities, with deep, abiding, and reciprocal relationships with BIPOC residents, artists and creatives in Oakland.

The CO-LLAB Choir performs at the Boards and Commissions Appreciation event, 2023.

Cycle 2 of the CSIG program (2022-2023) generated a broad slate of hard and soft achievements that positively impacted Oakland residents, City staff, Cultural Strategists, and the relationship between participating City departments and the communities they serve.

Strengthened Workforce Development/ Economic Investment in Oakland

- Over $618,000 in philanthropic grant funds paid to 11 Oakland Cultural Strategists and their collaborators — videographers, poets, photographers, musicians, performers, fabricators, chefs, and storytellers.
- Climate Justice Fund launched at Oakland Fund for Public Innovation with early investment of $60,000
- Four Oakland artists working with Sorell Raino-Tsui and the Public Art Program project secured art commissions for a total of $510,000

Increased Civic Empowerment for Residents

- **11 first-time filmmakers**, including local youth, received stipends to learn new skills and tell stories about their experiences engaging with 311
- Professional development workshop series for Oakland artists to participate in public funding opportunities
- **Four residents received Love Life Awards and 3 received "Keys to the City"** in recognition of their contributions to the city in alignment with the Love Life motto
- Through Love Life Day/Week and the Love Life Acknowledgement, activated and honored the legacy of Oakland resident Donald Lacy's longstanding efforts for the City to adopt the Love Life motto
- A majority of City employees who partnered with CSIGs strongly agree that after the project, the community better understands and trusts the work their department does

Improved Public Outreach & Engagement

- **Over 10,000 Oakland residents and City staff** engaged by the CSIGs and their projects
- **58 Instagram posts, reels, and stories created** — many of them including honest and forth-right conversations with families and staff — as a reactivation of the Department of Human Services Instagram page (Over 1,000 views total)
- **5,000 viewers of 12 short-form video and social media posts** detailing building electrification goals and proper waste sorting practices for the Environmental Services Division
- **75 resident, City employee, community based organizations and donor attendees** for the dinner launch of the Climate Justice Innovation Fund
- Eight departments, divisions, and offices collaborated on Love Life Week activities
- First ever all-City Boards and Commissions Appreciation event
- Three public webinars highlighting six CSIG projects

Expanded Equity, Diversity & Access

- **78 Oakland artists,** from majority underrepresented communities, entered into the Public Art program's pre-qualified pool
- Created pathways for BIPOC vendor representation in decision-making processes around vending at the Lake Merritt
- Catalyzed collaborative efforts between City Council Offices of Fife and Fortunato Bas to pursue a full-time markets manager and increase of City-sponsored market spaces Created opportunities to share nuanced and direct resident voices (via mini-documentaries) to City leadership concerning experiences with the 311 system
- Used music and visual art to engage thousands of residents around the core findings from the 2018 Equity Indicators Report

Shifted Government Roles & Capacity

- Reframed departmental role regarding vendors at Lake Merritt from enforcement to support for the City Council's office, and opened conversations about the role redefinition of the City from permit distributor to event sponsor
- Encouraged simplified permitting protocols and processes, and a new RFP for a full-time marketplace manager position
- Created opportunities for Department Heads to hear directly from resident experiences with City services through resident-generated mini-documentaries
- Added capacity to Public Art Program to support professional and creative development of an artist workforce, expanded from role as commissioner of public art projects
- 13 Departments, Divisions, Offices, and Commissions engaged by CSIGs, encompassing nearly every level of City government
- **One Impact Study** on vending at the Lake with recommendations and an analysis of the role of race in creating disbelonging in public space

New Arts and Cultural Production

- Two visual art exhibitions that uplifted project goals and displayed the creative work of BIPOC artists and residents, including photographs of Black fathers in Oakland through the Department of Violence Prevention, and a showcase of art from the Public Art workshop series' participating artists
- One Love Life Acknowledgment, read and shared at public meetings
- A new "Oakland Love Life" logo and swag — buttons, bags, posters
- Commissioned Love Life poem by Oakland Poet Laureate Ayodele Nzinga
- One Augmented Reality exhibit and digitization of related archives at the African American Museum and Library of Oakland accompanying the permanent *Visions Towards Tomorrow Exhibition* on 100 years of Black History in Oakland
- One new short film on the life of Huey Newton
- One fifteen minute **mini-documentary** detailing the CSIG process
- 11 mini-documentaries created by first-time filmmakers about their experiences with Oakland 311

Fostered Conditions for Risk-Taking & Innovation

- City workers partnering with Cultural Strategists reported experiencing a deeper sense of impact, inspiration, connection, and responsiveness
- Encouraged City staff to practice openness and creativity in trying new solutions to public service and community engagement problems
- Supported practices of deep listening and inquiry with impacted communities, leading to shifts in City understanding of role, responsibilities, and commitments
- Hosted first ever cross-departmentally organized City Boards and Commissions Appreciation event
- Facilitated conversations about love as a driving force for City government through uptake and socialization of the Love Life Acknowledgement

Tensions, Possibilities & Recommendations for Future CSIG Partnerships

The CSIG program presented many promises and possibilities for advancing equity and belonging, but was also not without its tensions and challenges. The following are guidance for strengthening the unique possibilities of this cross-sector, cultural strategy approach.

1 Invite Cultural Strategists in as essential and early experts in resident-focused projects and interdepartmental collaborations.

When cultural strategists are brought in as early members of collaborative teams, they can better attend to the role of encouraging cultural shifts in policymaking and practice in Departmental work. As this report demonstrates, CSIGs can play vital roles as translators, bridge-builders, risk-takers, and strategists. This doesn't only impact residents, but can also shift the framing, practice, and approach of a policy or City project.

Based on his experience with three different CSIG projects, Deputy City Administrator Joe DeVries suggested:

"...Instead of it being an afterthought, like, "Oh, hey, we're doing this thing... maybe we should pull in the strategist to explain it to folks for us." It's more like you bring them to the table the same way [as other roles]. If I'm lining up a team for an interdepartmental operation, I'm going to line up my rep from Public Works, my OakDOT rep, my Oakland Police Department rep, my planning person, my economic development person and my cultural strategist, right?"

Public Art program participants at a 'jam session' organized by CSIG Sorell Raino-Tsui, 2023.

2 Strategize ways that the equity work can be embedded into City processes and policy after the CSIGs' individual contributions.

In many of the Oakland CSIG projects, equitable outcomes of the program were made possible due to the individuals themselves: pre-existing relationships, "bedside manner", prior expertise in equity work, and culturally resonant methods and orientation of CSIGs. Some also experimented with concrete strategies for improved stakeholder engagement, reciprocal listening, communications, and relationship building, which are replicable practices for City departments and employees. Some CSIGs also developed equity tools that can be reused and refined, such as the equity scale CSIG Tanisha Cannon developed for participation in future vendor marketplaces. Given that CSIG projects are designed to run for about a year, future partnerships should create ways for continuing to practice and integrate equity processes and lessons that the CSIGs leave behind.

A vendor at Oakland Love Life Day, 2022. Photo by Darius Riley, AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

3 Emphasize the shifts in culture, process, and practice that are made possible by working with cultural strategists as inclusive of, but not limited to, artists.

CSIG projects were especially successful when CSIGs applied a suite of culturally-based skills, practices, and assets — including relationships, language, lived experience, creative approaches, and artistic practice. While artist practices featured heavily in many of the projects, this was not the only or even primary outcome that reflected project success. This emphasis was shaped by Senior Program Consultant Vanessa Whang's overall program design and emphasis in individual project meetings that CSIGs were thought partners first, not fee-for-service producers or commissioned artists. By continuing to identify CSIGs with deep cultural connections and creative approaches, not only does this allow the City to work with people who are not "professional" artists — it also opens possibilities for internal transformations in the creative and cultural lives of City employees, who can benefit from feeling inspired, revitalized, and invigorated through their CSIG partnerships.

4 Align CSIGs' pre-existing professional capacities, experience and goals with the partnership goals to strengthen project impacts and success.

In the instances where mutual benefit and extension of impact was felt by both City employees and their CSIGs, the partnerships were able to identify a project focus that leaned on the pre-existing personal, creative, and professional goals and intentions of the CSIG *and* the goals of the department project itself. This is different from a general alignment between the values and work of the CSIGs *and* the overall mission of the departments, and is about the specific collaborative projects themselves. When City partners and cultural strategists felt authentic resonance and alignment with their personal, professional, and creative goals, the overall work of the project also felt energizing, relevant, and impactful. This was supported by the autonomy of the partnerships to define their projects and iterate as opportunities and challenges arose — something repeatedly emphasized by the CSIG Senior Program Consultant Vanessa Whang.

5 Support CSIG autonomy, authenticity, and access to decision-making.

When City partners encourage autonomy and authenticity, it creates a space for CSIGs to activate a broader range of their cultural skills and experience, which supports them in transferring this authenticity and resonance to their efforts and opens room for experimentation. Without this autonomy and support, CSIGs can wind up feeling tokenized or undervalued. In one project, a failure to support and encourage this for the CSIG led to a general disconnect and breakdown within the partnership. In another, it created for a challenging relationship that nonetheless resulted in strong outcomes and learnings on both sides, but lacked the joy, energy, and revitalizing impact of many of the partnerships.

A key way to operationalize this autonomy is to ensure that departmental decision-makers are informed about CSIG projects and prepared to support, authorize, and clear the way for cultural strategy experiments and implementation.

Can the City Love Us?

"Can the City love us as much as we love the city?"

Resident at a Community Dialogue meeting for the creation of the Cultural Plan, 2018

At Love Life Day, 2022, Donald Lacy recounts the story of Oakland's "Love Life" motto. The life of Lacy's daughter LoEshe Lacy (pictured) was tragically cut short in 1997 as an innocent bystander of gun violence. LoEshe means "Love Life" in Igbo. For more on Lacy's work which carries on LoEshe's legacy, see The LoveLife Foundation. Photo by Darius Riley, AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

Love Life Acknowledgement

Created by CSIG Kev Choice

ABRIDGED VERSION, 2022

"We acknowledge that in service to our beloved city of Oakland, and all its citizens, adhering to the city of Oakland's official motto, "Oakland Love Life" we enter into this space committed to embody love as our guiding principle.

We acknowledge Love Life as our motto as we denounce violence in all forms and the conditions that create it.

We acknowledge that when we demonstrate love, we also exhibit respect and kindness towards each other.

We commit to acts of love as an intentional force to generate tangible solutions, in regards to all of our actions.

We recognize as leaders, we must set an example and precedent for those in community who have entrusted us with these duties.

We welcome and appreciate all contributions to this space, and even when expressing disagreement, we request that we lead with love in your heart.

We seek to find common ground, and tangible solutions that demonstrate love for our city, its residents, and all constituents.

We acknowledge that when we lead with love we are able to uplift a thriving city rooted in equity, equality, justice, inclusion, and opportunity for all.

We commit to the action of "Love Life" as our motto and mantra."

Read ↗
Long version of the Love Life Acknowledgement
bit.ly/LoveLifeOak

Mosaic Voices from the Cultural Strategy Program

CITY EMPLOYEES, CULTURAL STRATEGISTS + RESIDENTS

What's it like being a City Employee who partners with Cultural Strategists?

MOSAIC VOICES FROM CITY HALL

The following section is a composite representation of interviews and survey responses from 16 Oakland City employees working across 10 city departments and divisions that participated in Cycle 2 of the Cultural Strategists-in-Government program from 2022-2023. It reflects a kaleidoscopic picture of the motivations, insights, and experiences of City employees who collaborated with Cultural Strategists. Quotes have been edited and combined for readability.

Q: So, what's your relationship to Oakland? How did you come to work in City government?

STAFF 1: Yeah, so I was born and raised in Oakland and I actually started working for the City of Oakland literally on its streets, as a parking control technician, which gave me a higher level view of every street, pocket, and avenue of Oakland. And then I started to move up in my responsibility to where I am now, supporting Executive Leadership. Being in such a wide range of government positions is how I learned that residents need opportunities to ask for what they need.

STAFF 2: I moved to Oakland when I was little and ended up living in other places, but I always returned to Oakland. I went to school in the Fruitvale district and rode my bike around the streets. I've spent most of my adult life living and working in Oakland.

STAFF 1: The relationship that I hold with the City of Oakland is one of deep commitment, you know? Like, I have a ton of friends and family who had to move away because everything's so expensive. I want to foster relationships within the community to help folks find a way to stay. I want to figure out how we,

Learn more ↗

For a description of participating City departments and the CSIG projects, read the CSIG Project Summaries, Page 10 or Project Deep Dives, Page 37.

as the government, serve people better, keep our people safe, house folks, and make sure the most vulnerable people in our community, who are often Black and Brown women and unhoused people, feel supported. The way we do that from the City side is try to make our systems and services function as best they can.

STAFF 2: Yes, me too! I got started in the City because at the end of the day the government is meant to serve everyone, or we try to. I think that matters. Which means we, we gotta listen. And we're not always going to like what we hear — but we gotta hear it, right?

Q: We've been talking with residents about how they experience City government and have heard a lot of metaphors and stories about disconnection. As someone who's been rooted in Oakland and works in local government, how do you see your relationship to residents and City government?

> "... There are the responsibilities, constraints, and systems that we are accountable to and implicated in. It's hard to see what the constraints are from outside the department or government."

STAFF 1: Because I'm part of City government, there's like these barriers or perceptions that show up. First, there's a history of civic trauma, like there is a large portion of the residents here — especially Black, Brown, Asian, immigrant, poor folks — who have been wronged by the government in the past and we can't just ignore that. And two, there are the responsibilities, constraints, and systems that we are accountable to and implicated in. It's hard to see what the constraints are from outside the department or government. There are tons of dynamics that affect our decisions constantly — the rules and policies of course, but also: Is our work producing fairness and equity? Are we appropriately stewarding taxpayer dollars and putting them to good use? Are we ensuring fiscal and political sustainability? Will our efforts to change policies or practices actually stick, given political and administrative cycles that impact our work? And so on. It's a lot to consider and it creates distance for sure.

STAFF 2: Totally. And you know, they say the longer you work inside City Hall, the more you think

> "Most of us are fighting burnout and looking for innovative, creative ways to revitalize our work and our spirits on the job, and this program seemed like a way to address this."

like City Hall and the less you think like an average community member. I can't unknow what I know, right? That's what's been interesting about the cultural strategists coming into our departments. They're more like your regular person. They kind of burst our bubble a little bit and gave us reality checks. It's part of why I was so excited about this.

STAFF 1: Anytime I tell someone from the community who's unhappy with local government that I work for the City, there's like an automatic reaction of mistrust, or at least wariness. There's this perception that anything you say is disingenuous and you're just politicking to try to get them to hear or say or do something, even when I work outside of any elected process. So that affects our ability to really speak directly to residents and actually be heard and trusted, which hinders our ability to create the impact that we truly yearn for.

Q: Can you tell us a bit more about that? What are some of the other barriers and challenges that affect you as a City employee?

STAFF 1: We're in an era where distrust and trauma are being amplified through misinformation but it's also the persistence of things that matter to people that we haven't taken care of, like homelessness or police brutality or safety. Overall, we are living in a deeply polarized time, nationally and at the local level. All the recent research shows that trust in government across the country is a historic low. People are really quick to pick sides of us versus them, and I think the pandemic exacerbated this. The people I work with, the people in this program — we're not wanting to be punitive in government, so we have to kinda take all that in and keep trying to build and connect. I signed up for public service work because I genuinely want to help people. I try to work intentionally, centered on our commonalities in Oakland and the things we care about, and remember why we're really here — because I care about love, art, culture, community, and justice.

STAFF 2: Added to that is chronic understaff-

ing, high turnover, shifting political priorities as administrations come and go, and many levels of process-related bureaucracy. These all affect us deeply. Most of us are fighting burnout and looking for innovative, creative ways to revitalize our work and our spirits on the job, and this program seemed like a way to address this. I'm not complaining, but you asked about barriers!

STAFF 1: It's really hard! For example, we know that wealthier property owners in particular feel very entitled to reach out to us, to learn our systems, and to work within them. Conversely, we know that people who don't have wealth, who have been disenfranchised by the system historically, are less civically involved and empowered. It's in this area that cultural strategists could help us pull back the veil. Then we might be seen as human beings wanting to really make the neighborhood better for everybody.

