



CULTURE IS KEY



Strengthening Rhode Island's Civic Health
Through Cultural Participation



RHODE ISLAND
COUNCIL *for the* HUMANITIES



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ELIZABETH FRANCIS,
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RHODE ISLAND COUNCIL
FOR THE HUMANITIES

FOREWORD

The infrastructure of civil society in America is at risk, but I believe it can be built anew for a better future. Renewing civil society means strengthening everyone’s ability to participate in democracy and community. Crucially, it also means confronting difference, division, and disparities in a forward looking way and having what Angela Glover Blackwell, Founder in Residence at PolicyLink, calls the “stinging conversations.”

At a moment of profound change in public consciousness of the narrative of American history and realignment of how the nation grapples with its complexity through commemoration and legacy, strong engagement with history and culture is urgent. This transformational time has underscored the essential roles that culture, humanities, and arts play in civic life — and also the need to amplify and invest in these sectors.

At the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, we strive to activate the humanities to insist on this complexity, and we have been connecting the humanities to civic life for nearly 50 years. We are fortunate to work with a vibrant community of people and organizations through grants, partnerships, and initiatives.

The initiative discussed in this report — *Culture Is Key: Strengthening Rhode Island’s Civic Health Through Cultural Participation* — was born out of our belief that engagement with culture and the humanities strengthens civic health. Rhode Island needs to do more to recognize, value, and invest in the organizations that create those opportunities.

Over the course of the past 18 months, we have learned so much from, been excited and often moved to tears by, and inspired to act by the passion and commitment of those who contributed their insights and experiences to *Culture Is Key*.

This work is ongoing, and we hope you are inspired too. Onward!



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth Francis".

ELIZABETH FRANCIS, PHD
Executive Director

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Deteriorating civic life in America poses many risks to participatory democracy. Significant books and reports document inequities in civic education, decreases in rates of voting, political polarization, declining involvement in civic associations and trust in civic institutions, and threats to local journalism (see *Appendix: Resources* on p. 40).

The *Culture Is Key* report focuses on the potential to help renew civic life through the practices of cultural organizations in communities. If democracy depends on citizen connectedness and understanding, as most civic policy positions claim, then more attention should be paid to the collective contributions that cultural organizations make to these connections and understandings in the communities they serve.

The *Culture Is Key* report summarizes and analyzes an 18-month inquiry into connections between civic health — as defined by community participation and community well-being — and the public activities of nonprofit cultural organizations. In working with pilot project teams, soliciting survey responses, and conducting in-depth interviews, the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities' goal has been to connect what cultural organizations *already* do to existing indicators of civic health. Five key themes and potential next steps emerged.

1. IMPACT: Cultural organizations make a positive impact on Rhode Island's civic health through their public-facing activities.



NEXT STEP: Identifying, strengthening, and evaluating these impacts—efforts to which this report seeks to contribute—would make this work more visible and better resourced.

2. SUSTAINED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: To strengthen civic health, cultural organizations must genuinely invite and sustain engagement with their local communities.



NEXT STEP: Support and amplify cultural organizations' existing community-engaged practices, and provide resources for cultural organizations seeking to strengthen their community engagement.

3. SHARED COMMITMENT WITH JOURNALISTS: Cultural organizations and journalists have a shared commitment to supporting informed and dynamic community discourses, but this potential is in large part unrealized in Rhode Island.



NEXT STEP: Nurture the natural points of collaboration between journalists and cultural organizations around community storytelling, as well as shared work on clarifying and focusing dialogues, and correcting misinformation and broadening perspectives.

4. SECTOR-WIDE CHALLENGES: Cultural organizations face challenges to focusing on civic health as a result of institutional cultures that don't support this work; limited financial resources; and limited staff capacity.



NEXT STEP: A shared framework that includes indicators of civic health and measurable outcomes could create positive, tangible demonstrations of impact and platforms for advocacy.

5. PARTNERSHIP: By working in partnership with one another and outside the sector, cultural organizations can share resources, generate new perspectives and ideas, and positively affect civic health in their communities. However, working in partnership requires time, energy, and resources dedicated to shared visioning and coordination.



NEXT STEP: Developing a shared sector-wide understanding of civic health impact, as well as greater incentives and resources dedicated towards supporting partnerships, can facilitate partnerships that directly strengthen civic health.

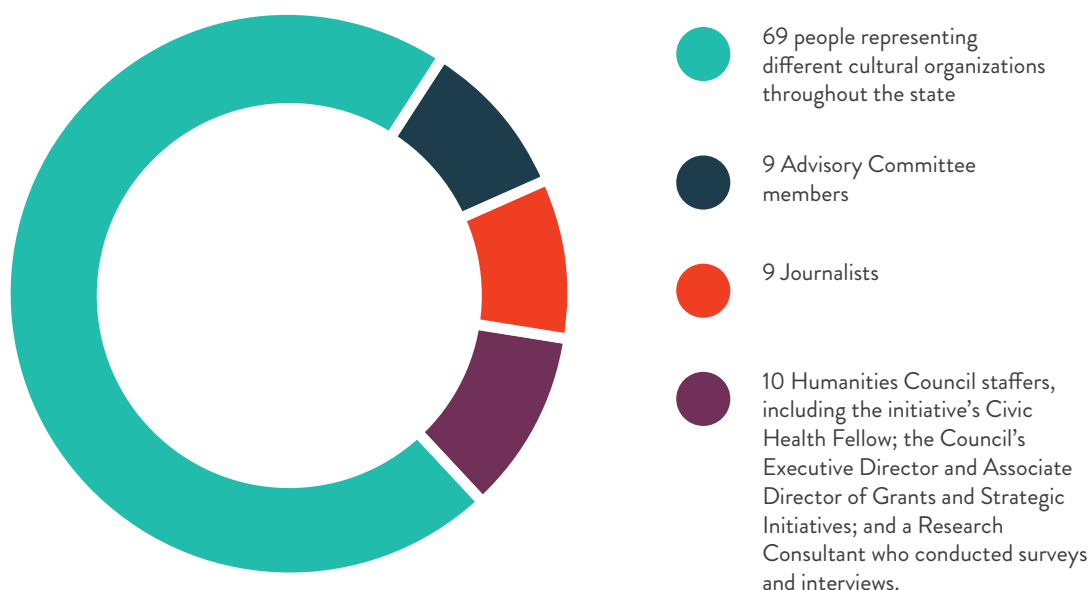
Look for the colored arrows throughout the report for references to possible next steps!

The *Culture Is Key* report includes a discussion of:

- how the team conceptualized the connection between civic health and cultural organizations;
- an overview of the components of the project;
- a summary and analysis of the survey and interviews with a broad group of cultural organizations;
- a synthesis of the activities, outcomes, and perspectives of the pilot project teams;
- as well as several appendices with more information.

Our hope is that you will recognize the value of the cultural experiences you have had through organizations in your community, and be inspired to contribute to the renewal of civil society through culture, humanities, and arts.

Nearly 100 people participated in *Culture Is Key*, including:



The Humanities Council is grateful for the support of the Rhode Island Foundation as well as the *Democracy and the Informed Citizen* Initiative of the Federation of State Humanities Councils and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.



Why Connect Civic Health and Cultural Organizations?

Over the nearly 50 years since the founding of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities Council as the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Council has supported a wide variety of organizations in engaging the public through the humanities. We *implicitly* have understood that cultural engagement at places like libraries, museums, historic sites, theaters and community centers enhances the lives of Rhode Islanders. It produces outcomes that include creating knowledge, encouraging interpretation, building empathy, and sparking dialogue. *Culture Is Key* took steps toward *explicitly* identifying and documenting civic health activities and outcomes reported by cultural organizations that positively contribute to civic health.

WHAT IS CIVIC HEALTH?

According to the National Conference on Citizenship, a Congressionally commissioned organization that conducts civic health indexes across the country, civic health is a measurement of two things: the extent of community participation in the civic/public sphere; and overall community well-being (see *Appendix: Resources* on p. 40). Civic health reflects the degree to which people participate in their communities, from local and state governance to interactions with friends or family. Civic health also relates to the overall well-being of neighborhoods, communities, states, and the nation, which depends on myriad dimensions of civic life.