STAFF 2: Yes, true. But there's also this other angle that I think is important as far as the CSIG work goes, that is maybe less visible. There are also dynamics that prevent City employees from taking risks in our jobs. There's a deep sense of obligation and responsibility, which can hinder our comfort level with spending our time or energy in ways that haven't already been tested — especially if you know you might not be able to deliver while you're spending taxpayer resources and dollars. The City is not very good at saying, "we're just going to experiment; we're going to throw some resources at something and see what sticks to the wall," right? If we try something, it really feels like we need to come through and deliver. It's really different from the kind of startup culture and angel investors that we see around us in the Bay Area. We don't get that dedicated and resourced space to experiment on how to be more effective or efficient.

"CSIGs helped infuse a sense of possibility, vitality, and relevance into our work."

Q: Okay, so you chose to partner with a Cultural Strategist through the CSIG program. Why was working with a Cultural Strategist supportive for you? What did your CSIG collaboration allow you to do that was different or strategic?

STAFF 1: As we were just kinda speaking to, building bridges to trust within communities was

"Our Cultural Strategist was rooted in the community, with deep relationships and credibility. They really held those relationships as primary and it guided their work, even as they had to pay attention to the City side."

a big deal. Our Cultural Strategist was rooted in the community, with deep relationships and credibility. They really held those relationships as primary and it guided their work, even as they had to pay attention to the City side. In this case, that was a good tension because we're working together. A lot of times we were going into rooms or meetings where folks are angry or frustrated. My experience working in City government is that we care deeply about what the community wants and we often want the same outcomes too. But the Cultural Strategist shifted how the meeting was held, whose voices were included, and what our role was. It really helped forefront that deeper intention, and even built some new, shared understanding. Which actually is way more effective and efficient, because it allows us to get to work together, to think about solutions that help everyone rather than an "us vs. them" mindset.

STAFF 2: Right! I feel like our Cultural Strategist also transformed the way we approach public engagement and education efforts more broadly. It was interesting though, because for us it really was first directed at us, and having to be transparent with the Cultural Strategist. I'm not gonna lie, at first I was kind of defensive, but as they asked more questions I realized it helped me understand the complexities of the problem better. It also exposed me to assumptions I had about how City programs and services were working or not. We learned that the problem was not really in whether the public knew about our services and agreed to use them, but really in the breakdowns, gaps, and disconnections within the City that created inequitable and inefficient service. We learned there were a whole set of services and processes that were not really work the way we assumed in the first place. This set us up for a more informed, real, authentic engagement with the community. I mean, surveys and emails are great tools, but nothing compares to this boots-on-the-ground experience. That process of internal reflection was a critical first step in re-establishing connection with the people we're serving.

STAFF 1: I think part of why CSIGs generated so much impact in community engagement is be-

cause many of them have skill sets and expertise as solid community organizers, or they knew how to work with people. What do doctors call it? Bedside manner! And then they also kinda flavor that with these other artistic or cultural practices and sensibilities: music, poetry, video, photography, augmented reality, or just speaking the same kind of language. It opened up these different ways to connect.

Q: What surprised or inspired you during the CSIG collaboration? And what did you learn about how Cultural Strategists approach their creative work?

STAFF 1: I was pretty excited about having someone creative to collaborate with. CSIGs helped infuse a sense of possibility, vitality, and relevance into our work. Our Cultural Strategist was super curious, an optimist and creative thinker. I think what surprised me was how comfortable they were with navigating all kinds of conversations with people from different professions, communities, levels of government.

STAFF 2: The surprise was realizing that I was experiencing joy and creativity myself! And I could see the real benefits to our City services. I shared that our weekly CSIG team meeting was my favorite hour of the week. It was a chance to step back from our day-to-day operations and discuss how our work is landing with Oaklanders and how we could reduce barriers to our pro-

"I feel like our Cultural Strategist also transformed the way we approach public engagement and education efforts more broadly."

grams. The CSIG was an incredible and uplifting partner, so my colleagues and I would leave our CSIG meetings feeling restored and recommitted to our work. I mean, we too are seeking opportunities to be inspired and invigorated as we think about our work differently. I'm getting a bit emotional thinking about it! At the end of the day, the work is for the people of Oakland, the people outside City Hall to benefit from it, sure. But it helps to be able to look at ourselves internally and find ways to be better: a better person, a better city government.

STAFF 1: As we talked about before, when you work in government, you kinda get caught up in that and your priorities kind of become shaped by logistics or systems. But for the Cultural Strategist, the clarity never left the table: they were focused on honoring people's dignity first. And that was so important for us, given that we know the

"Cultural Strategists come at problems from different angles, with freshness and experimentation, and a kind of comfort with trying things and failing. They're helping us stretch towards taking more risks, to experiment, to come up with new approaches."

history of government often not serving low-income communities of color first. Our Cultural Strategist reminded us about the equity implications of the work. That was really incredible. And we know a good government because it creates less competition, less conflict, and makes for a more livable city.

STAFF 2: On that point, we knew that our service wasn't meeting equity goals. It's not that I didn't know we needed to address this, but with everything else moving, it was like, "how do we even get there?" Cultural Strategists come at

problems from different angles, with freshness and experimentation, and a kind of comfort with trying things and failing. They're helping us stretch towards taking more risks, to experiment, to come up with new approaches. In a creative process, no one's going to be told you were right, or you were wrong, or you didn't do what you were supposed to do — which are legitimate worries for city staff.

The people who work for Oakland are committed and passionate, but we get stuck within our constraints because we have limited capacity and resources, and are worrying about being left holding the bag, or being told, "Oh you tried something new? You're responsible for accomplishing that now." The program was like this safe space for people to come together, hash out issues, and collaborate in new ways with creative partners like CSIGs. From that we start to really answer questions more effectively and innovatively, and take more productive risks together.

Q: What was challenging or hard about partnering with a Cultural Strategist?

STAFF 1: Well, there's always that dreaded thing that everyone associates with government: bureaucracy. It's true. There's a lot of bureaucracy we're dealing with every day, but much of it was created for good reasons, and it went through due process. It did have engagement and community voice around it. Sometimes it's hard to understand, especially when we have a layer

Former Mayor Libby Schaaf presents a Key to the City Award to Love Life honoree Marilyn Washington Harris, founder of the Khadafy Washington Project, 2022. Photo by Darius Riley AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

"We're deeply interested in connecting with residents, and honestly, the CSIG program is the excuse and framework to help push us back out there, to take some risks or try something new."

Q: If you could tell fellow City employees in other departments something about the CSIG program, what advice would you share?

STAFF 1: Well, firstly I would hate for this CSIG program to be just like a year of trial period and then it's gone, right? Because how do you start it back up? And it's like, hey, they created this bit of trust or they made this bridge of trust, but if we

cake of bureaucracy that requires translation and explanation. This definitely meant that the CSIG project had to go through layers of red tape and approvals, in some cases because we also didn't have the authority to fully support them or authorize their work. For the work that involved actually communicating with residents through social media or podcasts or media products, well, that involved additional processes of review, scrutiny, and negotiations.

But this also means there's opportunity for change, right? **Things only change when we get more people engaged in the work of local government, and helping them see this is their government, that it belongs to them. So CSIGs are tremendously useful and impactful as creative voices that can help translate the bureaucracy, catalyze change, facilitate engagement, and generally bring creative ideas to this work.**

STAFF 2: Another thing that was challenging is that the CSIG had a small partnering team within each department. In my case, it was me and one other colleague. This meant that even as we could see the benefits and impacts of our strategist's work in real time, it was hard to narrate and explain the possibilities of this project beyond our small team — to supervisors, leadership, other colleagues and peers, and in some cases, to other external stakeholders or across departments. Internal casemaking and advocacy was hard, and it was challenging to tell the story of the soft or more intangible impacts of the collaboration. And dynamics that contributed to making this even harder involve the immense workloads we have to juggle, paired with chronic understaffing and resource limitations.

"It's creating connection and communication for the public in ways that we in government roles can't always do. Even for us, it prompted new partnerships and connections across departments."

don't follow through and try to cross that bridge, we run the risk of back-tracking there.

STAFF 2: We're deeply interested in connecting with residents, and honestly, the CSIG program is the excuse and framework to help push us back out there, to take some risks or try something new. It's great to work with someone different, creative, provocative even, in a good way. I mean, we had a good time bouncing ideas off each other, but even just their asking questions of us was really clarifying. They're like, "I'm a musician, a painter, a filmmaker, so I work collaboratively; I bring in people with different skills all the time," so they're used to collaboration in that way. And that person is a resident with deep roots in the community, right? It's important to know that everyone wins when you acknowledge you can't do it all on your own, and open yourself to risk-taking and open collaboration with others.

STAFF 1: What I'll leave you with is that I believe the CSIG program in Oakland is "positively ambiguous." And what I mean by that is it's not your typical government box. It's not bureaucratic. CSIGs are not processing documents and forms or levying penalties or approving permits. It's cultural. It's creating connection and communication for the public in ways that we in government roles can't always do. Even for us, it prompted new partnerships and connections across departments. We work really hard to be effective, but sometimes without that trust, no matter how good something is, it might not be effective. The CSIG collaborations were less transactional, more open-ended, and more experimental. So introducing this to your department and connecting it to your departmental goals is the way to do it. And it's a fun and creative way to do it. And it's a progressive way to do it. The potential impact is that our city gets to experience cultural strides in how we govern, and how residents experience City government.

What's it like being a Cultural Strategist who partners with City Departments?

MOSAIC VOICES FROM THE CULTURAL STRATEGISTS

The following section is a composite representation of experiences and perspectives of the 12 Cultural Strategists, compiled from interviews, conversations, presentations, and on-site observations. It represents many of the most salient themes and comments across the research. Quotes have been edited and combined for readability.

"My job as the CSIG was to bridge across the assumptions and conflicts by recognizing people's dignity, by talking and listening to people, and creating new governmental channels for participation, representation, and equity. The goal was that historically excluded groups could experience real instances of meaningful access and accountability."

Q. So you're a cultural worker and creative professional living and working in Oakland. How did you get here? And why did you apply for the program?

STRATEGIST 1: Well, I was born in West Oakland, but I grew up in North Oakland and then moved to East Oakland. Many of the people I grew up with are still connected to Oakland, but many have had to move away. When I saw the CSIG request-for-proposals, I was excited but I hesitated because I read it like it was a call-for-artists actually. I've worked in non-profits, in government, and [the] private sector before, and I knew I had a deep connection to the issue, but I wasn't sure if my skills and experience really fit. In the end, I applied after talking to the program manager because she emphasized it really is about culture change. And

what I do outside of this program really is all about culture, the culture of this place called Oakland. So I applied, and I got selected for the program! And then I started to realize that many of the people I was engaging through the project were folks I went to school with. That's when I realized it was full circle and I was the right person to do this work.

STRATEGIST 2: I didn't grow up in Oakland, but I've been working here as a professional artist for about 15 years. I definitely consider Oakland home. I've built a solid community and practice here. To make it in Oakland as a sustainable career, I knew I couldn't just be an artist, so many years ago I had started to also offer professional support to other artists, and to diversify my practice so I could work across fields. **I applied**

because it was a way for me to extend my artistic work into public service — I'd never worked with City government directly before — and leave a legacy for Oakland that can help residents and artists generations from now.

Q. What kinds of problems were you trying to solve through your partnership with a City agency?

STRATEGIST 1: Look, I'll give you an example that is pretty familiar to cities everywhere. City governments have a hard time with authentic and equitable community engagement for a few reasons. First, community engagement often happens after a project has already been set in motion, so people give input but the funding for community engagement comes from the overall project budget that already has parameters and conditions. Second, the City tries to navigate civic engagement through their regular channels and approaches: surveys, town halls, meetings, dot maps, etc. They turn to and engage existing committees and commissions and resident groups, because that's who is there, right? And out of this, on paper, they come up with a solution that solves everything based on the info they've gathered. But in reality, it didn't start early enough and it doesn't include everyone's voices because not everyone participated. There was no room for deep listening, accountability, iteration — or even just feedback.

In my project, the gaps in participation fell along lines of race and class, as they often do. And when this kind of gap generates conflict, say around use of a public space, or how a City service is rolled out, it means the more organized, engaged, historically represented people — usually white people and property owners — get heard and prioritized. In my project, the way this showed up was that other people were deciding what should happen for BIPOC residents rather than working

with them to decide on a solution. But the BIPOC folks were already doing a lot of self-organizing; it just wasn't recognized. It's agonizing because I could see on both sides and ultimately the groups are asking for the same things — like clean spaces, safety, support from the City. My job as the CSIG was to bridge across the assumptions and conflicts by recognizing people's dignity, by talking and listening to people, and creating new governmental channels for participation, representation, and equity. The goal was that historically excluded groups could experience real instances of meaningful access and accountability.

STRATEGIST 2: I agree with what you said about the City having their regular channels and approaches, and sometimes framing the problem too narrowly as an outreach issue. Like, I think City staff understand what the equity and representation problems are in Oakland. But the City has a specific role that's very, very functional. They're looking at things project by project and figuring out: *What needs to get done? How do we get more people involved? Which authorities do we need to get to sign off on things? How do we deliver something balanced and fair given our constraints?* To move beyond the functional dimensions to look at the problems more holistically and culturally, you need a cultural strategist's perspective. Like, we get to ask questions that help City staff reframe the problems or shake things up a bit — which I say with a ton of respect because City staff are carrying a ton! For my work, I realized I had to translate complicated and confusing city processes, which meant I had to ask my City partners a lot of questions and really look at how things were landing with residents to better understand them. And we realized there's this gap between how things are supposed to work and how people are experiencing them, which compounds distrust and a sense of being ignored.

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Oakland residents pose with CSIG Kev Choice on Love Life Day, 2022. Photo by Darius Riley, AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

In part, my project was successful because people know me; they know my work has integrity and that brought people to the table. Honestly, it was both a blessing and a challenge, in terms of how much work we had to do, to realize how much demand there was once people felt like it was a place they could trust and participate in. We ended up reaching hundreds of people in person. These projects otherwise just simply wouldn't reach these communities, BIPOC communities. Which means these projects might not even be possible without our role, or if they were, they would take years of staff effort and dedicated resources. And unfortunately, we know Oakland really doesn't have that kind of time or money right now.

Q. What kinds of skills, sensibilities, or new perspectives did you find yourself bringing to your collaborative project with the City? And what do you think was valuable about your work for Oakland residents? For City employees?

STRATEGIST 1: As an Oakland resident who's experienced so many of the issues our marginalized communities have, I started from a place of honoring the inherent dignity of people, and deep listening. And I wasn't prepared to compro-

mise on equity goals, because how would that change things? I've heard other CSIG program folks describe successful cultural strategists as having a more consistent, approachable "bedside manner," which is interesting. It makes me think about why listening, relationship building, and a commitment to dignity and creativity works; I think that they honor the real humanity of people, which is foundational to encouraging change.

I also brought a perspective that's connected to the past, present, and future of Oakland. Oakland has a lot of urgent problems and City staff are tremendously overstretched — so they are always focused on the "now." How do we resolve

"Good artists take on productive risks; they try and fail at their experiments and learn by doing. It's part of being creative. Translating this approach to my project meant I could encourage my City partner to push the boundaries, to think more innovatively and creatively, and to take some productive risks."

complaints and serve residents, *now?* But our local history is important, and dreaming together about our future is important, too. Weaving our past, present, and future for our beloved City is powerful work. For example, like many people in Oakland, I'm inspired by the history of the Black Panthers, the things Black people in Oakland achieved, the problems they solved, the new ground in public service they broke. People think that all happened in the '60s and '70s, but the socio-political landscape now is similarly volatile, so there's a lot of connections between so many of those strategies that are very badly needed now. I'm an Afrofuturist, so I wanted to bridge the story of that time gap. So in whatever I did, I wanted to bring Black history, culture, and storytelling with its timeless beauty and relevance into the future, using my relationships, my skills, and vision. Those stories and practices are important for continued resident empowerment. There's power in that.

"To move beyond the functional dimensions to look at the problems more holistically and culturally, you need a cultural strategist's perspective."

STRATEGIST 2: Bridging the time gap! I'll have to keep thinking about that — love it. It makes me think, too, about how so much of my approach was about honoring the work that is already happening in the community. Like there are already people working on stopping violence, getting people housed, making sure we have enough to eat. I definitely wanted my work to pay respect to what is already happening here. Residents already have ideas, goals, and actual solutions for taking care of many of these issues. Often, the City just needs to support them, but they have to see that first.