WHY USE THE FRAMEWORK OF CIVIC HEALTH TO DOCUMENT THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS?

Existing frameworks for civic health don't necessarily measure the impact of cultural participation, nor do they recognize cultural organizations for their role as civic institutions.

There is extensive research that seeks to measure civic health impact in a variety of dimensions and fields, including well-being, community development, economic impact, placemaking, civic engagement and education, and social equity. *Culture Is Key* drew upon this body of work to identify established civic health indicators and potential outcomes relevant to the contributions that cultural organizations make to the civic health of the state. Selected resources are included at the end of this report (see *Appendix: Resources* on p. 40).

Definitions of civic participation tend to focus on governmental processes like voting and census participation, due to the critical role they play in the health and functioning of democracy. This type of participation is relatively easy for researchers to see and measure. Cultural organizations can and do contribute to more straightforward components of civic participation; for example, artists, faith leaders, and public scholars played substantial roles in encouraging voting in the 2020 election in Rhode Island. At the same time, many cultural organizations highlighted the importance of going beyond voting in order to include all community





members in civic life, as many Rhode Islanders do not have access to electoral participation due to their age, ability, citizenship status, incarceration history, or other factors. Thus, *Culture Is Key* worked with an expanded meaning of civic participation that included activities beyond governmental processes.

WHAT IS A CULTURAL ORGANIZATION?

By using the phrase “cultural organization,” the *Culture Is Key* initiative sought to break down distinctions between the missions and functions of humanities and arts organizations—which are often separated in literature and practice—in order to see common connections to civic health through the lens of culture. There are many studies and reports that document the impact of arts on civic life, but they have often excluded humanities-based work and organizations. The *Culture Is Key* initiative sought to make the humanities sector’s contributions to civic life more apparent and to bring together arts and humanities under the umbrella of organizations that encourage cultural participation. Both physically and programmatically, cultural organizations frequently function as extensions of the public square — in other words, as sites of participation. In museum galleries, historic houses, theaters, and libraries — and now Zoom rooms, parks, and parking lots — community members interact with each other and encounter, together, complex ideas and questions centered on the human experience. Cultural organizations curate these interactions and encounters to encourage interpersonal connections and transform them into critical communal discourse.

Rhode Island has a shockingly high number of nonprofit cultural, humanities, and arts organizations — estimated to be at least 1,000 in a state that is 48 miles long and 37 miles wide — as well as 50 public

and membership libraries. There is also great variety in public-facing activities — walking tours, exhibitions, storytelling events, documentary film screenings, heritage festivals, maker spaces and so much more — that tend to differentiate organizations from each other. Participants in *Culture Is Key* came from a diverse array of organizations, but they expressed a desire to be networked and in conversation with others. The overarching values and purpose of civic health revealed threads of connection to each other and also to the communities in which they reside.

RESPONDING TO THE MOMENT

While areas of civic life have been shown to be in decline for decades, the COVID-19 pandemic cast a harsh light on what is at stake. The pandemic exposed disparities and inequities, and precipitated enormous loss in communities in Rhode Island and throughout the world. Over the course of 18 months in the United States — March 2020 to September 2021 — the pandemic was intertwined with a resurgent movement for racial justice, an increasingly fractured media landscape, and a deeply divided political environment during a presidential election. The *Culture Is Key* initiative took place at this moment.

When the Humanities Council started the initiative in January 2020, our goal was to document the contributions of cultural organizations to the civic health of the state with a variety of convenings and workshops, as well as in-person programs and projects by participating organizations. By March, the worldwide pandemic necessitated a shift to virtual ways to connect and learn. Our commitment—and those who participated in it—deepened as the need for a more equitable civil society in both Rhode Island and the nation became more publicly visible. The experience of and responses to the pandemic have also illuminated how important connectedness, collective awareness, and shared values are for survival.

CIVIC HEALTH AND INFORMED COMMUNITIES



The pandemic has highlighted the essential role that information — and being an informed community member — plays in civic health. This initiative explored intersections between the work of journalists and cultural organizations in the context of how they both strengthen the fabric of civic life, including through community storytelling, clarifying and focusing dialogue, and correcting misinformation and broadening perspectives. We observed potential overlaps in these fields' activities in storytelling, public education, public program development, community dialogue and engagement, content and media production, and community needs analysis, among others. And, we asked how journalists and cultural organizations might deepen one another's understanding of the civic health outcomes of their work, and strengthen their potential collaboration through the lens of common civic purpose.

PUTTING CULTURE IS KEY INTO PRACTICE

The key questions

How do cultural organizations contribute to the civic health of the state?

How can those contributions be better identified and strategically amplified?



THROUGH SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, AND PILOT PROJECTS, *Culture Is Key* sought to document how Rhode Island’s cultural organizations are already engaged in activities and outcomes that positively impact civic health, and then to suggest how cultural organizations might deepen their impact on civic health, and how this work can be better supported on a sector-wide scale.

COMPONENTS

Culture Is Key Fellowship

The *Culture Is Key* initiative supported a fellowship for a public humanities professional to help select and facilitate pilot projects; design, implement, and analyze a survey and interviews with cultural organizations; and contribute to this resulting publication. Julia Lazarus was appointed to the *Culture Is Key* Civic Health Fellowship in April 2020. (See *Reflections on the Culture Is Key Fellowship* on p. 11).

Advisory Committee

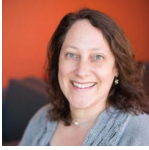
To help guide the initiative and the Fellowship, an Advisory Committee was established in June 2020. The Committee included leaders in policy; media literacy; government; arts, culture, and the humanities; and journalism. The Committee convened virtually several times, met with the Fellow and Julia Renaud, the Council’s Associate Director of Grants and Strategic Initiatives, and provided critical feedback on the initiative framework and the survey and interview questions. (See *Appendix: Advisory Committee* on p. 36).

Interviews and Survey

To gain a broad, initial understanding of how cultural organizations currently relate their activities to facets of civic health, *Culture Is Key* conducted a statewide survey and interviews. The *Culture Is Key* survey included questions about publicly facing cultural activities and civic health, and was sent directly to 218 diverse organizations representative of culture, humanities, and arts in the state, as well as circulated widely in professional networks. 49 organizations submitted responses. In addition, the Council brought on consultant Mary Kuan to conduct 12 in-depth interviews with representatives of diverse organizations that expanded upon the survey questions. (See *Surveys and Interviews* on p. 12.)

Pilot Projects

Culture Is Key supported five pilot projects to intentionally explore how public-facing projects can contribute to civic health-related outcomes. The teams included cultural practitioners from diverse organizations and journalists working together from June 2020 to May 2021, and highlighted the important relationship between journalism and cultural participation in rebuilding civic life. The pilot projects also provided an opportunity to take risks and to confront challenges and achievements that arise when cultural organizations deliberately focus their public activities toward strengthening civic health outcomes. (See *Pilot Projects* on p. 20.)



Reflections on the *Culture Is Key* Fellowship

May 2020 - July 2021 | By Julia Lazarus

IN MY APPLICATION for the *Culture Is Key* fellowship, I remember remarking that spring of 2020 was quite a time to be embarking on an inquiry into the impact of cultural organizations on civic health. Suddenly, the pandemic was flipping contemporary life on its head in an “unprecedented” way — the adjective it seemed everyone was reaching for that season — and the only health-related issues that seemed to have relevance anymore were physiological health and public health. But by having the opportunity to pause the panic enough to try to take in the big picture, it became clear that many threads of civic health were as relevant as ever, especially how we were going to work together as a society and in communities to make it through this time, understand it, and learn from it. Partisan strains, racial justice, and the role of media, education, and data-driven decisionmaking in American society were woven through each challenge the pandemic presented that spring.