STRATEGIST 2: Totally. And I think that kinda dovetails with the skills and sensibilities I bring as an artist, these elements of creativity, latitude, and freedom. Working in the City is not my everyday job, so I wasn't caught up in the regulations, and the City partners gave us a lot of autonomy in the work. In our work as artists — musicians, poets, public artists, whatever — we have to play, iterate, and experiment a hundred times before we get that right note or line, or the right load-bearing structure to carry the installation. There's never just one set of strategies to try, there are dozens! Good artists take on productive risks; they try and fail at their experiments and learn by doing. It's part of being creative. Translating this approach

"I also brought a perspective that's connected to the past, present, and future of Oakland."

to my project meant I could encourage my City partner to push the boundaries, to think more innovatively and creatively, and to take some productive risks. Also, ultimately there's still only 24 hours in the day, and they only have two hands, two eyes, one brain. So CSIGs can expand the breadth of what City staff can accomplish just on capacity alone.

Q: What was hard or challenging about partnering with a City on a cultural project? Did you get stuck at all, and were there any areas of mistranslation or misalignment in approaches or expectations?

STRATEGIST 1: To be honest, my analysis of the core problem in our project was different from how my partnering City agency understood it. Because of that, it took us a while to agree and align on the parameters of the issue and my project. For the City or even for some highly engaged residents, civic problems are often understood as a result of a lack of resident awareness, insufficient public engagement and outreach — or even compliance problems. So, for example, in talking to one of the other CSIGs about her project, the norm was that there are rules and policies that govern public space, and vendors and small business owners, most of whom were people of color, should learn about all that — follow the rules and engage appropriately. When framed that way, the solution follows existing practice: enforce the permitting rules, penalize vendors who don't comply, and keep investing in strategies for improving communications, outreach, and engagement around how to get people in compliance.

Her interpretation of the problem was different, though. She understood the problem to be a lack of relationship and deep listening, lack of caretaking and accountability by the City for low-income folks, compounded by histories of structural racism and economic disinvestment in BIPOC communities. So for her project, it involved engaging with some of the more privileged interest groups and getting everyone to recognize and better understand why that didn't work for the most marginalized groups. That was kinda radical. People just don't listen to them.

And I just have to say this, it's also about code-switching, right? It's like if you hear something in Spanish and then you translate it to English, some small words might be lost, but they are meaningful words. The same thing happens in these formal City-hosted public spaces where you feel like you can't use your own voice without things being misconstrued. And I think my City partner (who also is from Oakland by the way) gets this, and working together has really emphasized this for her. But I think sometimes you have to remember how to make space to bring that in, to remind ourselves that there is also a dominant culture in government and that it can make people feel like it's not for them or they have to code-switch to participate.

STRATEGIST 2: There are so many assumptions that go with being an artist. So yeah, I did run into challenges related to that. Artists get pigeon-holed into the product, the product, the product. One of the big attractions of the CSIG program was the invitation to be a thought partner rather than on delivering artistic products. To be honest, that took me a second to relax into — like what, you really don't want me to make a thing right out of the gate? That's really rare. But as we really leaned into the thought partnership piece, it became a lot more about learning, discussion, and testing, which is part of my process. My mentor used to say to me, "Artists facilitate situations where it's safe to ask a lot of questions." So then how do I explain the value of creating that safe space, the value of my questions? Or the parts of my work that are deep, spiritual, and grounded in relationships? My creative practice — just by nature of being a public arts producer — involves trying things out and making mistakes. Sometimes the translation errors, the assumptions, and misaligned expectations can reinforce the stereotype that artists are unprofessional, or not results driven. That's not really true. We are professionals, and we deliver excellent, vibrant, life-affirming experiences and products that make life better for Oakland residents. We just have different ways of understanding and approaching problems that the City government could really benefit from.

STRATEGIST 1: Absolutely!

For me, my project was set up for success because my City partners gave me a lot of trust and transparency from the beginning. But our CSIG team involved a small number of City staff — just two collaborators — who were stretched for time, capacity, and resources. They also had to keep checking in with their higher ups, which

slowed down my work because I didn't feel I had buy-in from the leadership and sometimes they'd come back with a no. That was the main way I experienced the red tape, which I expected. But what I didn't expect was the difficulty of telling the story of my cultural strategy work within the department, and the challenges with getting on the same wavelengths and work rhythms. To me, it was evident that my project was going to create fresh, authentic, and powerful options for resident empowerment. There were several times where I said what I was going to do and then delivered it, but then realized the City partners didn't fully understand what I was doing. For example, it took six people to review one of my social media posts at first. Eventually, they started to see that what I was doing was producing positive impacts. Now that I've been through the project I have more em-

> ## "We are professionals, and we deliver excellent, vibrant, life-affirming experiences and products that make life better for Oakland residents. We just have different ways of understanding and approaching problems that the City government could really benefit from."

pathy for those constraints — they have to follow their processes and it's hard to take risks because it can have all these ripple impacts. But it was still a challenging dynamic to work with at times.

Q. A lot of Oakland residents who participated in or experienced CSIG projects named the importance of having a trusted community translator to connect with. How did you orient to being a translator or bridge-builder for City agency work? And what did you learn about fostering civic trust through your project?

STRATEGIST 1: It was a bit tricky for me. I mean, yes absolutely, I *am* trusted, but I also felt I was doing a dance between the community and the City. I think people fundamentally want to trust their local government because we rely on crucial services, but there's this general sense of distrust based on people's experiences. I could relate to all the stakeholders but ultimately it was my reputation and my relationships at stake. The City department benefits from my networks — real ones in the community and on social media — and the trust I have in the community. So yeah, there could have been repercussions for me, trust

> ## "Plus, there's also the issue of not just expecting trust through promises and appeasement and public input, right? When services actually change, when public opinion is actually heard and integrated, then people are more likely to use those services and rely on the City more. If it doesn't work for them, they won't use it again."

can be fragile after all, but I knew I was going to carry myself with the integrity I always do. My City partner understood this and supported me in this dance of trust with the community, and that gave me space to lead with a commitment around equity and racial justice, which went a long way towards making me feel successful.

It's not that I was explicitly encouraging folks to trust the government. I think I was facilitating engagement in processes that people trusted because of who I am and because of how I'd set up the opportunity. Plus, there's also the issue

> ## "The CSIG program allowed me to extend the impact of my own creative and professional work within the communities that I care about."

of not just expecting trust through promises and appeasement and public input, right? When services actually change, when public opinion is actually heard and integrated, then people are more likely to use those services and rely on the City more. If it doesn't work for them, they won't use it again. I guess my take was, let's build trust by actually listening to people and understanding what isn't working — and then change things so that trust is actually, like, validated.

STRATEGIST 2: On the flip side of that, I actually oriented to being a translator or bridge right from the start. I knew the trust and credibility I've built up within the arts community over many years was going to be important. People aren't looking

at me like I'm doing propaganda, or I'm an agent of the City. I'm not here to tote the City line; I'm here to find the truth and facts and assess the gaps in whether services are working the way the community wants them to be. People look at me like, "Yeah, this is what you already do; this is what we know you for." So not to be all about me, but I really do believe that if I hadn't been the one to do this work, as a trusted community leader with professional and technical expertise, it wouldn't have worked. A City official couldn't have done it because it required a certain quality of trust that I have.

Q: How did the CSIG program impact you overall? Would you do this kind of project with the City again?

STRATEGIST 1: Yes, absolutely I would do this kind of project again. I was surprised at how much the CSIG program helped me, personally and professionally. I learned a lot from having to advocate for my approach and project within the partnership, which taught me a lot about what I do and how to share that. It was also tremendously gratifying to serve Oakland and Oakland residents in this way. I love this city so that part was amazing. Partnering with the City allowed me to reach and impact Oakland communities in an expanded and powerful way that I haven't been able to before. It felt really good to put my creative and professional skills to use for public service.

STRATEGIST 2: Yes! You know I think at our closing meeting there was only one or two CSIGs who said they wouldn't do it again. It was great to have the extended time up to 18 months. On top of our City partners being so busy, there was a change of administration, people got hired or left, people caught Covid. You know — life! The CSIG program allowed me to extend the impact of my own creative and professional work within the communities that I care about. Firstly, it aligned with the work that I was already doing. Secondly, it was energizing, educational, and empowering for me to get a much more detailed understanding of the City. But more importantly I have relationships in the City and I understand what staff are doing, who they are, and how much they care about Oakland. I had perceptions coming in that were just my own ideas of how I thought the City worked. Going through the CSIG program put me in an elevated leadership role, because now I know how to help others navigate the City better, because I myself know how to navigate the City better. I feel like I was truly able to give back to my city and to myself through the CSIG program.

What's it like being a resident participant in CSIG projects?

MOSAIC VOICES FROM OAKLAND RESIDENTS

The following section is a composite representation of experiences of 18 residents who participated in CSIG projects, gathered from interviews, focus groups, and conversations at on-site observations. It represents many of the most salient themes and comments across the research. Quotes have been edited and combined for readability.

Q: Can you tell us about your connection to Oakland? Both the city and the City government?

RESIDENT 1: I was born in Oakland and lived most of my life here although we moved around a bit growing up. When I think about Oakland, I think about it as a good friend. Like we've had some challenges for sure, and sometimes we get annoyed with each other, but it's always there for me. We can laugh about what we went through together. The City government though, I dunno, I guess before this project I never really noticed or paid attention to it. I would see "vote for me" signs but I never paid them much attention.

RESIDENT 2: I love Oakland, I feel like it's definitely shaped who I am. I think it represents this kind of power because it's this city where there's a history of fighting for what you believe in. My family moved to the US when I was nine and this is where

we landed. The government... hmm, it always felt like it was kind of locked away like a treasure box, like we knew there were resources and programs but they were really hard to access. I'd say it's mostly a sense of frustration because there is potential but it's hard to get to.

Q: How did you hear about the CSIG project?

RESIDENT 1: The way anybody hears about anything right now, social media! But honestly I paid attention to it because I saw who was posting and I already knew her from other stuff. It sounded like there were some workshops or events involved where I could attend and learn some new skills that might actually help me in my own professional work. I guess the City logo was on there probably but I didn't really learn about the whole program until much later.

"Like, working with the CSIG made me realize that by having one foot in the City stream, it elevates our voice, it gives us new options. I think that was really important, because it also changes how the City relates to us."

RESIDENT 2: He [the CSIG] came to where we were. We usually meet at this one spot and he showed up and one person already knew him from growing up. He just listened and then later asked questions. That kept happening and as I saw how what he was doing could actually support what we were doing, I got more engaged and involved.

Q: What was it like working with the CSIG?

RESIDENT 1: We need more of her! I wish the City could clone her or something. She was super helpful in explaining things that the City was doing, that I didn't even know about honestly. Part of it was how she talked about it, but I think because she had already had to navigate these processes, she was able to help us follow along and focus on what really mattered. I'd tried to navigate the process once before, but it felt like the City's goal was to just dispense information and meet their requirements, not really help the community. So I kinda wrote that off. I know it's good information, but we're still outside the door so it doesn't really help that much and I don't necessarily feel inspired to be engaged. Some people didn't speak as much English and some people don't really want to interact with the City because the main contact many of us have with the City is through the police, so that just makes me hesitant to try to connect more. It felt better and easier to engage with the CSIG, I think. She was just more approachable, you know?

RESIDENT 2: It was chill. He was super generous with his time, he brought pizza a couple times, and connected us to some cool people and opportunities. **Like I said, I didn't have a lot of experience with the City before, but this didn't**

feel like I was interacting with this intimidating thing called City Hall. It was about interacting with people; it felt more collective or community based.

Q: What did you get out of this personally?

RESIDENT 1: I gained a lot. I increased my technical skills and I see my own work in a new, more professional light. I think a lot of other people who participated feel similarly. I met new people in Oakland who have similar concerns and I learned how to navigate City processes. And I have connections to the City now. I met a Councilmember and other City staff and said what I needed to say directly, and not in, like, a confrontational way. Sometimes conflict is necessary, but I think this allowed us to connect in a way where we could actually discuss something. That was amazing. And one of the things I raised got dealt with. People on the block were treating me like a hero, haha.

RESIDENT 2: We had been doing a lot of work outside of the City processes to organize ourselves and keep doing what we do. Based on our experiences it felt like, why try to go through these formal routes, it hasn't worked out before? But I think when the CSIG started working with us, he kind of reflected back how not engaging was actually constraining our possibilities. Like, working with the CSIG made me realize that by having one foot in the City stream, it elevates our voice, it gives us new options. I think that was really important, because it also changes how the City relates to us. Like there are other formal committees, and meetings, and processes, and those are often the basis of how the City interacts with residents. It wasn't about selling out or assimilating into the City, it was about expanding the possibilities by accessing what was there. The CSIG helped bridge that shift in mindset, and also created some structure to pursue that.

Q: That's really interesting what you're sharing about this shift in relationship. Would you say that it created new trust between you and the City government?

RESIDENT 2: Haha, I don't know if I would go that far, I can't say all that. I think time will tell about trust in that relationship and how both sides continue to show up. But it did increase my understanding, and points of access and connection. Like, I didn't realize there were three different government regulatory bodies dealing with this issue, and the City didn't just have full authority. I didn't know that the City has a whole report that says how far we have to go on dealing with

racism, which to me is like, hey, acknowledgment is the first step to addressing a problem. I also didn't realize how understaffed some of these departments are. So understanding those kinds of things helps me orient differently, even if it doesn't excuse, like, how racism is still impacting our community. Like I said before, it was kind of like the City was locked away so I kind of turned away. Now I'm more open to accessing that on my own terms, so my orientation at least is a bit more open and knowledgeable. But in terms of actual trust, we'll see!

RESIDENT 1: I've found that a lot of people will give up on a certain thing because they don't trust it. But like you're saying, trust has to be built, and inevitably it gets broken and has to be rebuilt again. And I think the project I was part of kind of reflected an ideal process of trust-building, it was just at a small scale. Like, those of us who sat at the table, we didn't necessarily agree with everything that the other person said, but we were at least able to understand that we have an opportunity, a forum to just discuss these things. I feel like the government sometimes misses the mark because there are so many opportunities to provide information to their constituents, and they're focused on just getting information out.

"It's like, this program helps the government become more like a librarian, when before it was the bouncer to the VIP area."

Participants in a photo and video workshop organized by CSIG Walter Wallace. The workshops served over 1,000 Oakland residents.

Oakland vendors at a Lake Merritt Vendor Mixer event organized by CSIG Tanisha Cannon, 2023.

"I've found that a lot of people will give up on a certain thing because they don't trust it. But like you're saying, trust has to be built, and inevitably it gets broken and has to be rebuilt again. And I think the project I was part of kind of reflected an ideal process of trust-building, it was just at a small scale."

And rather than wait for a disaster to happen or right before election time, what about all of the other weeks and months before those periods when you have an opportunity to engage the community?

And so again, opening up the conversation, sitting at a table, talking about these issues — not in a contentious way, you know, at a town hall or anything like that, but there's so many other ways to really engage people: just going out to people, talking to them, looking at them straight in the eye, asking them how they're doing. Because at the end of the day, we're all a part of the same beloved city of Oakland. I felt like the CSIG was amazing at creating the conditions for this kind of thing to happen.

Q: Thank you, yeah, trust-building is definitely not a simple once-and-done! Another goal of the program is about strengthening belonging. Would you say that the project shifted your experience of belonging in Oakland? Did it change how you feel about the city itself, or City government?

RESIDENT 1: I don't think I would have tried to interact with the City in this way if the CSIG wasn't there. But because I got to build my own skills and do it in my own voice, in a medium that I like,

Risk, Trust & Strengthening Belonging

Risk, Trust & Strengthening Belonging

I was like cool, yeah, I'll do it. So that alone is big because now there's a relationship when there wasn't one before. But is that belonging? I dunno, maybe that's something more like increasing my sense of ownership or empowerment in Oakland? I'd say the work was effective in reaching me and making me feel seen, valued, and supported and I got to connect more with people in my own community even.

I think particularly because the project was explicit about the important role and history and value of Black and Brown people in Oakland, yeah, maybe I could say I experienced a sense of belonging. But to be honest, for this to grow, it would take a lot more time and consistency to get past this immediate reaction I have about government, which I know, isn't even just about the City. I grew up around our family table with people telling stories about how our neighborhood got cut in half when the City did this development project, or when the BART station expanded or whatever. I went through Oakland schools, I grew up poor, so that's years of not being seen or recognized by the City. It's hard; that's a lot to chew on. **But I will say today I'm more aware of how to engage the City and I'm also aware that it's not this monolith. And to approach the community in this way is really important. If it grows, it could be epic and really make the city thrive for everyone.** So yeah, you need more of these CSIGs.

RESIDENT 2: I don't think I've used that word before really, haha. But I think I get what you mean. The way I see it, Oakland is in a tough place these days, people are having a hard time. It's expensive, people talk about it feeling unsafe. It feels like on the one hand I have to pay this parking ticket I got while I was working, and on the other hand I have to go get my window fixed after somebody broke it. So what I need is, like, some support from the City, for the City to say' "Hey, we see you're trying, let us make this process a little easier." Or, "Here's how we're gonna respond to your request about this thing." I did see some shifts like that from this project, which honestly, it challenged my assumptions a bit. And I think the CSIG really was what made that possible. If we keep going, yeah, I think this could definitely add to a sense of belonging in Oakland. But like with the trust thing, it's still early and there's a lot more work to do.

Q: Given that this is really the beginning of this work, and it's not funded by public money yet, if this could continue to grow, what do you see this leading to for Oakland?

RESIDENT 1: I love Oakland and the people here are amazing, so I'm always hopeful for change to happen. I think its potential is huge, but I'm also skeptical to say this program is going to change the future of the city. It is one effort in the sea of all sorts of things going on. I know the City has a lot of services, but it's like the wires are disconnected between the City and the community, especially Black and Brown folks. So if this program can help connect those wires, it means the things that are already happening on both sides, it means they can happen a lot better. And that invites people in, when before it was unknown, intimidating or even just straight-up exclusionary or racist. It's like, this program helps the government become more like a librarian, when before it was the bouncer to the VIP area.

RESIDENT 2: I think having a role like a cultural strategist be more common would make such a huge difference. I feel like it really brings the humanity into everything and it just connects people in a way that we're not connected. Like we have a whole online group now where we share tips and opportunities and ideas — that's awesome. It also fills in some gaps about civic processes and civic responsibility that people might not ever learn about in school or from their parents or their community. We have a lot of gaps in terms of awareness of what options we have and what our role is in our city. And I think having somebody who doesn't work in the City, just normal people, who kind of knows, who understands all the logistics of how things operate in City Government, but also just can show up with a smiling face and be down to educate and listen to people is huge. Especially for young people who don't learn about this stuff or maybe are learning about it from a really different lens like reading about it in a book or learning about it in a class. This is such an active way to understand how things in society work. I think it would really connect our city and bring creativity and art into it, bring our individual experiences into it, and bring life into it. I think it would be amazing.

Project Deep Dives

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Project Deep Dive

Dr. Tanisha Cannon
✕ Office of the City Council President

Increasing Equity in Uses of Public Space
Listening to BIPOC Vendors at Lake Merritt

City Partner

Office Of The City Council President - Nikki Fortunato Bas

District 2 surrounds Oakland's Lake Merritt and encompasses neighborhoods diverse in class, racial, and ethnic demographics, including the Grand Lake, Chinatown, Little Saigon, San Antonio, and Eastlake neighborhoods. It bridges downtown Oakland, East Oakland and the Oakland Hills. Encompassing Lake Merritt, District 2 is home to the most popular, central public space in Oakland, used by people from all over the Bay Area.

Cultural Strategist

Dr. Tanisha Cannon

Dr. Tanisha Cannon believes in the power of civic engagement and community organizing to drive meaningful change. She is the Managing Director at Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and has worked in government and non-profit organizations. She holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from California State University, East Bay.

Project Description

Dr. Tanisha Cannon's role was to help City Council President Fortunato Bas' office understand how to create a safe and equitable space for all people to enjoy Lake Merritt. Tanisha approached her project through a storytelling and intimate inquiry process and a theoretical framework of Critical Whiteness Studies.[8] Through this, she focused on the experiences of BIPOC vendors who didn't have access to established governmental channels for participation, and the expectations of white residents' over what is allowed at Lake Merritt. Through her work, she initiated equitable shifts in stakeholder understanding and relationships, the way the City of Oakland understands its own role in governing public space, its perceived impacts on BIPOC vendors, and how the City initiates and implements policies to support vendors.

View ↗
Tanisha's Impact Study
bit.ly/OakVending

Why Was The CSIG Invited In?

Lake Merritt, considered the "Jewel of Oakland," has long been a vital public space, but unfortunately, several high profile incidents of racial profiling of Black residents at the Lake over the years — involving harassment and profiling during barbecues, drum circles, and music festivals — have repeatedly challenged the belief that the Lake is a space of belonging for all. In spite of this, the Lake became a heavily used group gathering site, predominantly by BIPOC residents, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Local vendors followed the crowds and a new, albeit unpermitted, "market place" emerged, especially along the Grand Avenue footpath, with vendors setting up on the grass, closest to pedestrians. The intensive uses of the Lake prompted safety, environmental, and health concerns from residents living in the area and established stakeholder groups whose interests include the bird preserve (the first protected wildlife refuge in the country), the maintenance of the grass, and protection of the trees.

The City faced what appeared to be competing needs of diverse constituents. BIPOC vendors and small business owners were seeking economic well-being by accessing a place to sell handicrafts and wares during an extremely difficult economic time; customers were seeking community, connection, and goods; while area residents, most of whom were white, were concerned about unpermitted vending and a lack of City control. The situation escalated to the point where the loudest calls from residents were to shut down and ticket the vendors. Vendors reported experiencing harassment from residents and police. For many vendors of color, this was aggravated by shared histories of, *"being from Oakland, growing up in Oakland, going to schools and not getting the right tools, or, you know, growing up in poverty and not really feeling seen by the city."* Vendors, who felt they were trying to make a positive contribution to the cultural community that added to their own economic growth, expressed their frustration with the City's response.

Working with Councilmember Fortunato Bas' office, Cultural Strategist Tanisha sought to address these different needs, which were shaped

CSIG Tanisha Cannon meeting with vendors at a Vendor Mixer event, 2023.

by racialized histories of economics, housing, and policing of public space in Oakland. Rather than creating cultural or artistic products, Tanisha's work took the form of a policy argument, catalyzing equitable shifts to better support and resource vendors with information, permitting options, and opportunities for advocacy. Among the problems that Tanisha mapped out were: an imbalance in access to decision-making and governing bodies for BIPOC vendors, an individualized and bureaucratic process for obtaining permits, and continued discrimination against how BIPOC people use public space in Oakland. These problems were at danger of making vendors give up their entrepreneurial approach, and turning Lake Merritt into a more exclusive, less diverse public space. **In reflecting on how vendors experienced institutional exclusion and the lack of access to City-approved permits, one vendor shared an African proverb that stuck with Tanisha throughout the entire process:**

> **"The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth."**

Applying Cultural Strategy To Governance

In this section we look at how Cultural Strategists applied their legacy, experiences, and skills in music, performance, film, photography, public art, organizing, facilitation, socially engaged art, graphic arts, and more. Through the application of their practice in the inherently cross-sector space created by the program, it allowed for risk-taking in government practice.

Tanisha pursued her CSIG project with a commitment to honoring the dignity of BIPOC vendors and the recognition of historical impacts of structural racism and economic disempowerment for Black residents of Oakland. She also brought her own expertise and background in community organizing, intimate inquiry, and equity-building with multiple stakeholders.

Commitment to Honoring Dignity

Initially, the loudest calls for addressing vendors at the lake were focused on shutting them down. **As District 2 Chief of Staff Cinthya Muñoz Ramos shared,** *"The way she approached the work, she had this clarity about the inherent dignity of people and our inherent right to commerce with each other, and seeing vending as this thing that is innate to humans since we became humans, and that tending to economy is really about caring for home."*

Tanisha's approach saw vendors (many of whom identified as Black women) not as a problem to be dismissed or resolved, but a part of the community that the City could better support through an equity framework. As Tanisha later shared, *"The most radical thing that we're doing with the Cultural Strategist project right now, I would say, is holding the City accountable to support these vendors. And the way that we're doing that is through having the City act as the event sponsor."*

Learning by Doing

To understand the experiences of vendors, Tanisha supported the permitting process for an Afrocentric Juneteenth festival at the lake.

This experience uncovered huge insight into the hurdles, barriers, and disincentives, as well as the flexible points in the process that impacted both residents and vendors. She used this experiential understanding to then narrate and explain the permitting process with the City, and eventually also to advance policy arguments for the City to consider a shift in its role from distributing individualized permits to serving as an overall event sponsor.

Cinthya Muñoz Ramos shared:

> *"We are trying to figure out how to develop a plan to have markets across the entire city that are managed by the city. Because that is very strong feedback that we got from Tanisha. Like the City needs to be either the holder of the permits or the holder of the relationship, but in new ways. So hopefully we're learning from everything she did and learned to show up and be different as an institution."*

Mapping Power Dynamics

As part of her research process, Tanisha frequently attended meetings with the different governing bodies, regulatory entities, and resident groups concerned with the Lake. In seeing how BIPOC vendors were not directly represented in these spaces and were largely unheard, Tanisha began to raise the equity implications of the distribution of power.

Her City partner Cinthya explained, **"Displacing the vendors was never an option, given who Tanisha is. That felt so important, given that many of the systems that we are operating under stem from a culture that is white supremacists and capitalists first and doesn't serve people first. That was really incredible."**

STAKEHOLDERS POWERMAP

Most Power ———————————————→ Less Power

DECISION MAKERS

City of Oakland – Special Events
Oakland Police Department
Alameda County Health Department
Fire Department

↓

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

DECISON INFLUENCERS

Lake Merritt Working Group
Media Outlets
Oakland Parks and Recreational Department

↓

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

IMPLEMENTATION

City Code Enforcement
Oakland Public Works Department (OPW)
Oakland Department of Transportation (OakdoT)
Oakland Police Department

↓

CITY ADMINISTRATORS

VENDORS/CUSTOMERS

Lake Merrit Freedom Market Vendors
Non-Participating Vendors
Residents and Visitors

↓

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Stakeholders Power Map created by Dr. Tanisha Cannon to explain power differentials in her CSIG project

Practicing Intimate Inquiry

To build knowledge around vendor needs, goals, and concerns, Tanisha used "intimate inquiry," a love-based qualitative approach to research.[9] As Tanisha shared, *"Intimate inquiry starts with really just meeting the folks where they're at. That's me going to the Lake on the weekend, talking to vendors, asking about their products, asking about how they started, in more of an intimate, conversational way. Because when you go out and you speak to these vendors, you realize vending isn't their ultimate objective. They want to build their business. And this is the beginning."*

Bridging Across Multiple Stakeholders

With one foot in the City and strong relationships with the vendors (some of whom she knew from growing up in Oakland) Tanisha garnered trust as a bridge-builder. **She was able to understand and translate the experiences and needs of the vendors while also balancing the multiple responsibilities of government.**

As Deputy City Administrator Joe DeVries shared,

"As I tried to navigate the waters with the neighborhood, the vendors themselves, our regulatory scheme — I saw how there are so many different ways of looking at it. Tanisha helped lift that up, not just for me, but for the neighbors. Some of the neighborhood advocates wanted to see the City take a more heavy-handed enforcement role against these vendors. They didn't understand why vendors were doing certain things. Tanisha joined the meeting and said, 'Well, here's what [the vendors] are saying...' And that actually changes how we do business, because now we're like, 'Oh, that's something we can fix for the vendors. Maybe they won't look at us as the enemy. They'll look at us as a partner.' And that takes away the conflict and the confrontation in the relationship."

Over time, Tanisha's ability to create bridges manifested in greater understanding by residents who had sought to shut down the vendors originally, but came to better understand the needs of vendors and the challenges they faced, while also creating new pathways for vendor-City interaction.

Hard & Soft Impacts

Engaging the City as Support, not Enforcement

In 2021, the City Council voted to become an event sponsor at the Lake by establishing a vending location at El Embarcadero, a street close to, but not directly on the pedestrian footpath surrounding the Lake. This solution, designed largely by City staff, covered the prohibitive need for insurance, water, and bathrooms for food vendors. Unfortunately, it didn't take into account numerous challenges with this location, especially the lack of foot traffic and challenges with set-up, which resulted in many vendors returning to their original location along the footpath.[10]

Tanisha worked with the City and vendors to design a marketplace framework that includes recommendations for direct representation of vendors, by-laws, and equity stipends. This created conditions for shifting the way the City navigates regulatory hurdles for vendors at the Lake to focus less on crackdowns and more on creating long-term City-sponsored spaces for vendors. This process is influencing the design of at least two future marketplaces in discussion for sponsorship by the City.

Strengthening Equity in Governance Structures

Tanisha supported a process of developing a structure for a Vendor Governing Board to address the gap in vendor representation in governing what happens at the Lake. This included outlining implications for the City budget and funding sources; a board stipend; and an equity scale to ensure that direct vendor representation was appropriately incentivized and compensated.

New Government Capacity

Councilmembers Nikki Fortunato Bas and Carroll Fife are working together to release an RFP for a full-time marketplace manager position that could grow internal governmental capacity and carry Tanisha's work forward.

An Oakland vendor at Lake Merritt, 2023.

CONCLUSION
From Enforcement to Listening & Support

In societies with persistent economic inequality and limited safety nets, marginalized people stretch towards generating resources in the informal economy. As a result, conflict around unpermitted vending is a familiar and long standing issue, and informal vendors are often dealt with through sweeps or new enforcement policies.[11] In the specific context of Oakland during the pandemic, this was further aggravated by histories of racial profiling at the Lake and the larger context of the popular uprisings for Black Lives Matter during this time period of vendor growth at the Lake. Beginning in 2020, the City was faced with calls from predominantly white organized resident groups to shut down the predominantly Black vendors along the Lake.

Tanisha motivated the City to take thoughtful and strategic risks on how it approached this potentially volatile problem with race and class implications by emphasizing the collective benefit of a relational, equitable approach. She grounded this by emphasizing the Lake as a "natural resource, a city resource, and an everybody resource." Tanisha's focus on listening, vendor representation, and bridging perspectives across stakeholder groups encouraged the City to shift its role, from one of enforcement (on behalf of organized constituent groups) to one of support of BIPOC residents, former residents, and small business owners that have historically expressed disenfranchisement by the City. Tanisha framed this shift in approach by uplifting the self-governance techniques of the vendors: *"The vendors are already organized. They're self-governed; they know what they're doing. The thing that the City could do is really support them."*

As Cinthya Munoz Ramos shared about Tanisha,

"She was definitely very, very skilled at bringing people together and building shared understanding, building a shared lens through which to see [the issue], even if it's not the lens that people wanted to keep on the entire time, but they would for that period that you're in this conversation. They [the City] needed to now be creative and figure out a solution that actually met the needs of vendors as well as their own

desires. Like, now we need new solutions. Once you understand that your solution is actually a false solution."

Informed by the new channels of communication opened up by Tanisha, the City took a new approach focused on inquiry, listening, learning, and being open to adapting. As Deputy City Administrator Joe Devries said, *"So what we did was we opened it back up. The vendors have moved to where they want to be. They're not technically operating legally, and we are not prioritizing en-*

Informed by the new channels of communication opened up by Tanisha, the City took a new approach focused on inquiry, listening, learning, and being open to adapting.

forcement against them. What we're doing instead is we're trying to build our proposal to come back to the Parks & Rec Advisory Commission to allow them to vend in the park. And so that's the thing. It's a different regulatory process." Rather than immediately relying on enforcement, the City is exploring new ways of operating through this focus on equity, reflected in acknowledgement of belonging at the Lake for all those who use it safely and with respect to it as a shared resource. Taken together, these efforts have the potential to influence inclusion, equity, and belonging in cherished public spaces in Oakland — at Lake Merritt and beyond.