As a public humanities practitioner, I have seen and studied myriad ways that humanities and arts contribute to creating vibrant communities, from the intrinsic value to individuals participating in cultural activities to broader societal-level benefits to the economy, education, public spaces, and more. So in this year of renewed attention to the contours of the “civic,” it seemed fitting to re-engage with the importance and ongoing challenge of trying to articulate and champion the impacts cultural organizations can make on civic life. I was delighted to join the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities’ creative, insightful team as their *Culture Is Key* Fellow, and help to materialize the potential they saw to support Rhode Island’s cultural community in reflecting on and maximizing contributions to the state’s well-being.

Conversations with the Advisory Committee, pilot project teams, and survey and interview respondents

underscored the interesting potential for bringing together practitioners across what I began thinking of as the state’s cultural-civic health ecosystem; the continued importance of prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion concerns in any discussion of civic health; and the deep history of work in this area of inquiry, both within Rhode Island and beyond. We focused on two key topics: Rhode Island cultural organizations’ orientation toward civic health outcomes, and how they evaluate, document, and report on their civic health work; and whether a common framework, or language for describing civic health impact, might offer the statewide sector a useful tool for describing its activities. Results of these inquiries are documented in this report.

From the perspective of my own practice and experience participating in this fellowship, I am embracing anew that public humanities scholarship and practice needs data: data to inform community needs analysis and responsiveness; to make evaluation more accessible, agile, and central to our design practices and strategic planning; and to align efforts across the sector and state. So much creative effort, time, and resources are put into the work of cultural organizations — and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to explore and learn about that wide and impressive landscape — that we owe it to ourselves, as well as to our communities, to test our assumptions, confirm we are making the impacts we believe we are achieving, and design strategically.

Cultural organizations play a key role in our civic infrastructure. My hope for the future of this work in our statewide community is that in bridging the language of different sectors — humanities and arts, culture and policy, strategy and creativity — Rhode Islanders can work together to pursue many opportunities to align, expand, and increase civic health impact.

THE COUNCIL DESIGNED the survey and interview to be an initial exploration of the relationship between cultural organizations and civic health in Rhode Island.

To accomplish these goals, we created an opt-in **survey** offered to staff of any interested cultural organizations within the state, and a set of **interview questions** designed for individual conversations with a small group of invited participants.

The complete set of questions follows in the *Appendix: Survey and Interview Questions* (p. 46).

Key aspects of the survey and outreach included:

- A mix of quantitative and qualitative questions to capture experiences, practices, and perspectives of respondents.
- Defining the respondent group as all cultural non-profits, including humanities, arts, and cultural heritage organizations.
- Interviews that represented diversity of the demographics and geography of the state, type and size, and audiences served.

A total of **61 practitioners** participated in the survey and interviews: **49 survey respondents** and **12 interview participants**. A full list of participating organizations can be found in *Appendix: Culture Is Key Participants* on p. 44.

Defining and Aligning with Civic Health: Survey and Interview Results

» The vast majority of Rhode Island cultural organizations surveyed see themselves as deeply engaged with the state's civic health. Remarkably, over 80% of respondents reported that they orient their missions and activities towards impacting the state's civic health "moderately," "a lot," or a "great deal."

» When asked what the phrase "civic health" brought to mind, at least half of respondents identified civic health as dependent on **community engagement** with community well-being, sustainability, and strength in a number of dimensions. One cultural practitioner provided an elegant, simple definition of civic health, stating that "I think of communities of people working, living, and celebrating together." The importance of **shared information**, **dialogue** and **diversity** among community members frequently surfaced, as did the centrality of **public space** and **democratic decision-making**.

Interviewees provided further information about their motivation for engagement with civic health, indicating a grounding in civic purpose. They described key drivers as: serving community needs; economic development; tourism and placemaking; encouraging a sense of belonging and political voice, especially in particular communities the organizations serve; highlighting diversity; making history relevant to today; and increasing access to cultural experiences.

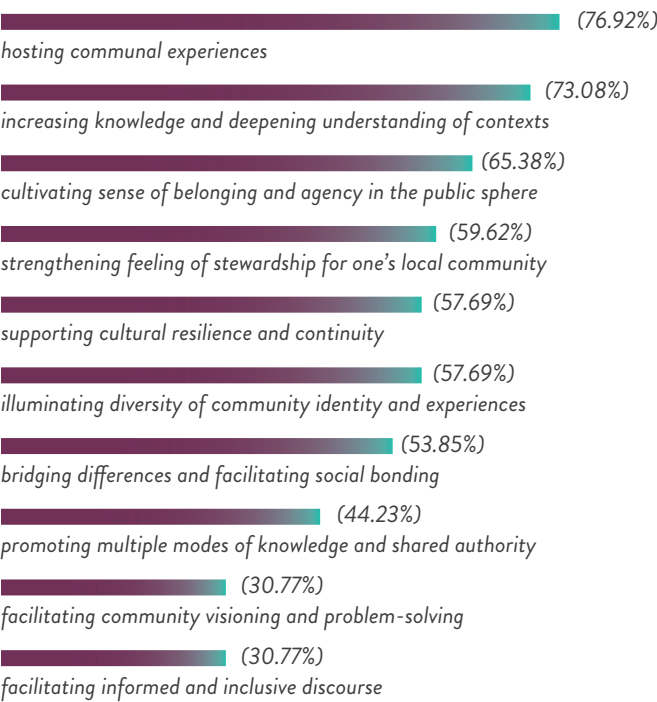
Connecting the Dots: Possibilities for Evaluating the Civic Health Impact of Cultural Organizations' Work

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

» Drawing upon studies by ArtPlace America, PolicyLink, Jennifer Novak-Leonard and WolfBrown, the Urban Institute, and the National Conference on Citizenship (NCOC) (see *Appendix: Resources* on p. 40), the *Culture Is Key* team curated a list of established social outcomes connected to civic health impact. The selected outcomes resonated strongly with our understanding of common outcomes of cultural organizations' public activities.

To determine whether these established outcomes could be helpful in describing the civic health impact of cultural work, we asked survey and interview participants whether these outcomes seemed relevant to the outcomes of their organizations' public-facing activities. If so, these outcomes would represent, in part, cultural organizations' contributions to **community participation**, an integral component of our working definition of civic health.

The results were:



VOICES FROM THE CULTURAL SECTOR

“

Our work is about creating understanding by gathering people together for a shared experience and opportunities for discussion.

CIVIC HEALTH-RELATED OUTCOMES OF CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS' WORK

- bridging differences and facilitating social bonding
- cultivating sense of belonging and agency in the public sphere
- facilitating community visioning and problem-solving
- facilitating informed and inclusive discourse
- hosting communal experiences
- illuminating diversity of community identity and experiences
- increasing knowledge and deepening understanding of contexts
- promoting multiple modes of knowledge and shared authority
- strengthening feeling of stewardship for one's local community
- supporting cultural resilience and continuity



“

We provide materials and educational and cultural opportunities for all, while striving to reflect our community’s diverse culture. Whether through exhibits, computer classes, author talks, or just one-on-one interactions, we attempt to bring people together.

All 52 respondents affirmed this list of civic health-related outcomes as meaningful reflections of the outcomes of organizations’ work. No categories were identified as irrelevant, and comments offered suggestions for sharpening or expanding definitions, but not to eliminate any categories.

Community-building and informal education serve as the common thread among the three outcomes cited by over 60% of respondents, indicating a sector-wide focus on these areas. The next tier of outcomes—cited by over 50% of respondents—focused on strengthening connections within a diverse community and inspiring community investment in a shared home.