Sorell Raino-Tsui
✕ Cultural Affairs Division – Public Art Program
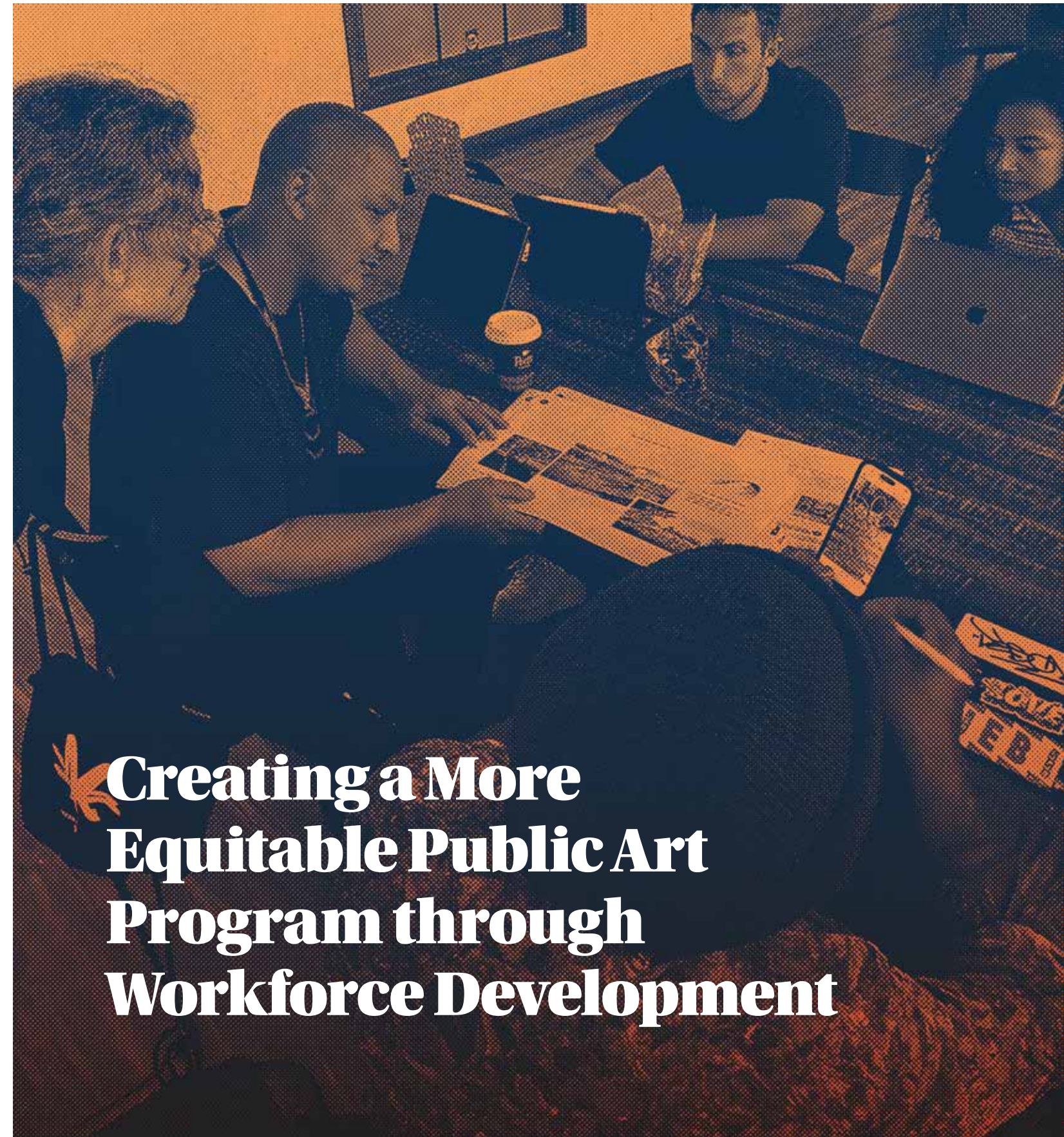
Creating a More Equitable Public Art Program through Workforce Development

"

I saw the Public Art Program like the velvet rope around the VIP area. I can see the next section but I'm not invited.

Julio Rodriguez, Oakland artist and Public Art workshop participant

Being a part of this workshop is really important to myself and other people that I know. It gives a sense of being able to know it's possible. I've always had these big dreams and ideas, but to actually connect with someone or a program that's able to take off the veil and just say, 'These are the steps,' that's huge for the confidence and know-how of an artist.

Cinque Mubarak, Oakland visual artist and Public Art workshop participant

City Partner

Cultural Affairs Division – Public Art Program

The Public Art Program enlivens, enriches, and enhances the visual environment and public spaces of Oakland as focal points, meeting places, and landmarks for community activity and the enjoyment and experience of cultural diversity. The program commissions original works of art for public spaces throughout Oakland. Public Art projects are funded through a 1.5% allocation from all eligible City of Oakland capital improvement projects, eligible grant revenue, as well as private contributions.

Cultural Strategist

Sorell Raino-Tsui

Sorell Raino-Tsui is a lifelong Oakland and East Bay resident who has been engaged in the Oakland art community for over two decades as an artist, curator, and public art producer. Sorell founded and directs ABG Art Group (alongside Trent Thompson), which produces permanent public art throughout Oakland. Prior to this he founded Athen B. Gallery which promoted a mix of contemporary, urban, and street art. In 2005, he co-founded People's Choice Printing, the first minority-owned and operated silk screen print shop in Oakland.

"I knew from my experience in the field that it wasn't gonna be enough to just advise on policy or invite more artists to come into the [Public Art] pool. So we embarked on this series of workshops to elevate local artists, to not only be added into the pre-qualified pool, but to actually put them in a position to compete and win. And that takes time. It takes education. It takes development. It takes interaction."

Sorell Raino-Tsui, Cultural Strategist

Project Description

How do we support a resourced and professional art community that reflects Oakland's cultures and diverse residents? How does supporting the leadership of trusted community members efficiently and effectively implement equity in civic norms and practice?

Sorell Raino-Tsui worked with Kristen Zaremba, Public Art Coordinator in the Public Art Program, to develop a comprehensive workshop series that prepared 78 Oakland artists to compete in the public art field in Oakland and beyond. **The work was driven by the awareness that Oakland's existing pool of pre-qualified artists (the group of artists who are eligible to apply to create publicly funded art in Oakland based on industry standards) didn't reflect Oakland's diverse artistic community in regards to race, age, class, and gender.** While the pandemic and popular social movements of 2020-2022 had sparked a flourishing of street art and murals in Oakland, the Public Art Program itself had paused funding opportunities due to safety concerns and a lack of staffing capacity. 2023 was an ideal time to diversify and expand the artist pool and bring it into closer alignment with the stated equity goals of the Cultural Development Plan for the City of Oakland.

As a trusted artist, curator, and art producer in the Oakland art community, Sorell was well suited to design a comprehensive workshop series. The series included a set of wrap-around support services for artists, including: orientation to the civic process and ordinances; team and project management skills; site visits with fabricators; the development of proposals and prototypes; and feedback, design, and workshopping sessions on public art prototypes and pitches. All of these services were delivered by Sorell, with support from his own team of collaborators and Kristen.

Why Was The CSIG Invited In?

Prior to the CSIG developed workshops, there was no consistent, intentional outreach program for the Public Art Program focused on emerging artists with an equity lens. As Sorell explained,

"We wanted to demystify the field of public art in the city of Oakland. Public art is a really challenging field for artists to break into. And the City found that it didn't have a very diverse pool of artists that it was pulling from for public projects. There were a lot of repeat people in the pool and we weren't getting a lot of young energy, we weren't getting a lot of artists of color."

To address the diversity and equity goals of the department, Sorell's CSIG project had to also address entrenched barriers. First, many artists that the Public Art Program wanted to engage with were disconnected from the City, lacked crucial information about City processes, or were intimidated by the public art process. As workshop participant and Oakland artist Kalani Ware shared, "I just didn't have the information, didn't have the connections or the relationships to know how to apply, or even where to apply." **Sentiments like this were reflected in focus groups as contributing to a general distrust of the goals of the Public Art Program, compounding further disengagement and a lack of belief in being able to participate. To overcome these barriers would require trust building, translation of city processes, and intentional outreach and engagement.**

Second, the professional field of public art generally entails more expensive, permanent projects that can require higher technical capacity, relationships with fabricators, team management, and navigation of bureaucracy. This is distinct from public street art — often graffiti, murals, or temporary installations that don't receive official permission or are one-off commissions by private entities — and from which many of the workshop participants came from. This contributed to artists' assumptions about the difficulty of translating and applying their skills, technical expertise and professionalism into more formal and permanent public art projects. Contrary to this and informed by his experience in the field, Sorell saw that many

CSIG Sorell Raino-Tsui speaks at the Public Art Program participant culminating exhibit and launch of a new public installation of the work of Shomari Smith, 2023.

street and graffiti artists were incredibly talented but locked out of opportunities to build skills and navigate formal channels. **What they needed was access to relevant City information, a supportive community of peers, targeted upskilling, professional development, and connections to fabricators and the City, all of which helped shift assumptions and mindsets about competing in the field.** Importantly, Sorell and Kristen recognized that the entrenched barriers required the workshops to go beyond presenting information to "learning by doing" for participants.

Despite Sorell's pivotal role as a relationship holder and high-touch support, he recognized that staff capacity constraints would continue after this role and that documentation for future use was an important component. This led to the production of new online resources: an Informational Procedures Manual, a condensed 35 minute overview video, and the full eight hours of workshops. Sorell's project was also intentional about creating a workshop series that had the potential for a longer shelf-life than Sorell's time as a CSIG.

Applying Cultural Strategy To Governance

In this section we look at how Cultural Strategists applied their legacy, experiences, and skills in music, performance, film, photography, public art, organizing, facilitation, socially engaged art, graphic arts, and more. Through the application of their practice in the inherently cross-sector space created by the program, it supported shifts in government practice.

The success of Sorell's project centered around his long-standing experience in the Oakland artist community and his ability to navigate a variety of cultural and professional spaces in both public and private sectors. This was further energized by his own professional trajectory — from entrepreneur to muralist to curator to art producer — giving him insight into how to facilitate and secure public art commissions and projects, and how to implement them with the resources or constraints available.

Serving as a Trusted Bridge

"[Sorell's] the bridge. I can't say that we trust the government and I'm not gonna say none of that. But I'll definitely say that we trust him. I'm grateful that he's able to bridge the gap to this other almost enclosed space or world."

Cinque Mubarak, Oakland artist and workshop participant

Cinque's comment was reflected in repeated interviews with workshop participants. Without Sorell, the program likely would not have reached or retained the same pool of artists in a program that was conceived and implemented in under 18 months with minimal funding. Concretely, this included leveraging Sorell's social media networks — something that was a major gap for the City despite being the main communication channel for target artists. As a result, the initial workshop had 147 attendees. Sorell reflected on the importance of his leadership in the program:

"I think when people heard I was leading it, they felt like, 'Okay, this is somebody I know that's active, that's doing stuff in the community. I wanna go to this workshop. I wanna learn from this person. I wanna see what this is about.' And so that's why leveraging someone that's already built into that specific community just makes so much more sense to develop and guide policy."

He continued,

"I think that's why the City finding a community leader that had that established relationship is so important. That issue of trust is why an outside government official could never have led this workshop with the expertise and the authenticity and with the connection that we have. We've built up that trust over time."

Trusting Sorell may not transfer trust to the City as a whole, but it does open the possibility of new relationships between target artists and the City. One workshop artist reflected on the reciprocal impact of this:

"It's making [the Public Art Program] less intimidating and more accessible. Also, for the City side, it's probably very encouraging for them because they're seeing how many artists are willing to step up, and are willing to get involved and show up when it's not so scary. I think this is building trust with artists. It is saying, like, instead of us versus them, it's us and them, and let's shake hands and work together and see what we can accomplish."

Kristen echoed this from her side as well, sharing how some of her best memories from the project are the opportunities to connect directly with the artists through workshops, artist jam sessions, and fabrication studio site visits.

Public Art Program participants attend one of the fabricator field trips organized by CSIG Sorell Raino-Tsui, 2023.

CSIG Sorell Raino-Tsui stands in front of a piece by Cinque Mubarak he helped get installed prior to working with the City, 2023.

As a recognition of its success, in a focus group workshop participants were asked for metaphors of the Public Art Program before and after Sorell's workshop series. Almost across the board, the metaphors shifted from those representing inaccessibility (fog, velvet rope, locked treasure chest, plateau) to that of connection and helpfulness (librarian, open door).

A Skilled Guide and Translator

"Sorell's like the ultimate coach for the artists that are in the room. He's like, 'I know you can do it, but you've got to do this homework.'"

"The values that really stand out have to do with being an optimist, being a creative thinker, being comfortable talking to people from different worlds, whether it be someone who's a developer in Oakland or someone who's an elected official or a building worker, as well as the artist community, right?"

Kristen Zaremba, Public Art Program Coordinator

As an experienced muralist and producer of other people's public art through his company ABG Art Group, Sorell has experience in supporting artists' move from ideas and prototypes to complex, large-scale permanent art projects. Public art is known for requiring technical problem solving, material expervprocesses. The majority of Sorell's previous projects were with private clients and involved more intimate partnerships with a single artist or smaller collectives. Working with such a large group of artists, striving to ensure their ability to compete, not just participate, and navigating new public bureaucratic processes, required Sorell to apply and expand his professional skills as a problem-solver, translator, and guide. As one reflection of this, the first content in the workshop series focused on orientation to civic processes for artists. Sorell reflected on the ripple impacts of his new understanding of public processes:

"I have a much deeper understanding of the way things work now. I had my perceptions but they weren't totally real, they were just my own ideas of how I thought the City worked. But going through the process has been very educational for me, and I think it's put me in a more elevated leadership role, because now I know how to help these artists navigate the City better, because I know how to navigate the City better."

Using his professional experience, his new understanding of public processes, and the close partnership with Kristin, the workshop series mirrored all the decisions and processes required in pulling off a major public art piece — from scratch to finish. In addition to the technical and creative aspects mentioned previously, it also included professional connections including opportunities to meet with Kristen in the Public Art Program (who wrote a letter of recommendation for those who completed the program) and field trips to five different fabricators (who are essential collaborators

"It's making [the Public Art Program] less intimidating and more accessible. Also, for the City side, it's probably very encouraging for them because they're seeing how many artists are willing to step up, and are willing to get involved and show up when it's not so scary. I think this is building trust with artists."

for public artists), and meeting and learning from successful public artists who reflected the identities of workshop participants. Sorell also coached participants on navigating different spaces and collaborators (such as developers, building workers, funders, bureaucrats, and fabricators) that the artists may not have previous experience interfacing with. When asked what made it so successful, Oakland artist Kalani Ware shared, "The professionalism behind it, the guidelines, the structure. Overall the concept is very well organized. And it feels very not competitive." This mix of clarity and community was carefully built through Sorell's role as guide and translator.

Hard & Soft Impacts

Artist Workforce Development

78 Oakland artists completed the workshop series, increasing the race, gender, and age diversity of Oakland's pre-qualified public artist pool. Four workshop artists landed paid commissions, totalling $510,000. **The workshop series was described as creating a sense of "limitless" opportunity for one artist, as an "elevation" of a participant's career stage for another, and "educational" for a process that was previously "hidden" or unknown to a third artist.** Artists described the importance of developing relationships with other artists (creating a professional community for feedback and collaboration), fabricators, developers, and city officials. All of these elements combine to create a more professional, networked, and empowered artist workforce.

A More Equitable and Accessible Public Art Program & Model:

"Everyone I know in the creative community just is totally in the dark about [public art] resources, like where and what websites to look on, how to find access to these things, and then how to present yourself when you do... [These] resources are usually directed towards people who already have education, who are already part of these kinds of ecosystems of power and information."

Rachel Wolfe-Goldsmith, Oakland artist, muralist, and Public Art workshop participant

The workshop series was designed out of a recognition of the layered and complex barriers related to class, race, culture, professional training and age that Oakland artists face. **As a recognition of its success, in a focus group workshop participants were asked for metaphors of the Public Art Program before and after Sorell's workshop series. Almost across the board, the metaphors**

"I have a much deeper understanding of the way things work now. I had my perceptions but they weren't totally real, they were just my own ideas of how I thought the City worked. But going through the process has been very educational for me, and I think it's put me in a more elevated leadership role, because now I know how to help these artists navigate the City better, because I know how to navigate the City better."

shifted from those representing inaccessibility (fog, velvet rope, locked treasure chest, plateau) to that of connection and helpfulness (librarian, open door). As one artist shared, "I think that this program has changed my perspective on the City in a positive way, just knowing that the City is behind us and is trying to take a risk and move forward and promote growth within our community." It also shifted perceptions of artists from City staff from disconnected to engaged and professional.

One artist recognized how the success of this program can create momentum as a model for supporting Black and Brown artists: "This should be the kind of thing that inspires and puts pressure on other organizations to actually walk the talk they've been talking." To this end, Sorell presented to the San José City Council in 2023 and ABG Art Group won a grant to develop a similar, equity-focused educational program for the City of Emeryville.

"Cultural workers are not entrenched inside City Hall, they are working with freshness, creativity, and innovation. They are trying new things, experimenting and failing and trying again, because it's part of their creative process."

Strengthening Artist Self-Confidence, Expanding the Creative Possibilities

The shifts in mindset encouraged by the program had creative and economic impacts. In one interview, Sorell told a story about a group of young artists who had been installing temporary, non-permissional installations in parks that were quickly taken down by the City. He described helping them turn the corner on how they view their own work, from, "'I'm doing this on my own and I'm having fun with it but it gets taken down,' to looking at it through the lens of, 'I can actually

do this and compete for competitive budgets. It'll actually be made to last and people will love it.' To see that mental shift from artists that I know that are young, that are hungry in the community, has been really rewarding." Another artist shared how Sorell's series wasn't about "thinking outside the box," but instead, "it's like there is no box. It's kind of like opening our minds to be more creative and think outside of our typical way of thinking, developing new concepts and exploring new mediums, and completely thinking in different ways that we're not used to."

Workshop participant Rachel Wolfe-Goldsmith described an expanded playing field of what can be created: "By prioritizing artists from Oakland, Black and Brown artists, artists like myself, it shows other people that there's this path. I see a future where we don't have to make art about resistance. Where we can really have fun, and like, make things that are beautiful, and things that are true to our hearts, that are bigger than this narrative of struggle. I'm excited because I know a lot of people have a lot of work to offer that expands beyond the boxes that we have to check when we go for those grants."

One of the Public Art Program workshops. Overall, 78 artists completed the series.

The Relationship between Equity, Risk and Trust

"Cultural workers are not entrenched inside City Hall, they are working with freshness, creativity, and innovation. They are trying new things, experimenting and failing and trying again, because it's part of their creative process. It's not that I didn't know we needed this of course — but how do we get there? Cultural Strategists come at problems from different angles; they're helping us stretch towards taking more risks, to experiment, to come up with new approaches. The people who work for Oakland are committed and passionate, but we get stuck within our constraints because we have limited capacity and resources, and are worrying about being left holding the bag, or being told, 'Oh you tried something new? You're responsible for accomplishing that now.' Well, if you create a safe space for people from different departments to come together, hash out issues, work with creative partners like CSIGs — we might start to really answer questions more effectively and innovatively, and take more productive risks together."

Kristen Zaremba, Public Art Program Coordinator, City of Oakland

Recognizing a general aversion to risk in government, Cultural Affairs Manager Roberto Bedoya describes the Cultural Strategist program as "a bit of risk capital." In the case of the Public Art Program, this risk capital catalyzed the implementation of a more equitable Public Art Program. **In this case, risk alone is not enough for advancing equity goals. The other ingredient necessary is trust.** Sorell's experience in the field and his standing in the artist community allowed him to develop and implement a program in under 18 months that otherwise might have taken years to create. **The value of trusted relationships, and Sorell's role as a trusted bridge, cannot be understated in designing other City programs and services that aim for equitable implementation and outcomes.** Kristen's trust of Sorell — validated by his professional and creative experience

"When artists thrive, I feel like the city thrives. There's more culture, there's more beauty, and it's an energy in the city that can't really compare to anything else."

Participating Artist

— led to deep support in his leadership and vision, allowing her to collaborate from her City-specific role while maintaining her other responsibilities. From a younger, more racially and class diverse artist community perspective, Sorell's standing as a trusted actor who would treat their work and time with value, was a key factor in why people participated and are now included in future City public art calls. This has future impacts in terms of artists building relationships with the City and continuing to invest their labor, creativity, and vision towards Oakland.

As reflected by one participating artist: "When artists thrive, I feel like the city thrives. There's more culture, there's more beauty, and it's an energy in the city that can't really compare to anything else."

No. **3** | **Project Deep Dive**

Walter Wallace
× Oakland Department of Transportation
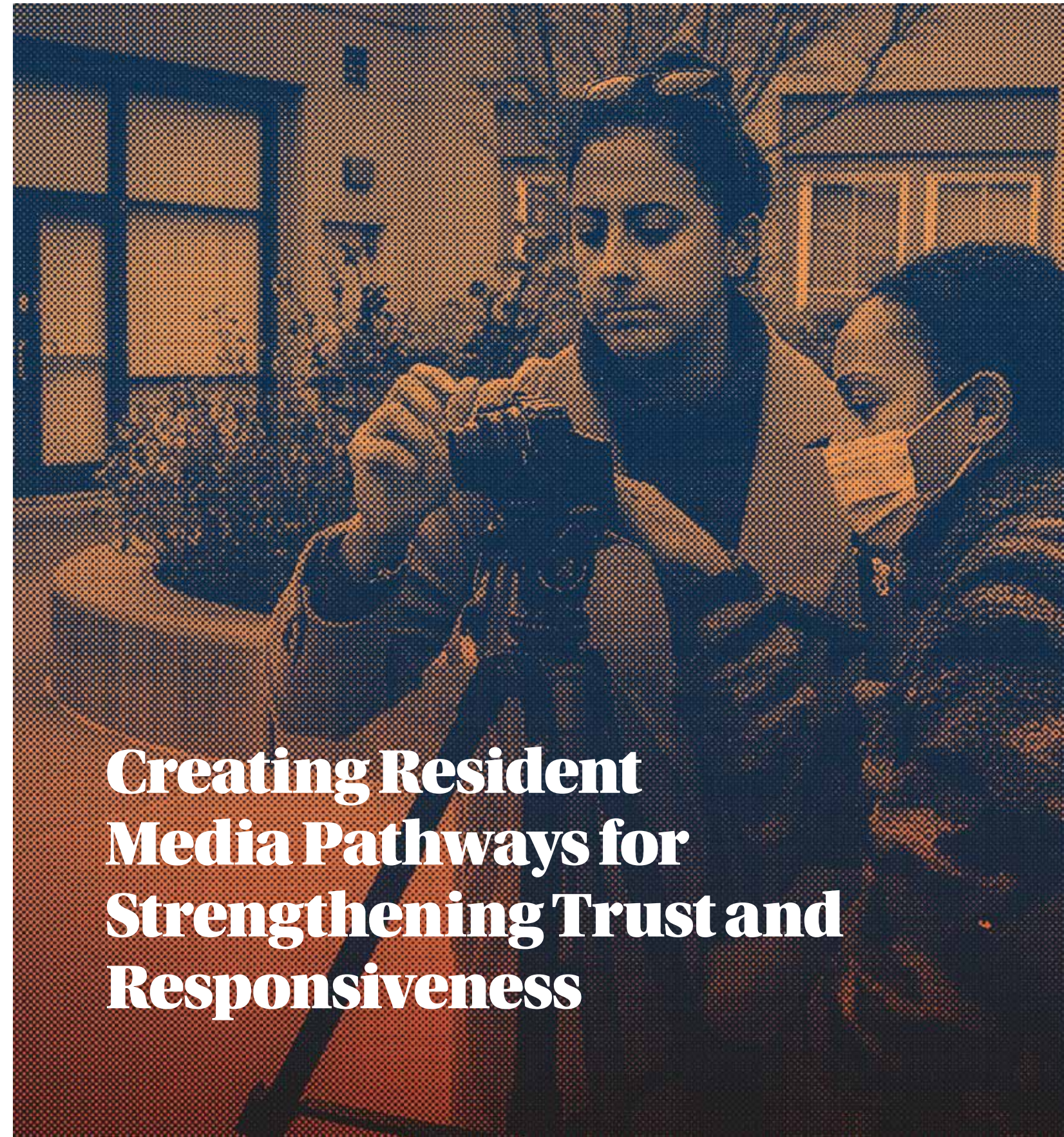
Creating Resident Media Pathways for Strengthening Trust and Responsiveness

> **What got my interest to be a part of the video making program was because I feel like it kind of gave me a voice to be able to talk to the government. I didn't have a way of getting in contact with them. Making a video about what the issue is gives me power, a little bit of power to be able to get my voice in front of other people.**
>
> Habeeb Tiamiyu, Oakland student and program participant

> **The goal in working with Walter and our CSIG team was to really improve our engagement tactics within the community. Over the span of my 15 years at the City of Oakland, I always felt like we needed to do more to meet folks where they were at.**
>
> Jasmine Zamora, Executive Assistant, OakDOT

City Partner

Department Of Transportation

The Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) envisions, plans, builds, operates, and maintains a transportation system for the City of Oakland and assures safe, equitable, and sustainable access and mobility for residents, businesses, and visitors. One of the primary ways the Department accesses resident input, feedback, and concerns around issues with streets is via the 311 system, which is a citywide service. In recent years, as part of the City's Reimagining Public Safety efforts, the Abandoned Vehicle Program moved from the Oakland Police Department to OakDOT.

Cultural Strategist

Walter Wallace

Walter Wallace is an experienced filmmaker and public relations professional. He is the founder of the Black Film Guild, a Bay Area collective of writers, editors, photographers, and filmmakers. The Black Film Guild is a hub of education dedicated to nurturing local Bay Area talent and equipping them with the technical expertise required to thrive in the world of photography and filmmaking.

Project Description

What is the purpose of community engagement? And what are the assumptions and conditions that discourage residents from being engaged with City services?

At the outset, the core directive of OakDOT was to improve how the Department communicates with and engages with residents, with a focus on equitable engagement. Through asking questions and learning about the breadth of OakDOT's efforts, Walter focused on the 311 system and the Abandoned Automobile program. Walter created a set of activities that could raise awareness and understanding of OakDOT services, while strengthening resident skills in film, photography, and storytell-

ing. The resulting media — 11 mini-documentaries and a podcast — created educational and professional development opportunities for residents and were shared directly with OakDOT Executive Team and Department heads to better understand how core OakDOT services are experienced by residents.

The City's 311 system is the primary means for residents to report problems like illegal dumping, abandoned cars, graffiti, potholes, street obstructions, and urgent infrastructure issues. Specific transportation-related issues like potholes and abandoned cars are then reported to OakDOT through 311. Through offering free video and photography workshops in publicly-accessible spaces such as libraries, Walter empowered resident artists and students to interview their neighbors and fellow community members about their experiences with using the 311 system. The 11 completed mini-documentaries were shared on the NEAR blockchain (an NFT marketplace), where the program was able to purchase them directly from resident media creators, ensuring fair compensation and usage rights for many first-time artists and filmmakers in the city.

To integrate civic education and community engagement around OakDOT's Abandoned Automobile program, Walter created a podcast that brought together residents of different perspectives with City leadership. They discussed the recent shift of the program from the Oakland Police Department to OakDOT as part of broader efforts to defund the police and reimagine public safety. The podcast created a template for future City engagement efforts focused on education and dialogue.

Overall, the project taught storytelling and filmmaking skills to over a thousand Oakland residents, equitably developed and compensated artists and youth, informed them of the 311 system, and provided invaluable, authentic feedback from residents to executive leadership about the experiences of residents engaging with a citywide service, generally, and OakDOT's responsiveness, specifically.

Why Was The CSIG Invited In?

"Before we started the program, I don't think I fully appreciated how hard it is to figure out which City department does what and how to access our services. As Jasmine Zamora, the OakDOT CSIG lead, and I were scoping the project with Walter Wallace, our Cultural Strategist, Walter asked such smart and direct questions, which were surprisingly complicated and difficult to answer. That's when I think we knew we had more work to do."

Emily Ehlers, Transportation Manager, OakDOT

At the start of the CSIG program, OakDOT sought to find ways to better engage residents in an effort to increase transparency, trust, and effective implementation of existing services, planning efforts, and projects. The CSIG team recognized that there were gaps in resident awareness of how to access and use existing services. **Staff also recognized that the traditional forms of engagement — surveys, public notices, town halls — weren't working well enough to engage populations with lower trust, and/or previously negative experiences with City government.** As one young adult shared, "When the opportunity to improve comes there's already missing trust."

Jasmine Zamora explained that City employees experience this mistrust in real and tangible ways too, even as they work hard to listen to the communities they serve. She said:

"Anytime you tell someone from the community who's unhappy with local government that you work for a local government, there's an automatic, like, they don't trust you, right? They don't believe anything you say. It's politics, right? There's this perception that anything you say is disingenuous and you're just politicking to try to get them to hear what they want to hear and to get something past that's not necessarily going to benefit them. If you feel unsafe talking to the government, right, you don't wanna talk to the

CSIG Walter Wallace sets up for a photo and video workshop at the African American Museum & Library at Oakland, 2022.

"It's like a sea of issues and not a lot of hope. You know, if you're sending out your message in a bottle in that sea, it's like, why bother putting the message in the bottle when the sea is extremely rocky and I don't trust that it's ever going to get to who I'm sending it to?"

Oakland resident

This shift — refocusing from community engagement to internal learning — was important because it supported a reframing of the problem from increasing awareness of OakDOT services with residents to increasing trust, responsiveness, and accountability of OakDOT to Oakland residents.

police. You don't wanna talk to anyone who works for the City. You don't wanna fill out these surveys because you're scared, you're terrified, right? But you still have a voice. You still should be heard. This is still impacting your community."

Another resident shared about her experience in engaging with the City before the project:

"It's like a sea of issues and not a lot of hope. You know, if you're sending out your message in a bottle in that sea, it's like, why bother putting the message in the bottle when the sea is extremely rocky and I don't trust that it's ever going to get to who I'm sending it to?"

To address these challenges Walter recognized that he had to begin his project from a place of open engagement and reciprocity that would allow residents to develop trust over time, and not because the City needed something from them.

As Walter leveraged the CSIG program to build trust and engagement through filmmaking workshops and the videos, a second layer of complexity arose beyond resident awareness and trust — that is, OakDOT's accountability to deliver on its services for residents. Through resident videos, a gap was revealed between "people feeling like they're heard and the results that they're actually seeing." As residents reported concerns to 311 as a possible pathway to a solution, the results came back mixed, with some resolved quickly and others not at all.

Informed by his engagement with residents, Walter reflected:

"As a resident, we don't really care who's responsible; we just want it to get fixed. And so, to use 311 and to see what happens, I think that it can be very powerful. As a representative, if this is one of your constituents and you know, this

is on camera with them trying this out and just trying to get this thing solved and it's not solved, hopefully it'll raise some red flags to be like, 'Hey, this is something that should be addressed in the future.'"

As a result, the project shifted the focus of its attention from external, public sharing of the mini-documentaries towards internal learning to increase effective implementation based on direct resident experiences. **This shift — refocusing from community engagement to internal learning — was important because it supported a reframing of the problem from increasing awareness of OakDOT services with residents to increasing trust, responsiveness, and accountability of OakDOT to Oakland residents.**

Applying Cultural Strategy To Governance

In this section we look at how Cultural Strategists applied their legacy, experiences, and skills in music, performance, film, photography, public art, organizing, facilitation, socially engaged art, graphic arts, and more — to their collaborations with city government and community. Through the application of their practice in the inherently cross-sector space created by the program, it allowed for shifts in government practice.

Walter approached his CSIG project with a deep sense of accountability to empowering Oakland residents; his ability to engender trust and respect through his steady, warm, and approachable communications style; and his commitment to resourcing creative and professional development pathways for residents, especially youth of color, in Oakland.

Practicing Inquiry & Asking Questions

Walter emphasized the importance of growing his own understanding of the OakDOT systems and services as core to building trust while engaging with residents. In team meetings with OakDOT staff, he routinely probed assumptions and asked questions about how services, processes, and protocols worked — or didn't work.

Walter's approach was that "he's a member of the community who was trying to figure out the answers along with the community." **When some of his questions couldn't be answered, it prompted the CSIG team to engage other City staff and find ways to answer the questions, creating more connectivity and better internal understanding.** This also extended to Walter trying out the systems that they were focused on: "I started using the 311 system. And after using the system for a little bit, I started seeing some of the, let's say, cracks in the system."

This was an opportunity for City staff to begin to look at how things worked through a different lens, sparking the realization that more direct resident input and reflection were needed to better implement more responsive systems. As Walter shared, "When we started the project with our first meeting we did not have any idea what this project would look like."

This was an opportunity for City staff to begin to look at how things worked through a different lens, sparking the realization that more direct resident input and reflection were needed to better implement more responsive systems.

In this way, curiosity and inquiry were the foundations of Walter's creative practice, leading to the identification of the focus areas, revealing initial gaps that needed to be addressed, and ultimately sparking his project design for resident filmmaking workshops and mini-documentaries on 311 .

Leveraging Technical Expertise in Multimedia Storytelling and Teaching

Walter's experience in producing high-quality videos, podcasts, and other digital media provided him the flexibility to follow through on multiple resident-led productions. Walter also balanced his role as a technical expert with an accessible and professional teaching practice that built on his work as the founder of the Black Film Guild. As a result, 11 completed mini-documentaries served as high-quality content that communicated effectively with City leaders. As residents attended workshops, received technical assistance and coaching support from Walter (often with pizza!), and completed their films, many of them grew their confidence, comfort, and proficiency with storytelling and filmmaking. These new skills allowed for new pathways of civic engagement.

As Jasmine Zamora shared: *"Walter could produce all of the work and teach others how to do that. This facilitated an ease in the creation of content and opened up new avenues for residents to engage the City through their own voice and perspective, while building new skills and relationships."*

Empowering Resident Storytellers

How we communicate is cultural. As reflected in interviews for this project, many of the defined pathways for residents to engage with local government can feel unidirectional, exclusive, confusing, culturally dissonant, or even nonexistent. Acknowledging this, Walter didn't want to just encourage people to use 311. He wanted to find "a way that's actually interesting or different or fun or that can use some type of thing that you already like to do." Walter elaborated further, sharing how the video creator:

"… may not even care about OakDOT. They might not even care about City government, but you know, they might care about community, or they might care about making sure that people are represented, or they might care about telling

How we communicate is cultural. As reflected in interviews for this project, many of the defined pathways for residents to engage with local government can feel unidirectional, exclusive, confusing, culturally dissonant, or even nonexistent.

stories. And so this is a way that, if you love telling stories, well, hey, here's a story that you can connect with your local community. And it's gonna connect back to City government, even though you don't even recognize that that connection is being made."