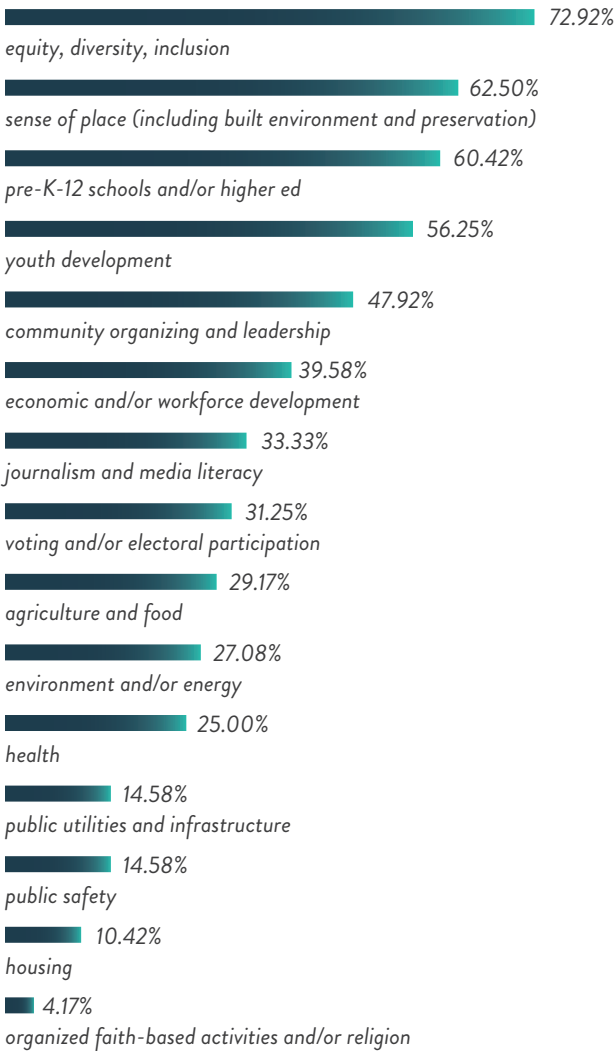
Community Well-being

- » In addition to community participation, the National Conference on Citizenship identifies **community well-being** as a critical aspect of
- » civic health. The overall well-being of neighborhoods, communities, states, and the nation depends on many dimensions of civic life:
- » public health, education, and so on.

As such, we sought to document cultural organizations’ relationships with these other dimensions as a way that cultural organizations contribute to community well-being. These dimensions often surface in the work of cultural organizations both in terms of the **themes and topics** of public programs, exhibitions, and other organizational activities, and in terms of **cross-sector collaborations and partnerships** among cultural organizations and other civic institutions:



Respondents were asked to indicate which of the following aspects of civic life (identified in literature on community development) their organizations had engaged with in the last few years:



(100%)

The 48 respondents had a wide range of responses; at least two organizations had engaged with all of these aspects.

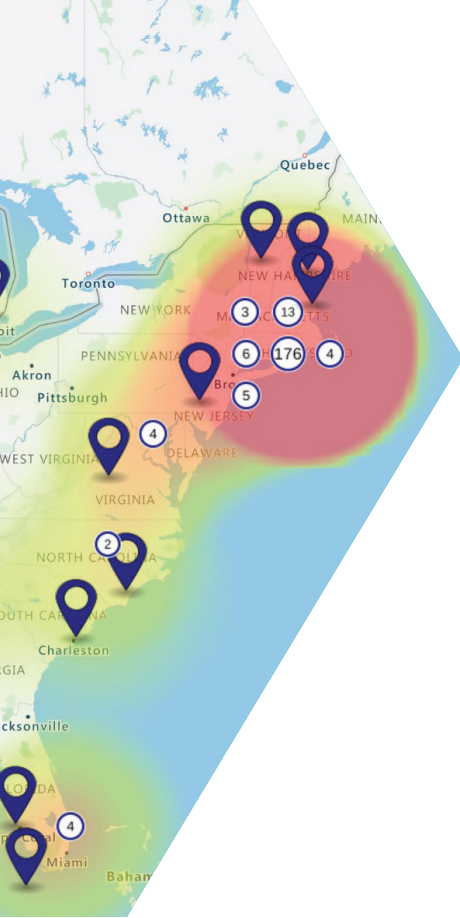
Over 60% of cultural organizations had engaged with equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts and building a sense of place, emphasizing again this sector-wide focus on diversity and investment in community. A number of organizations found that these two efforts go hand in hand, because reflecting the complexity of a community's history and identity often fosters greater connection to it. Over half of respondents had also engaged with pre-K through 12 schools/higher education and youth development activities, demonstrating the cultural sector's deep investment in working with youth in both formal and informal education contexts. Notably, only 33.33% of organizations reported engagement with journalism and media literacy. This indicates an opportunity for future strategic investment, which was further explored in the interviews.

INDICATORS OF COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

- agriculture and food
- community organizing and leadership
- economic and/or workforce development
- environment and/or energy
- equity, diversity, inclusion
- health
- housing
- journalism and media literacy
- organized faith-based activities and/or religion
- pre-K-12 schools and/or higher ed
- public safety
- public utilities and infrastructure
- sense of place (including built environment and preservation)
- voting and/or electoral participation
- youth development

”

All our work is centered on youth development outcomes.



Cultural Organizations & Journalists: Potential Ecosystem Partners

» Through its past initiatives related to humanities and civic health, the Council identified rich intersections and alignments between the mission and practices of cultural organizations and those of journalists and media producers, including community storytelling, clarifying and focusing dialogues, and correcting misinformation and broadening perspectives. To further explore this, the *Culture Is Key* team asked interview participants about the extent to which their organizations see such intersections themselves and are pursuing any cross-sector collaborations in this area.

Respondents were fairly evenly split between practitioners who identified a connection and those who did not. Among those who did, respondents described straightforward, transactional relationships. Participants mentioned interactions with journalists connected with organizations' need for publicity (coverage of their programs, posting on social media, or providing visitors with access to newspapers), as well as looking to journalists for information on community stories and needs. Cultural workers and journalists also interact as expert sources for each others' work: organizations produce journalism-related content or engage journalists as program participants; serve as interviewees for journalists or media producers; and engage in reporting on civic issues and produce opinion pieces.

The lack of greater affirmative responses overall suggest an opportunity for future strategic collaboration and/or investment. One respondent described a lack of opportunities for collaboration based simply on a lack of journalistic presence in her community, reflecting the general hollowing out of local journalism in Rhode Island and across the country:

Unfortunately, in our town we're kind of the journalistic dead zone, nobody covers this area. It's actually heartbreaking.

Another respondent who reported little current engagement with journalists or media producers expressed that cross-sector partnerships would be fruitful:

Journalism and history go hand in hand. You're talking about objective information that is translated into a digestible format so that people can be informed and make decisions.... I can 100% see the connection of exploring these topics and getting them to people. That's the whole point.

“

We are a hub for activities for many other arts companies and events. We host many various events and meeting spaces for our Spanish-speaking community. We participated heavily in the 2020 Census efforts to reach Latinx people... and we offer our space as a polling place for every election.

Practical Considerations: Opportunities to Strengthen Civic Health Work

» The *Culture Is Key* team explored three topics related to organizations' civic health-related practices with interview participants, including: how organizations assess needs in their communities and evaluate the impact of their work; lessons they've learned from recent civic health crises; and the challenges they face in civic health-related work.

IDENTIFYING NEEDS & EVALUATING IMPACT

Respondents described using a mix of formal and informal approaches to assess community needs and conduct program evaluations. Overall, however, they did not describe particularly robust practices in either area.

The majority of respondents described assessing the needs of their communities informally. Methods include occasional conversations and establishing trust-based relationships with community members. One respondent summarized, "I won't say it's systematic, I'll say it's more personal-based, it is lots of listening, it's more, I'll say, informal referrals through community connections. It's asking and then listening."

In terms of program evaluation, respondents more frequently reported a range of formal evaluation tools and approaches, but also articulated that their practices were "sporadic," "not systematized," or based on "simple surveys." Many respondents described the joy and meaning of seeing the impact of a cultural experience register in participants' faces and hearing positive testimonials describing personal impact on their lives:

Attendance is pretty important because we need to make sure that what we're offering is what you want, so that's very important to us. But ... the looks on people's faces, the stories that they bring back to us of how we've impacted their lives, for me that's more important.

On the whole, respondents expressed an interest in using community-needs data and systematic impact evaluation to support how they design their public-facing activities. However, they identified that they do not currently have the capacity or resources to do so.