Warmth, Reliability & Bedside Manner

In every interview conducted for Walter's project, people remarked on Walter as a person: his patience, his warmth and excitement, his willingness to help, and his consistency. These resonate with a broader finding across the Cultural Strategist program: that much of what makes CSIGs effective is their "bedside manner."[12]

Walter and participants shared heart-warming stories about sitting with people and showing them how the 311 system works; loaning video equipment; bringing food to meetings; and being respectful of people's time — all of which created ease and trust in engaging with the project. In working with his City partners, Walter requested weekly meetings to ensure a consistent and collaborative process: "I wanted to make sure that City partners felt ownership in this process while working with community."

Walter also found it important to pay everyone involved in the process: raising money to compensate the documentary creators, and hiring newly trained workshop participants to do makeup, set background, interview, and manage the production aspects of the podcast.

These resonate with a broader finding across the Cultural Strategist program: that much of what makes CSIGs effective is their "bedside manner."

Taken together, the project design choices conveyed a sense of value, respect, and trust for everyone involved. It's a powerful example of an OakDOT-affiliated project that engendered feelings in residents being seen, heard, and invested in.

Hard & Soft Impacts

Increased Community Awareness and Education around OakDOT Services:

Over 1000 residents were engaged through public workshops, videos, and the podcast. Walter encouraged residents to practice their newly-acquired skills through creating mini-documentaries about the 311 system, which many were unaware of. The podcast, which focused on the Abandoned Automobile program and its transfer from the Oakland Police Department to OakDOT as a part of "Reimagining Public Safety" (aka Defunding the Police), has been viewed over 300 times. In itself, these reflect a strong awareness and educational campaign. As one teenage participant shared: *"A lot of people saw my video, it was posted on my school page! Anyone could see it. It made me feel good to spread more awareness. And, if they're gonna watch this, they get the message I get to give and in the way I want to give it."*

Facilitated Internal Inquiry, Learning, and Systems Change within City Staff

The impact on City staff through his project reflects the potential of deeper, organic processes of community engagement and empowerment. According to one staff person, the podcast was a "beautiful example" of community members engaging directly with the Deputy City Administrator "in a way that prior to this project, I don't think was necessarily possible." **Through Walter's question asking, and through approaching community engagement in a way that supported authentic, unmitigated, and thoughtful voices, the work prompted internal realizations on how to make services more responsive and build resident trust. This resulted in shifting the outward orientation of the City disseminating information to "building awareness" towards inward inquiry about improvements in internal systems and processes.**

As Jasmine Zamora reflected: *"We shared the videos with our executive leaders to highlight what's*

happening, what the community is saying and how it's impacting our organization. The outcome definitely highlighted improvement opportunities for a more responsive government and also for establishing and maintaining trust within the community. The filmmakers actually shifted the narrative of the docuseries from a 'how to use 311' lens to a 'how to improve it so that we feel comfortable trying to use it again' lens."

Increased Resident Sense of Empowerment and Civic Confidence: Participants in the mini-doc and podcast process expressed how Walter's project increased their understanding, awareness, and sense of power in engaging with the City. For some this was the opportunity to directly engage with City leaders, Deputy City Administrator Joe DeVries or Councilmember Treva Reid, in small group conversations. Podcast participant and resident Greg Townsend shared:

"[It's] important for all of us as community members of the City of Oakland to have the opportunity to talk about the pressing issues in the City that certainly affect all of us... for that podcast, you were sitting down with the [Deputy] City Administrator who has a fair amount of sway and pull in the City and it was this intimate hour in the public sphere."

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For mini-doc creators and workshop participants, this also included the strengthening of technical skills: *"I'm able to record a video, edit a video together, put a little sound in the background... all of that I wasn't able to do last year."*

Perhaps most impactful was the opportunity to put together a video that the creators knew was going to get seen and heard. One young person shared: "I feel more empowered because I was able to put something I already knew into physical form for other people." A teacher working with the students engaged in the program reflected on the importance of strengthening civic understanding as a form of agency and shift in self awareness:

"It made it possible for students to see a light at the end of the tunnel and not just feel hopeless. There's a lot of awareness that East Oakland is full of things not being fixed. But seeing the students learn that they have a voice in going through steps like reporting it and getting it taken care of — it was cool to see the students see if it's not an emergency and nobody's dying, it doesn't mean I just have to ignore it. I can still do things to handle it. — Sydney, Oakland resident and high school teacher

Revisiting the "Why" of Community Engagement

By approaching community engagement in an organic, service-oriented, and accountable way, and by encouraging residents to describe their direct experiences with department services through media and storytelling, the OakDOT CSIG team took some big risks. As a result they prompted a deeper inquiry and accountability around the purpose, the "why" of community engagement. Instead of only focusing on "educating the public," the team's work created an approach that resulted as much in the learning of City workers as residents. Jasmine Zamora reflected on her learnings from the project: "I was very confident; just send this request here and it'll get done within six months. And only to learn that sometimes it's not always how it happened. It was revealing to me. I was living on cloud nine, thinking that everything worked great and the way that it was supposed to. And sometimes things got broken along the way in terms of communication. That was very enlightening. It made me want to do things differently."

As a public relations professional who has worked on government projects in the past, Walter is well aware of the pitfalls of traditional modes of community engagement. Using the flexibility of the CSIG program and his team's commitment to creating an equitable engagement process, he was intentional about offering a new model — one which can be adapted and replicated for OakDOT and other departments in the future:

> "[With public projects,] the outreach can't start until the funds are allocated. The problem with that is that you're coming into the community and you're asking them to give their input, or come and put little stickies on a board, or come to look at the posters that are set up at these community meetings, but you're only doing it when you want something in return. There's no development of

> that trust. You're not building that relationship out. After that's done, you don't really see them the same way anymore. And so that's the thing that I want to break down and kind of build out. And that's why I love the CSIG program, because it gives you that time to build the trust. So for

... They prompted a deeper inquiry and accountability around the purpose, the "why" of community engagement. Instead of only focusing on "educating the public," the team's work created an approach that resulted as much in the learning of City workers as residents.

> me, all the workshops that we did throughout the entire year were all free. You can ask any questions that you have about filmmaking and photography. And then if you want to, you can participate in a mini-documentary."

Love Life in Practice
Envisioning What Love in Government Can Look Like

City Partner

Citywide Communications

The Citywide Communications and Engagement Division is part of the City Administrator's Office. The Office ensures that all Oaklanders have access to the information that they need to participate in City programs and services, and the opportunity to shape the policies and programs that impact their everyday lives.

Cultural Strategist

Kev Choice

Kev Choice is an Oakland raised musician, activist, educator, composer, band leader, and Oakland Cultural Affairs Commissioner. His music combines his classical training, heavy roots in hip-hop, wit and conscious lyricism, to bring a positive and inspiring message to his unique blend of hip-hop, jazz, classical, R&B and soul. Kev has worked and toured the world with the likes of Michael Franti & Spearhead, Goapele, Ledisi, Zion I, Too Short, Souls of Mischief, and The Coup. He served as music director for Ms. Lauryn Hill in 2007. As a performer, Kev has played at events for Barack Obama, Bernie Sanders, as well as Black Panther Party 50th Anniversary Gala, to shows at San Quentin Prison. He teaches at Oakland School for the Arts, where he is the co-chair of the Instrumental Music department.

"In times of deep, deep divides in our society we are so lucky to have the love acknowledgement that Kev Choice created through this formal position in the City of Oakland. It's important to remember what Kev talks about in this acknowledgement: what brings us together versus what separates us, the things that we all care about, and the commonality."

Councilmember Carroll Fife, District 3

Project Description

Kev Choice worked with the Citywide Communications and Engagement Division to amplify and uplift the City of Oakland's motto: "Oakland Love Life." Adopted in 2016 by the City Council via efforts spearheaded by Donald Lacy — whose daughter LoEshé Lacy was killed as an innocent bystander in Oakland in 1997 — the Love Life motto was not well recognized by residents nor City staff. Perhaps most importantly, it hadn't been put to use in guiding government practice. Kev's vision was to honor, uplift, and connect the City's efforts to Donald Lacy's ongoing work with the Love Life Foundation, while creating engagement, resonance, and adoption of the motto through a host of cultural activities that could center love in the City government, in the community at large, and in the relationships between the two. **Kev applied his experience in creating powerful, immersive, communal experiences through music, his deep community relationships, and his passion for Oakland, in order to animate the Love Life motto in the City.** As a result, Kev's work led to a Love Life Acknowledgement (a short statement, see page 18, that can be read at the opening of city meetings, an official Love Life Day and Week, and opportunities for connection across City departments and offices to explore the motto. Love Life has begun to take on organic and varied forms throughout the City — including community partnerships and Love Life-themed grants from community organizations.

Why Was the CSIG Invited In?

Members of City Commissions and Boards listen to speakers describing CSIG Kev Choice's work to activate the City motto, Love Life Oakland, 2023. Photo by Darius Riley AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

At a public meeting about safety and healing from violence, organized by Kev for Love Life Week, one of the panelists asked the assembled audience, "Who feels like the City of Oakland loves them?" In response, no one raised their hand.

Is love even something that has a place in government? Can an institution as large and as seemingly impersonal as Oakland's city government show love?

The City adopted the Love Life motto as a counternarrative to gun violence that disproportionately impacts Black and Latino residents.[13] Kev frequently reminded people in public events and

Is love even something that has a place in government? Can an institution as large and as seemingly impersonal as Oakland's city government show love?

conversations that Love Life also means eliminating all of the constraints that prevent Oakland residents from living life fully. As the opening line of the Love Life Acknowledgement reads; *"We acknowledge and uplift the City's chosen motto 'Love Life' as we denounce violence in all forms and the conditions that create violence."* Love Life also means centering love in how policies are created, how laws are passed, and how the City holds difficult conversations around homelessness, violence, poverty, and other major issues. The activation of the Love Life motto presented an opportunity to imagine new practices of governance that centered love in a time of budget cuts, housing insecurity, conversations about the future identity of the City, and public safety. To begin, the Communications and Engagement Division recognized that for Love Life to come to life in this context, it needed "to be rooted in the community in order to gain any traction. The community needs to feel ownership over this."

Kev faced significant challenges in creating this type of ownership over the motto: **in the 2022 Oakland City Survey only 3% of residents**

strongly approved of the job local government is doing, while 63% disapproved overall. But Kev reflected that despite this reality: "For the most part, constituents, community, they want to trust the government because there's so many things that are reliant upon the government's functionality." This desire for trust is buoyed by Kev's understanding that people in Oakland do indeed love Oakland; they want their city and community to win. As his role progressed, Kev found that City staff want to help the community but they are overwhelmed and slowed down by a lack of capacity, risk capital, and layered bureaucratic processes. As a trusted community member and artist with experience navigating government processes (from his time as an Cultural Affairs Commissioner and in supporting the Department of Race & Equity), Kev stepped into bridge many of these gaps, outlining a vision for how to ground Love Life in community ownership and initiating shifts in how the motto shows up in government practice.

Applying Cultural Strategy to Governance

In this section we look at how Cultural Strategists applied their legacy, experiences, and skills in music, performance, film, photography, public art, organizing, facilitation, socially engaged art, graphic arts, and more. Through the application of their practice in the inherently cross-sector space created by the program, it allowed for shifts in government practice.

Kev's long standing track-record and respect in Oakland featured heavily in his ability to bridge between government and community around Love Life. As a musician who has continued to push the role and possibilities of music in the Black freedom struggle and social change efforts, Kev also brought' these methods and legacy in informing how the City could approach its work around Love Life.

A Trusted Actor

Kev's engagement approach was driven by his deep cultural resonance and relationships across Oakland community and government spaces. As Kev reflected:

"I think a lot of the value that I may add, number one, is that people know that I'm actually from this community. I was raised by this community. I grew up in this community. I was educated by this community. I've also given back to this community in many different ways as an educator, as an artist, as an activist, even as a father. So I've shown and built that connection, that relationship, that trust, just through my actions, just through my presence over the years. It's almost like the equity of being a community member and being indebted to the community."

This was reflected in the care Kev took with growing the possibilities of Love Life to a citywide scale while simultaneously honoring and tying it back to its source: Donald Lacy's efforts to promote Love Life in Oakland on behalf of his daughter. **Kev also understood the complexities of encouraging uptake and socialization of a motto rooted in** love, within historically marginalized communities that have experienced harm within the city. While this may not have shifted people's relationship or trust of City government directly, Kev's approach opens up a model for how the City might build that trust over time, while also creating new connections and proximity for people who trust Kev but don't have any connection, or only negative experiences with the City.

> "I was raised by this community. I grew up in this community. I was educated by this community. I've also given back to this community in many different ways as an educator, as an artist, as an activist, even as a father. So I've shown and built that connection, that relationship, that trust, just through my actions, just through my presence over the years. It's almost like the equity of being a community member and being indebted to the community."
>
> Kev Choice, Culture Strategist

Listening (like a musician)

Musicians, and especially group-based musicians, learn how to listen. They know how to listen for what's there, as well as the spaces in between, for what's not there. Without that skill, there is no harmony, no stepping up or back for solos, no resonance and building of energy. Kev began his CSIG collaboration with listening: "I started by getting community input and creating content about what Love Life meant to them, then I started having conversations with City staff around Love Life." By contrast, reciprocal listening is not what Citywide Communications is tasked with doing. It is the messaging and dissemination arm of the City, directed to get information outward as a way to inform and educate the public.

For Kev, deep listening was an essential practice that also reflected the deeper ethos of Love Life:

"The more that the City can create a space to show that we're listening, that we're actually really caring, and have compassion for the issues that people are going through [the more we can spread Love Life]. And not looking at it like, this is data or a number, or that's something that we can't really fix at this moment because we don't have the money, but really just saying, 'You know what? I hear your concerns. I care for you. I'm gonna do my best to show how we can help you through whatever situation you're dealing with.' I feel like a lot of times it's just that basic human level of showing compassion and love versus like, 'Okay this is my job, I have to pass a resolution before I can even help you.'"

This was reflected in Kev's focus on creating spaces for collaborative input, sharing, and celebration through Love Life Day, a Boards and Commissions Appreciation event (the first of its kind), a shared interdepartmental effort to feed over 600 unhoused people, a community healing summit, and a community healing circle during Love Life Week.

Engaging Arts, Culture and Ritual within Government Practices

As a musician who plays in a wide array of spaces — community, social justice, religious, and educational — Kev is acutely aware of the ways that the proceedings of a gathering can strengthen or deny belonging. He reflected on his practice as a musician: "Being an artist who goes into sacred spaces, I know how we always start off in a certain way to create a space to heal, to be open, to be compassionate. And that's something that I feel like the City government could learn from." **City processes are often characterized as dry, depersonalized, and intimidating, or just not resonant. This is often reinforced by how City proceedings appear to exclude cultural expression from government practices, which is in**

City processes are often characterized as dry, depersonalized, and intimidating, or just not resonant. This is often reinforced by how City proceedings appear to exclude cultural expression from government practices, which is in fact a re-emphasis of dominant cultural norms. These norms can combine to create a sense of disbelonging and exclusion.

CSIG Kev Choice (second from left) with City Officials including Council Member Carroll Fife (center) and Deputy Mayor Dr. Kimberly Mayfield (second from right), 2023.

fact a re-emphasis of dominant cultural norms. These norms can combine to create a sense of disbelonging and exclusion.

As one City staff shared:

"Even in the format of how we set up the formal process for meetings, where we have a dais and we have a gate and the community can come up and give their two minutes of testimony towards a particular thing. They're not the most engaging spaces, right? And they often create contention or this feeling of us versus them. And so the love acknowledgement to me creates an intention around the fact that we are all here because we love this community, we care about this community, and we want the best for the community that we're here to serve. And so just saying that and taking a moment at the beginning of every meeting to root ourselves in that intention, I think, that goes a long way in creating that space that is really inclusive and respectful for all. It starts to build up that muscle memory."