LEARNING FROM RECENT CIVIC CRISES

» The *Culture Is Key* project took place during a number of profound and destabilizing shifts in our nation's civic culture: the COVID-19 pandemic, the movement for racial justice, and partisan polarization. As such, the *Culture Is Key* team wanted to investigate how these interlocking civic crises may have changed organizations' ideas about their civic purpose or role.

”

The intimate face-to-face human experience is what we do best — to illuminate what unites us rather than what divides us.



“

So, the pandemic didn't bring anything new to the surface 'cause it's like the same things that we've been seeing all along. What it has done is it's opened up the eyes of people who are less impacted by the things that we've been going through for years. So, in some aspects, in some of those situations, it's helped us because people...wanna take it seriously now.

A number of organizations responded that the shifts in civic life in the last 18 months accelerated initiatives that were already in process, with one respondent stating that “it's actually more of a deepening; we've already thought of all of these things, we've already actively done these things; [recent civic crises] just made it more focused for us.” These initiatives were often focused on internal organizational culture and processes. A number of respondents reported increased reflection or specific training within their organizations on diversity, equity, and inclusion in particular, and prioritizing organizational shifts already in progress.

Other respondents described an expansion of their external-facing priorities to incorporate topics responding to the civic crises, such as public health, racial justice, and the community's economic recovery. Organizations developed new online or other socially distanced programming formats, and redesigned programs to include diversity/equity/inclusion topics. One interviewee reflected on a renewed attention to supporting their community amidst these crises:

I think in the pandemic, we became even more people-oriented in a lot of our work. We really ramped up a lot of our work during the pandemic, and it was in the name of creating community and maintaining community and maintaining safe spaces for people to interact and for people to get resources and understand what was going on.

Another participated directly in their community's COVID response:

We actually served as a call center for the town for getting COVID shots and vaccines and information, and we also, during the pandemic, did delivery services of books, wireless printing, and lots and lots of free Wi-Fi in front of our building.

Many respondents expressed the negative economic impact of the pandemic on their organizations' fiscal health, and their struggle — and commitment — to maintain their community impact activities within that context. In one striking example, an organization “had to let go of 69% of staff within the last year because of the financial impacts of the pandemic.” The economic strain of the pandemic exacerbated financial concerns in an already resource-strapped non-profit sector, as is explored in greater detail in the following section.



Challenges Faced & Resources Needed to Sustain Civic Health Impact

- » Unsurprisingly for any non-profit organization, and especially for historically resource-strapped cultural organizations, respondents reported resources and staffing as their chief barriers to achieving greater civic health impact.

As one respondent pointed out, these needs are interlocking, or, are “all a big circle.” Another commented, “I think our biggest challenge is we really have lots of really great ideas and our heart is way out there, and sometimes we have to rein ourselves in because we don’t have the staff.”

In keeping with these reflections, respondents highlighted funding needs for:



staffing, including to shift away from all-volunteer operations



general operating support



marketing



evaluation and community needs research



capital projects related to accessibility



strategic community partnerships including appropriate partner compensation



professional development, including diversity/equity/inclusion training and best practices of the field in general.

Additional challenges cited by organizations included:

- a lack of inclusivity from “establishment” players in civic and cultural spaces;
- a struggle to be more visible in their communities;
- difficulty reaching new and diverse audiences;
- and a general lack of strategic alignment within the sector.

As one respondent reflected, “Things are terribly siloed, and it makes us all really ineffective.... It’s a really big impact, and I don’t know how to fix that.”

When asked to reflect on a key action they felt their organizations could take to increase civic health impact, respondents identified the following:

- welcoming broader, more diverse audiences;
- addressing the funding needs of their organizations;
- collecting and responding to audience feedback;
- expanding educational programming.

All of the identified actions are elements incorporated into the *Culture Is Key* pilot projects.

”

Money, staff, time...all of those are really all the same thing, really. Without money to hire the staff, who would have the time? It’s almost impossible to do it, or it takes a very, very, very long time.



THE HUMANITIES COUNCIL designed *Culture Is Key*'s pilot project program as an opportunity for cultural non-profits to deliberately explore their programs' civic health impacts in partnership with local journalists and media producers. This report discusses themes that emerged across the projects and from the perspectives articulated by the participants. It also provides summaries of the civic health-oriented cultural projects they conducted and their impacts.

In June 2020, the Council invited five Rhode Island cultural organizations whose distinct practices are deeply rooted in community engagement to join the project, supported by \$7,000 seed grants:

- **newportFILM** (Newport), a year-round documentary film festival (see p. 30)
- **Providence Public Library** (Providence), a library with educational resources, public programs, collections, and exhibitions (see p. 26)
- **Pushed Learning and Media** (active statewide), a non-profit that works in K-12 schools and with the general public to create dialogue and media around pressing issues (see p. 22)
- **Tomaquag Museum** (Exeter), Rhode Island's only Indigenous museum (see p. 28)
- **Wilbury Theatre Group** (Providence), a professional theater (see p. 25)

To investigate the connections between the civic contributions of cultural organizations and journalists, local mediamakers joined each team, supported by a stipend. The mission of each pilot project team: to strengthen, document, and evaluate the civic health impacts of a public-facing program or activity at the cultural organization.

As public humanities work requires inspiration and community in addition to financial resources, *Culture Is Key* Fellow Julia Lazarus developed a series of five group learning sessions, in which pilot project teams could discuss research on the connections between civic health and cultural work; learn from the insights of guest speakers and each other to inform their projects; and develop a network of civically minded colleagues.

Jennifer Novak-Leonard, Research Associate Professor and Research Director of the Arts Impact Initiative, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, joined the second session for a dynamic, informative presentation on evaluation strategies to assess the civic health impacts of the pilot projects. Novak-Leonard specializes in the development and use of novel measurement systems to understand cultural participation and to inform public policy.

Pandemic Challenges and Opportunities:

“This ability to pivot made our project possible”

» In a stunning demonstration of the responsiveness and resilience of the cultural sector, *Culture Is Key* pilot project teams adapted their projects to the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic in both form and content. Teams uniformly pivoted to virtual platforms for their projects, revealing the versatility and diversity of the digital realm, as well as new opportunities for connecting with audiences and journalists. All five pilot project teams extended this flexible, responsive approach to the content of their projects, engaging with some of the most pressing and profound civic health issues in their communities: the COVID-19 pandemic, the corresponding economic crisis, and the movement for racial justice.

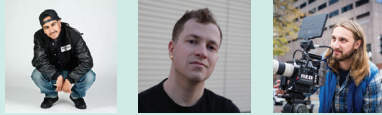
Some project teams, like the Tomaquag Museum, translated an existing project into a hybrid or digital format, thus adding unanticipated programmatic benefits. In recording live webinars with Indigenous artists and creators, Executive Director Lorén Spears reflected that the Museum created “this library of useful educational materials...around Native culture... particularly in Southern New England,” that staff can easily share with educators, parents, and community members seeking resources. With virtual screenings and discussions, newportFILM expanded beyond New England to connect with audiences nationwide, which former Executive Director Rebecca Bertrand found to be “an incredible benefit and opportunity to continue to further the work of documentarians and bring communities together.”

Others branched into entirely new media formats for their projects, gaining inspiration for new directions along the way. Pushed Learning and Media’s podcast on climate change has influenced the organization’s direction beyond the restrictions of the pandemic. According to Co-Executive Director Eric Axelman, “this process made us think much more seriously about pursuing a more media-heavy project regimen in the future...We’re thinking about actually making podcasts with students in the same way we’ve historically made videos with students we work with.”

In shifting their live YouTube community storytelling event, *Capture the Block: Stories from Ward 15*, to focus on the experience of the pandemic within one of the hardest hit neighborhoods of the state, the Wilbury Theatre Group offered opportunities for community connection during an isolating period, bolstering a sense of civic identity. When inviting neighbors to participate, Wilbury Theatre Group Artistic Director Josh Short discovered “that people were happy to come out and speak with us.... Rather than a deterrent, the pandemic seemed like a motivating factor in people’s willingness to share their stories with us.” And, in working on the project, radio producer Ana González found that her journalism-based methods of allowing a story to unfold enabled a responsive process: “We had to respond to the community. This ability to pivot made our project possible.”

Pushed Learning and Media

THE TEAM



Pushed Learning and Media works with the general public and educational institutions to create publicly available video content documenting and synthesizing key civic issues in Rhode Island public life. For *Culture Is Key*, Co-Executive Directors **Oliver Arias** and **Eric Axelman** partnered with filmmaker and podcast host **Sam Eilertsen (L-R)**.

THE PROJECT: GENERATION GREEN NEW DEAL

Arias, Axelman, and Eilertsen produced the podcast *Generation Green New Deal* on climate change, the history of the climate movement, and the younger generation of climate activists. The podcast, with accompanying video content, featured conversations with writers, professors, and oral historians.

THE CIVIC HEALTH IMPACT

The Pushed team designed their project to help general audiences better understand climate change—a complex phenomena that greatly impacts civic life and demands a strong civic response across sectors—through storytelling rather than science. As a journalist, Eilertsen contributed professional media production strategies to help tell these stories. Through these methods, the team sought to engage their audience with the human realities of climate change, and the public policy debates and activism surrounding it.

These strategies paid off: 87.9% of respondents reported that professional production strategies are more likely to make them civically engaged. Furthermore, 90.9% of respondents commented that listening to the podcast made them think more about the climate crisis, and made them feel newly empowered to impact climate change.

LISTEN

Link to podcast with writer and activist Nikayla Jefferson:

<https://www.generationgreennewdeal.com/s01-convo1>

Link to podcast with Professor Leah Stokes:

<https://www.generationgreennewdeal.com/s01-conversations-2>

Link to podcast with journalist Eric Holthaus:

<https://www.generationgreennewdeal.com/s01-conversations-3>

Link to podcast with author and activist Jamie Margolin:

<https://www.generationgreennewdeal.com/s01-conversations-4>

Link to podcast with oral historian Maggie Lemere and writers and activists Brianna Fruean and Thelma Young-Lutunatabua:

<https://www.generationgreennewdeal.com/s01-conversations5>

TEAM BIOS

Oliver “SydeSho” Arias

Oliver “SydeSho” Arias is a Dominican-American artist, educator, and filmmaker. He is the co-executive director of Pushed Learning and Media, and has called Providence, RI, his home since he immigrated to Rhode Island as a small child from the Dominican Republic. Arias is an accomplished dancer, rapper, and teacher, and loves his work.

Eric Axelman

Eric Axelman is a trans (they/them) educator, filmmaker, and artist. Along with Oliver they are the co-executive director of Pushed Learning and Media, and also co-run Tikkun Olam Productions. In addition to their work at Pushed, they are co-directing the upcoming documentary *Israelism*.

Sam Eilertsen

Sam Eilertsen is an accomplished filmmaker, cinematographer, and podcast host, from Providence, RI. Before getting into the podcast and activism world, he was the cinematographer or editor on a number of feature length films, including *Vault*, starring Samira Wiley and Theo Rossi. Eilertsen is the host of the podcast *Generation Green New Deal*.

Journalism, Cultural Work, and Civic Health: *“Those stories provoke questions, and those questions lead to civic engagement”*

- » Partnerships between journalists and cultural organizations provoked new insights and methods for strengthening civic health impact. Journalists sharpened the civically-oriented questions cultural organizations asked, while doing cross-disciplinary work with cultural organizations inspired journalists to see and reflect on their own civic health impact-related practices and roles. Team members across disciplines found a shared commitment to community storytelling, as well as to correcting misconceptions and misinformation.

Journalist Tom Meade helped to shape conversations with featured speakers during Tomaquag Museum programs, as well as to hone the civic health impact-related questions asked in audience evaluations. In turn, Meade found that working with the Museum led him to consider his own role as a conversation participant: “As a print journalist, you begin conversations, but you don’t really encourage them....What’s changing now is...that there is so much give and take.” Journalist Will James, a collaborator on the Providence Public Library project team, similarly found that work with the Library gave him the opportunity to actively engage in community dialogues, which “seems to have a positive impact on knowledge and civic engagement.”

The Wilbury Theatre’s Josh Short and radio producer Ana González together explored the potential of storytelling as a civic act. Short reflected on how the project “allowed us to achieve...the idea of sharing the stage, creating space, and letting people tell their own stories....What was different this time around was...Ana, as a journalist, creates an environment where community members really felt like their experience mattered.” For González

Civic engagement can be as simple as expressing your concerns about where you live or telling your story to your community.

In other words, community storytelling inherently contributes to civic health. Documentary filmmaker and Providence Public Library partner Loreal “Lo” Bell echoed this journalistic commitment “to make space for people to share their efforts and accomplishments while also elevating any concerns as well as what needs to happen for continued growth,” further noting that “media production gives an alternative way to approach how to be civically engaged.”

The Tomaquag Museum, a 2016 recipient of the National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the nation’s highest honor given to museums and libraries for service to the community, tells stories that have been suppressed and misrepresented in the mainstream civic sphere, “correcting wrongs or omissions in history, community dialogue, and representation.” Underscoring the importance and urgency of these efforts, Executive Director Lorén Spears commented, “There is no Rhode Island history without Narragansett, Niantic and other Indigenous peoples’ history,” which makes the work of the museum essential to civic health. Journalists and mediamakers can aid in this mission by amplifying these accurate histories and continuing these community dialogues beyond the doors of the museum. As noted by journalist partner Tom Meade, “Journalism benefits cultural organizations and their missions by telling their stories simply. That’s easy at the Tomaquag Museum where history is passed on in stories, many of them thousands of years old. Those stories provoke questions, and those questions lead to civic engagement.”

Community Participation and Cultural Organizations: *“If you do not serve a purpose from which the community can benefit, then what is the point?”*

» Cultural organizations serve as sites of genuine community participation, and therefore strengthen their civic health impact, when community members feel that they are addressed by, welcomed into, and engaged with the work of the organization. Several pilot project teams placed participation and partnership at the center of their practice of community engagement. As audiences became participants and community partners, pilot project teams recognized the need to provide resources to support them, and then, in the words of the Providence Public Library’s Janaya Kizzie, “get out of the way.” Releasing project control, along with institutional resources, to community partners may be unprecedented and uncomfortable for many cultural organizations. However, the work of the pilot project teams indicates its potential for building genuine community participation, and, in turn, deepening civic health impact.

A sense of responsibility to community drives the Tomaquag’s purpose; as articulated by Assistant Director Silvermoon LaRose,

If you do not represent the community in which you reside; if you are not addressing the interests, ideas, and culture of that community; if you do not serve a purpose from which the community can benefit, then what is the point?

Wilbury Theatre Artistic Director Josh Short echoed LaRose’s dedication to representing and serving local community:

Arts and cultural organizations like ours have an opportunity to serve as anchors within their communities. If we embrace our role, then we can be a gathering place where ideas can be shared and civic engagement can happen. If we ignore that potential, and choose to solely...import artists and audiences from elsewhere, then we fail to live up to that potential. We have an obligation to engage with the communities where we live and see that they see their stories and themselves reflected on our stage.

Providence Public Library (PPL) staff structured their pilot project *Brick* around this concept of community engagement, viewing their role as providing resources to their community partners, rather than making decisions for their community partners. As PPL Event Coordinator Janaya Kizzie reflected, through the pilot project,

Wilbury Theatre Group

THE TEAM



An award-winning, not-for-profit professional theatre company, the Wilbury Theatre Group engages communities in thought-provoking conversation through new works, reimagined classics, and adventurous playmaking. **Ana González**, radio producer and host of the podcast *Mosaic* on The Public's Radio, joined Wilbury Artistic Director **Josh Short** for the project (L-R).