Kev said, **"I feel like we almost need music and ritual at every single meeting. You know, to create a space of healing, to create a space of openness emotionally. Like how are we bringing in our different traditional rituals, cultures into a City space or to a government space."** This recognition of the disconnect between this type of culture (music and ritual) and government opened the door for a cultural shift. This was operationalized through the creation of the Love Life Acknowledgement, a piece that Kev conceptualized and wrote, and that he and others began to read at the opening of City Council meetings, the Mayor's inauguration, and the Mayor's State of the City Address.

Hard & Soft Impacts

The Love Life Acknowledgement

Kev developed a "Love Life Acknowledgement" as a resource that can be used at the opening of City proceedings, including City Council meetings. The Love Life Acknowledgement aims to shift the practice of government by reminding people of deeper goals rooted in love, a word and concept that are often excluded from government spaces. Kev has encouraged and supported other people to continue reading the acknowledgement at meetings despite the ending of his time as a CSIG.

Buttons, signs and the photo wall in use at various events. The Oakland Love Life logo was created as part of Kev's partnership with Citywide Communications. Photos by Darius Riley AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

Amplification of Love Life at Scale

Kev's activation of Love Life reached thousands of Oakland residents in person and digitally, significantly raising the visibility and engagement with the City's motto. The primary vessels for this were Love Life Day and Love Life Week — which coincide annually with the anniversary of LoEshé Lacy's murder (Oct. 20) — and the reading of the Love Life Acknowledgement at public proceedings. Love Life Day culminated in a free concert of Oakland musicians at City Hall, and awards given to Oakland residents who further Love Life in their work or life. Love Life Week involved a range of activities that demonstrated Love Life in action: a day of service where over 600 meals were distributed by a cross-departmental team of City staff to unhoused people in partnership with City's Department of Violence Prevention, a community healing summit with the Office of the Inspector General, and a healing circle developed through partnering with the organization Restorative Justice for Oak-

land Youth. A result of these activities, alongside the ongoing advocacy of Donald Lacy's Love Life Foundation, has supported organic uptake of the motto. For example, there is now a billboard at the Oakland Airport ("it's the first thing people see when they come to Oakland"), forthcoming murals focused on Love Life initiated by Councilmember Reid's Office in District 7, and a Love Life funding opportunity for Oakland artists launched by the Oakland-based organization Center for Cultural Power.

Expanding Resident Love Life Messengers

Kev created numerous ways for people to take on the mantle of Love Life and interpret it through their own life and work. For example at Love Life Day, the four people who received the Love Life Award in 2023 and Keys to the City in 2022 can now see and claim their work in relation to the City's motto. Oakland's poet laureate Ayodele Nzinga was commissioned to create a poem interpreting and responding to the motto. By involving organizational partners such as RJOY, TRYBE, and

Deputy Mayor Dr. Kimberly Mayfield presents a Love Life Hero Award to Michelle La Place-Watts of Catholic Charities of the East Bay. The other 2023 awardees were Annette Miller (Hoover Foster Resident Action Council), Jessica Segura (The Khadafy Washington Project) and Brianna Manning (Urban Peace Movement). Photos by Darius Riley AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

Visit Oakland, all of the City Commissioners, and other City departments, more organizations now have direct awareness of the motto and concrete ways to activate it in their own work.

Shifting how Government Approaches its Work

Kev left behind concrete outcomes and resources that for City staff, electeds, and residents to relate in different ways. As interim Communications Director Nicole Neditch reflected: "So much of the work that we do in Communications is responsive. It's responsive to things that are happening with the city, and a lot of it is really negative, there's a lot of hard issues that we're working through as a city and as a community. And so working with Kev on really centering love and thinking about all of the amazing and beautiful things that are happening in Oakland and the community that's coming together to make those things happen, it's the best part of my work right now." Tina Risker, Digital Strategy and Innovation Officer continued about the impact of working with Kev: **"It shapes the way I think about digital engagement because we are always informing and pushing out messaging. But really what people want to know is like, 'I'm listening,' you know, 'I'm here.'"**

Kev also intentionally created **"opportunity and environment for City departments to collaborate with each other, which sadly, doesn't happen often enough."** This included the first ever Boards and Commissions Appreciation event at City Hall as well as events like the day of service. As Kev reflected: "One of the biggest things for me was the day of service. All the departments [Neighborhood Services Division, Mayor's Office, Office of the Inspector General, Department of Violence Prevention, and City Administrator's Office] met together on East 12th before they went out to give out the meals. This is what I wanted that role to do, bring government together to serve the city, all under this banner of Love Life."

And while Kev left a blueprint and tools for the City to continue the work, the implementation challenges are real. One of Kev's persistent reflections was the overwhelm faced by his City partners and their limited capacity (during Kev's time as a CSIG, the office saw three different directors and had a staff of 3-5 people running communications for the entire City). Similarly, staff recognized significant bureaucratic hurdles — such as payment to musicians and partners — that directly constrained the City's ability to engage and maintain trusting relationships.

> **And while City partners recognized how they "benefited off of his connections, community engagement and leadership," Kev pushed this further by creating muscle memory and opportunities for the City to shift their approach through the many engagements created during his time as a CSIG.**

CONCLUSION

Love as a Risk in Government

For four years, the City of Oakland had claimed the motto of Love Life, but hadn't been able to activate or animate it fully. **Without Kev's bridging and unconventional approach — informed by his experience as a musician — Love Life could have come off as a "toxic positivity" marketing ploy in the face of a post-pandemic period marked by rising homelessness, displacement, and homicides. Instead, Kev served as an "ambassador and an advocate for the City" because of his relationships. And while City partners recognized how they "benefited off of his connections, community engagement and leadership," Kev pushed this further by creating muscle memory and opportunities for the City to shift their approach through the many engagements created during his time as a CSIG.** For Kev, a relational approach is essential to opening new channels of connection. He explained: "There are people out here who are doing work in every arena that the City is doing work. So how are we supporting those people that are already doing this work, creating genuine relationships, providing more access for them to even learn more about how the City works and also for the City to learn how these organizations work?"

Though nascent, this also points towards a cultural shift — from top down to a supportive and collaborative relationship — in activating Love Life in ways that impact people's lives. Tina Risker reflected:

"It breaks down a lot of the walls that we've built. We're ready to continue building when we're in those spaces, because often people are coming in as us versus them. Instead, it feels like, even though we're not sitting in a circle in those rooms, it feels a little more like, okay, for that one moment, we are all here together to try to figure out solutions, especially when it comes from someone like Kev, who is a bridger of the community because he's comfortable in both environments and respected in both environments. We want more Kevs in the world for sure, but it's uplifting to hear that everyone has that mutual respect for the love acknowledgement, which makes it a little safer of a place to say what you want to say."

CSIG Kev Choice with attendees at a Love Life event. Photo by Darius Riley AKA Hour Voyses, courtesy of Citywide Communications.

Appendix

practice shifts, or prototypes that could contribute to systems change. Ongoing consistency in the program will allow for tracking over time, which is essential for capturing the full impact of the CSIG projects. Second, the research process did not have capacity to measure broad impacts on res-idents. Much of what was initiated remains nascent and overall program resources meant it didn't have consistent visibility in the community. As the program grows, gathering broader feedback and conducting impact evaluation will be extremely important.

Research Methodology & Guiding Questions

Guiding Questions for Research & Documentation

- What happened in Cycle 2 (2021-2023) of the CSIG program?
- What kinds of approaches, practices, sensi-bilities, and skills from CSIGs brought value to their City partnerships and projects?
- What was supportive about the CSIG partner-ships? What was challenging?
- Did CSIGs contribute to more equitable, effective, and culturally resonant government practices? If so, how? If not, how?

What were the outcomes, promises, and possibili-ties of CSIG projects? Do they relate to or advance the goals of Oakland's Cultural Development Plan around equity and belonging? Did they advance Oakland's ordinance to integrate the principles of "fair and just" in all the City does? If yes, how? If not, how?

Research Process & Data

The research team and authors of this report gath-ered data and findings from the following process-es with Oakland residents, City employees, City officials, and Cultural Strategists:

- 32 interviews
- 30 surveys
- 20 in-person observations of CSIG and City project activations, gatherings, meetings, con-venings, presentations, and events
- Numerous informal conversations
- An internal field scan and literature review of comparable City-based programs in the areas of arts and culture, equity, and belonging

Participant and External Review for the Report

Report Form: The report primarily uses narrative to examine these guiding questions. The Executive Summary encapsulates the high-level themes, recommendations and tensions emerging across the partnerships. The Mosaic Interviews — compiled from the breadth of the research data — represent composite perspectives of the three key stakeholder groups (Cultural Strategists, City employees, and residents). The four Project Deep Dives provide a more in-depth analysis of the what, how, and impacts of featured projects. While all Cycle 2 projects are described and represent-ed across the report, the four featured projects were selected as a representative sample across the cohort with considerations on diversity in: demographics; types of arts and cultural strategy approaches (photography and film, public art, community development, music); type and mo-dality of partnerships; ranges in experimentation with trust, risk-taking, relationship-building, and resident empowerment; as well as ranges in types of issues and civic problems being addressed. The appendix includes an overview of the research methodology, along with process and a selected bibliography.

This is deliberately *not* a programmatic evaluation report, and does not include program impact data or recommendations for program implementation or improvement purposes for the CSIG program, or other programs like it.

Limitations: There are two primary limitations. First, this report represents an immediate, rather than long-term assessment of Cycle 2 of a new, pilot program. To that end, much of what has been named relates to seeds planted, early mindset and

Individual Interviews

Cultural Strategists-in-Government (Program Year 2022-2023)

1. Celia Peters (African American Museum and Library of Oakland)
2. Kev Choice (Citywide Communications & Engagement Division)
3. Maddy Clifford (Environmental Services Division/Oakland Public Works)
4. Sorell Raino-Tsui (Public Art Program)
5. Tanisha Cannon (Office of City Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas)
6. Umi Vaughn (Department of Violence Prevention)
7. Walter Wallace (Department of Transportation)

Department of Cultural Affairs Staff & Consultants

1. Vanessa Whang (Program Manager)
2. Roberto Bedoya (Cultural Affairs Division Manager)

Participating CSIG Staff of City Agencies & Departments

1. Cinthya Muñoz Ramos, Chief of Staff, District 2
2. Councilmember Carroll Fife, District 3
3. Emily Ehler, Transportation Manager, Department of Transportation
4. Jasmine Zamona, Executive Assistant, Department of Transportation
5. Joe DeVries, Deputy City Administrator
6. Kristin Zaremba, Public Art Coordinator
7. Nicole Neditch interim Director, Citywide Communications
8. Tina Risker, Digital Strategy and Innovation Officer, Citywide Communications
9. Gregory Minor, Assistant to the City Administrator

Oakland Residents & CSIG Project Participants

1. Greg Townshend
2. Sydney Barnett
3. Habeeb Tiamiyu
4. Lisa Kerr
5. Sam Mendenhall
6. JadaMarie Thomas
7. Cinque Mubarak
8. Kalani Ware
9. Bud Snow
10. Rachel Wolfe-Goldsmith
11. Stephanie Dennis
12. Shido
13. Tallulah Terryll
14. Zoe Boston
15. Artist focus group — Julio Rodriguez, Qiana Ellis, Timothy B, Terrion Smith

Resources

The following is a curated list of resources that can provide better understanding of the broader field of arts, cultural strategies, and creative practice in government and the theoretical approaches that informed this report:

About the Field

LA County Creative Strategist Webinar
Perspectives from artists and government partners with concrete examples and learnings from 2018-2023 (see webinar at bit.ly/LACountyCreative)

LA County Creative Strategist Evaluation
Includes an introductory history of government artist residencies and six project profiles (see LA County evaluation at bit.ly/LACountyCreativeEval)

Municipal-Artist Partnerships: Relationship Guide
from Animating Democracy and A Blade of Grass Includes case studies and helpful "how-to" guide for municipalities developing similar programs

Boston Artist-in-Residence Evaluation
Project profiles of artists-in-residence and overall program impacts

Creative Citymaking - Minneapolis Program Evaluation
Evaluation focused on program implementation and outcomes (see Minneapolis evaluation at bit.ly/CreativeCityMN)

PolicyLink's Working With Artists to Deepen Impact
Research and documentation about cultural strategies used in community development and planning processes from ArtPlace America's Community Development Investments initiative (see resource at bit.ly/PolicyLinkartists)

Arts & Democracy Building Bridges
A compilation of conversations between cross-sector arts and culture practitioners (see compilation at bit.ly/bridgeconvos)

About Oakland

Belonging in Oakland, A Cultural Development Plan: The guiding document for the Cultural Affairs Division and the conceptual foundation for the Oakland CSIG program (see Cultural Plan at bit.ly/BelongOak)

Municipal Code that created the Department of Race and Equity: In 2015 the City of Oakland passed an ordinance that mandated the integration of the principle of "fair and just." This ordinance guides the Cultural Plan's statement that "Equity is the Driving Force".

Oakland Community Survey (2022): Survey of residents and their experiences and perspectives on the City Government.

Oakland Equity Indicators Report - (2018): Survey of indicators that show Oakland's achievement of equity.

Selected Theoretical Framing

Lisa Garcia Bedolla and Melissa R. Michelson. *Mobilizing Inclusion: Transforming the Electorate through GOTV Campaigns* — Speaks to the role of culture, identity and relational engagement in strengthening civic engagement.

Charles Mills. *The Racial Contract* — Philosophical text on the foundational exclusions of American government, the role of white supremacy in maintaining this, and the underpinning of a racialized experience of government trust/distrust and belonging/disbelonging.

Edouard Glissant on the *Right to Opacity* — Speaks to the importance of recognizing the limitations of hierarchical processes that are recreated in cross-cultural communication. In the context of understanding community engagement, the framework of "right to opacity" asks who and what must change to allow for communication' awareness' and transparency. (read more at bit.ly/glissantopacity)

Roberto Bedoya. *Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Disbelonging* — Speaks to the role of culture in creating belonging and disbelonging in placemaking. Identifies the tension and interaction between residents in producing this within larger state processes that shape the material conditions of resident lives, often around race, ethnicity, and class. (Read more at bit.ly/belong-disbelong)

Elinor Ostrom. *Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy and Development* — Names the process by which the public and the state "co-produce" new civic outcomes and practices.

Endnotes

1   Throughout this report, "City" with an uppercase C has been used to refer to City government, and "city" with a lowercase c has been used to refer to the city of Oakland.

2   Vanessa Whang. *Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan*. Cultural Affairs Division, City of Oakland. 2018.

3   "In 2015, the City of Oakland adopted a bold ordinance that states explicitly the government's will to integrate "the principle of 'fair and just' in all the City does in order to achieve equitable opportunities for all people and communities" on a Citywide basis." Vanessa Whang. *Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan*. Cultural Affairs Division, City of Oakland. 2018. (8)

4   BIPOC is used throughout this report to refer to Black, Indigenous and people of color

5   Pacita Rudder worked with the Sustainability & Resilience Division and Cheo Tyehimba Taylor worked with AssistHub and the Mayor's office. Rudder participated in many of the Mellon-funded cohort activities and so is included in this report.

6   See: https://www.oaklandca.gov/documents/equity-indicators-community-briefing-documents

7   See the Department's Accomplishment Report, which includes core strategies here: https://cao-94612.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/20-22-Accomplishment-Report_FINAL_2.pdf

8   Critical Whiteness Studies aims to examine the invisible role of whiteness in shaping the continuation of racial inequality.

9   Intimate Inquiry: A Love-Based Approach to Qualitative Research by Crystal T Laura, Chicago State University. See https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1114637.pdf

10   In a survey of vendors conducted by Tanisha, foot-traffic and safety were primary concerns, both of which were compromised at the El Embarcadero location.

11   These have also been met with popular resistance. For example the Arab Spring was sparked by an act of self-immolation by the Tunisian fruit vendor Mohammed Bouazizi.

12   Bedside manner is a term that comes out of the medical field and refers to how doctors or nurses relate with patients and how they make patients feel seen and heard — not just the technical, diagnostic, or problem-solving skills they use for treatment.

13   Clayton, Abené, "Inside the San Francisco Bay Area's pandemic murder surge: 'No one knows this pain but us.'" The Guardian; Sept. 28, 2021. Accessed via: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/sep/28/san-francisco-bay-area-gun-violence-murders-2020

Oakland Love Life day,
2022. Photo by Darius
Riley AKA Hour Voyses,
courtesy of Citywide
Communications.

In an 18-month period, the Cultural Strategists-in-Government Program engaged over 10,000 Oaklanders and City staff and generated over 1.1 million dollars in direct income to Oakland residents, while simultaneously fostering shifts in government practices and outcomes that increased civic engagement and empowerment, trust-building, risk-taking, and equity.

Mellon Foundation

CITY OF OAKLAND

Oakland Fund for Public Innovation