THE PROJECT: CAPTURE THE BLOCK

With support from community development non-profit ONE Neighborhood Builders, the project team interviewed Olneyville neighbors willing to share their experiences of loss and resiliency in the COVID-19 pandemic. On Sunday, February 21, 2021 at 6:00 pm, the team featured these interviews in a livestreamed YouTube event hosted by González and Short, and viewed by 107 people and counting.

THE CIVIC HEALTH IMPACT

The Wilbury team designed *Capture the Block* to engage local Olneyville community members in conversation about the challenges faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the project, González and Short contacted a wide variety of community members and covered a range of issues, including civic health, personal health, emotional well-being, race relations, and community development.

By encouraging their participants to consider civic health, and their roles and relationships within their community, the project team ignited an interest in these issues on a wider scale. In follow-up evaluation interviews, one participant commented that they were "...moved by everyone's unique story. How we all come from different backgrounds and yet have things in common. Fear. Anxiety. The loss of a loved one or neighbor. Sharing how everyone found ways to cope with the pandemic and tell their story... definitely made me look at life and the world differently."

WATCH

Link to all project videos, including individual interviews:

<https://thewilburygroup.org/capture-the-block.html>

Link to recording of livestreamed event:

<https://youtu.be/e7AMzCQ7IZE>

TEAM BIOS

Ana González

Ana González is the former host and producer of the *Mosaic* podcast with The Public's Radio. A member of the Brown University Class of 2015, she's proudly Puerto Rican and Irish, and loves meeting new people almost as much as she loves meeting new dogs. González previously worked with the WHY Media Labs in Philadelphia and ran her own video production company, EARF. In 2017, she produced and directed a feature-length documentary about hip hop history in Rhode Island, *Almost Dope*, supported in part by a Humanities Council grant.

González left The Public's Radio in October 2021 and is now a Special Projects Producer for Radiolab at WNYC.

Josh Short

Josh Short is the Founder and Artistic Director of Providence's award-winning Wilbury Theatre Group, where he's produced hundreds of workshop and full-scale productions of work by local and world-renown artists with a commitment to artistic excellence and community engagement. In addition to his work with The Wilbury Group and FRINGEPVD, Short has worked with Gloucester Stage Company, Perishable Theatre, The Gamm Theatre, The LaJolla Playhouse, The Gaslamp Quarter Drama Department, The Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival, and The Providence Black Repertory Company, where he served as Associate Producer from 2008-2010. A proud member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, he also serves as a member of Congressman James Langevin's Arts and Culture Advisory Committee, as a mentor with the Rhode Island Foundation's Emerging Leaders program and is a graduate of the Pi II 2020 class of Leadership Rhode Island.

Providence Public Library

THE TEAM



Providence Public Library (PPL) is a 145-year-old non-profit providing free public library services through its rich and historic physical and digital collections, extensive information resources, thought-provoking exhibitions, and impactful educational programs. For *Culture Is Key*, Programs & Exhibitions Director **Christina Bevilacqua** and Events Coordinator **Janaya Kizzie** worked with **Loreal “Lo” Bell**, filmmaker and AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer; **Kenny Borge**, artist and skater; and **Will James**, independent journalist (L-R).

THE PROJECT: *BRICK*

The PPL team sought to document and amplify the civic contributions of the skating community of Providence and the Friends of Adrian Hall Skate Park, known locally as Trinity Skate Park. The project included individual interviews, community convenings, and a documentary titled *Brick* to be distributed through the Library and social media. The forthcoming documentary features oral histories capturing the history of the Trinity Skate Park via the skaters who founded it; includes interviews capturing younger skaters’ knowledge of this history; and documents skaters’ experiences of civic life through skating.

THE CIVIC HEALTH IMPACT

The PPL team incorporated evaluation into the creation of their documentary, screening clips for 15 members of the Providence skating community and leading a virtual discussion on the community’s history, culture, and relationship with civic life. Participants affirmed that learning more about the creation of Trinity Skate Park inspired them to continue to advocate for truly inclusive urban spaces—not just for skateboarders, but also for workers, families, and all who wish to be in community. As one participant commented, “The community needs to be involved to make it a space everyone can benefit from and not just the people who are building it and the original intent, when there can be other things within that particular space that can cater to other peoples’ needs.”

WATCH

Link to *Brick* trailer:

<https://www.provlib.org/programs-exhibitions/culture-is-key-brick/>

TEAM BIOS

Christina Bevilacqua

Christina Bevilacqua is a cultural curator who uses the arts and humanities to cultivate conversation among diverse audiences. Since 2017 she has been the Programs & Exhibitions Director at Providence Public Library (PPL), where she has explored adaptations to programming formats in order to allow PPL to continue to present robust public offerings, despite being closed for nearly two years - due first to a renovation and later to a pandemic. As Trinity Repertory Company’s Conversationalist-in-Residence, she co-created the series *Context & Conversation*, engaging artists, scholars, and community practitioners to respond to the work of the theater in community based conversations; and contributed to the ongoing series *America Too*. Prior to working at PPL she spent 11 years directing programs and community engagement at the Providence Athenaeum, where in 2005 she founded the popular *Salon Series*, curating and producing weekly presentations and conversations there until fall of 2016; in 2013 the Humanities Council awarded her the Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities in recognition of the creativity and culturally collaborative model of the Salon. She also co-created *Policy & Pinot*, a current events discussion series with RI Public Radio (now The Public’s Radio). She earned a BA in Writing and Literature from Bard College and an MA in Social Policy from the University of Chicago.

Janaya Kizzie

Janaya Kizzie, Events Coordinator at Providence Public Library (PPL), is an archivist, historian and artist. Her first archives internship was at PPL, and she volunteered in PPL's Special Collections for nine years while working in archives at the American Academy of Arts and Science, Citizens Bank, and Concord Free Public Library. In 2017 she was hired by the library to accession and process the historical records of AS220. In 2019, Kizzie became the first Rhode Island Arts and Culture Research Fellow at the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, and in 2020, she was selected by the Council for the Public Humanities Scholar Award, recognizing her outstanding public humanities scholarship advancing the civic and cultural life of Rhode Island. Kizzie earned a BA from Bard College and a MA in Library and Information Studies from the University of Rhode Island. She was inducted into the Academy of Certified Archivists in 2010.

Loreal (Lo) Bell

Lo Bell's hometown is Chicago, Illinois, where she spent three years teaching at a private academy and preschool working with future leaders of America. Her initial introduction to working in a school atmosphere was through a work-study program at The Piney Woods School, a historically black boarding high school she attended. Her work experience in both office and caregiving settings led to what would be 10+ years working with students from cradle to career.

Based on experiences with students and community members, Bell created the first independent publishing conference at her college, and, later co-founding Bobtown Arts, a non-profit artist residency. Bell attended Berea College where she double majored in English with a concentration in Writing and Communications with an emphasis in Documentary Film. During this period in her life she was introduced to civic engagement, social entrepreneurship, and activism through an Entrepreneurship for the Public Good fellowship program and organizations like the Black Student Union, Pride, Unity, Love, & Social Equality and The Harvey Milk Society. She currently serves as a Brown VISTA Fellow at Providence Public Library.

Kenny Borge

Kenny Borge was born and raised in Providence, Rhode Island. He is an independent artist, filmmaker and skateboarding advocate. Borge is one of the founders of the Friends of Adrian Hall and the Adrian Hall Skate Park in downtown Providence.

Will James

Will James is a visual artist and journalist who focuses on topics of labor and cultural history. In addition to writing, he produces short social media videos for *Uprise RI*. He conducts research, produces videos, and sets the creative direction for humanities and arts based projects.

We learned that getting out of the way, as a huge old institution, works if you have good people with you, and acting as the substrate, rather than the puppet-master, works. We, as an institution, can finally do the thing that we're actually supposed to be doing, which is giving agency to the people in our communities rather than deciding who gets the services and why and how and when.

In taking this approach, the PPL created the possibility for a genuinely collaborative process, leading to unexpected and potentially transformative outcomes. However, this shared authority can also create blurred boundaries among project roles, and questions around project ownership and control. The PPL and other pilot project teams navigated these complex issues, which shed light on the continual necessity of building and maintaining relationships, trust, and dialogue among cultural institutions and community partners.

Tomaquag Museum

THE TEAM

A recipient of the 2016 Institute of Museum and Library Services National Medal, the Tomaquag Museum is Rhode Island's only museum entirely dedicated to telling the story of the Indigenous Peoples of this region and the only Rhode Island museum led by Indigenous people. The museum has a unique collection of cultural belongings and archival materials focusing on the Indigenous peoples of Southern New England and highlighting the federally recognized Narragansett Tribe. Executive Director **Lorén Spears** and Assistant Director **Silvermoon LaRose** partnered with journalist **Tom Meade** for *Culture Is Key* (T-B).



THE PROJECT: QUARANTINE CREATIVES AND LITERATURE & CULTURE AUTHOR CONVERSATIONS

The Tomaquag Museum team undertook a virtual public program series titled *Quarantine Creatives* to emphasize the civic dimensions of Indigenous artists' and cultural producers' work. They also presented a virtual author conversation series, *Literature & Culture Author Conversations*, designed to engage audiences with the history, culture, and civic contributions of Indigenous life. They then archived and presented these recordings through a YouTube playlist.

THE CIVIC HEALTH IMPACT

Working closely with Meade, the Tomaquag team redesigned questions asked of speakers and audience members to emphasize the civic themes in their virtual events. For artists, the Museum created questions that guided the artist to share how their artwork represents and reflects important issues taking place in the world today. In post-program online evaluation surveys, the Museum assessed a number of civic health-related outcomes:

- 96% of participants had gained new understandings and perspectives about other peoples and cultures.
- 60% had encountered a new point of view.
- 88% felt somewhat or significantly spurred to take an action.
- 88% discussed their experience with others.

WATCH

Link to *Quarantine Creatives* full YouTube playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLP2wfWKCKG7t07Z-MDmRxEtAziKPIFzOK>

Link to *Literature and Culture Author Conversations* full YouTube playlist:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLP2wfWKCKG7ueK_Mt7MPe3lxLJj1mBdG

TEAM BIOS

Lorén M. Spears

Lorén M. Spears is the Executive Director of Tomaquag Museum. Spears aspires to empower Native youth and to educate the public on Native history, culture, environment and the arts. Spears shares her cultural knowledge and traditional arts learned through her family with the public through museum programs such as tours, virtual programming, and educational resources. Under her leadership, the Tomaquag Museum received the Institute of Museum and Library Services' National Medal. An educator for 25 years, she has served as an adjunct faculty at Brown University and University of Rhode Island. Spears founded the Nuweetooun School affiliated with the Tomaquag Museum and was a teacher in Newport public schools for 12 years.

Outside of her work in the museum, she is also an educator, activist, author, and Indigenous artist. Her work as an author includes *Dawnland Voices, An Anthology of Indigenous Writing of New England; Through Our Eyes: An Indigenous View of Mashapaug Pond; The Pursuit of Happiness: An Indigenous View, From Slaves to Soldiers: The 1st Rhode Island Regiment in the American Revolution* and she co-edited *The Key into the Language of America* by Roger Williams.

Spears received her undergraduate degree from the University of Rhode Island and her MA from the University of New England with a focus on elementary education. Spears has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors most notably the 2016 Tom Roberts Prize for Creative Achievement in the Humanities from the Council and a Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*, from the University of Rhode Island in 2017.

Silvermoon Mars LaRose

Silvermoon Mars LaRose is the Assistant Director of the Tomaquag Museum. Silvermoon assists the Executive Director with managing the museum's collections and archives, educational resources, and the Indigenous Empowerment projects. Her other duties include sharing her cultural knowledge and traditional arts with the public facilitated through the museum programs and partnerships. Before transitioning to the museum, LaRose worked in Health and Human Services for Native communities in Southern New England for 12 years. She has worked in tribal communities for over 19 years and was the former Director of the Mashantucket Pequot TVR program.

LaRose has traveled extensively, visiting and learning from Indigenous communities throughout the United States. In her spare time, LaRose dabbles in writing, storytelling, beading, finger weaving, and other traditional arts. Recently, she has taken up drawing and painting. She enjoys learning new skills to carry on and share the traditions. LaRose also creates traditional Hubbub Games, Painted Stones, Bookmarks, and other textiles with her designs and designs inspired by the traditional basket stamping of Southern New England tribes. LaRose holds a BA in Sociology, with a minor in Justice Law and Society from the University of Rhode Island, and a partially completed MA in Rehabilitation Counseling from Western Washington University.

Tom Meade

Tom Meade has been a writer and editor for more than 40 years. His writing has appeared in such newspapers as *The Providence Journal*, *Essex County Newspapers*, *The Springfield Republican* and others. Magazines publishing his work include *Backpacker*, *Fly Fisherman*, *Yankee*, and others. He is the author of the book *Essential Fly Fishing*. His editing credits include Outdoor Empire Publishing, *North Shore Magazine*, and *The Lawrence Eagle-Tribune*. He and his wife, Marie Meade, live in Charlestown, Rhode Island.

Cultural Organizations and Civic Health: “Promoting and engaging in civic learning is what we do every day”

» Without evaluating the civic health impacts of cultural organizations' work, we cannot
» fully understand the civic significance of their activities. As such, pilot project teams had the charge of evaluating their project to assess the civic health impacts of their work on their audience — however they chose to define those impacts, and those audiences. As noted earlier, the *Culture Is Key* team provided extensive resources to the pilot project teams in developing these evaluation methods, including a presentation by cultural participation evaluation expert Jennifer Novak-Leonard.

While each team framed their evaluation of civic health impacts differently, most groups focused on measuring whether their projects provided opportunities for sharing different perspectives and fomenting discourse among different members of a community—activities that, they asserted, contribute to civic health. According to the Wilbury Theatre's Josh Short,

Creating opportunities for community members to engage in discourse about civic health is an exercise in civic engagement by itself, and by supporting these opportunities we make our communities stronger and more engaged.

By assessing their programs with an eye to these impacts, among others, pilot project teams demonstrated the efficacy of their programs in expanding audience perspectives and encouraging community discourse and action.

These outcomes resonate with a number of the civic health-related program outcomes established by prior researchers and explored in the *Appendix: Survey and Interview Questions* (p. 46) section of this report: namely, **bridging differences and facilitating social bonding; facilitating informed and inclusive discourse; illuminating diversity of community identity and experiences; increasing knowledge and deepening understanding of contexts; hosting communal experiences; and promoting multiple modes of knowledge and shared authority.**

newportFILM

THE TEAM

newportFILM inspires, educates, and entertains by presenting current and impactful documentaries that build community and propel change. For the project, former Executive Director **Rebecca Bertrand** worked with **G. Wayne Miller**, Staff Writer, *Providence Journal* & Co-Founder and Director, *Story in the Public Square* (T-B).



THE PROJECT: *MLK/FBI*

The newportFILM team explored the civic questions provoked by the recent documentary film *MLK/FBI*. The project included free streaming of the film, an episode of the TV show *Story in the Public Square* featuring an interview with Miller and filmmakers Sam Pollard and Ben Hedin, and a virtual audience discussion with Hedin, Bertrand, and Miller.

THE CIVIC HEALTH IMPACT

The documentary film *MLK/FBI* explores the FBI's previously little-known surveillance of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other advocates for social justice in the 1960s. By adding post-screening interviews between Miller and the filmmakers, the newportFILM team adapted their film screening project to increase audience knowledge and deepen understanding of historical events in the United States. The film and Q&A also sought to open up audience dialogue about questions like, "Who tells stories about our past?" "How are these stories told?" and "Who holds authority with the historical record?"

In their online post-screening survey, the newportFILM team assessed whether audience members had gained new perspectives on historical narratives. As Bertrand noted, "More than 74% [of 27 respondents] strongly agreed that the film taught them something new. An overwhelming 97% of audiences surveyed indicated that they gained new perspectives on the traditional historical narrative that we may have previously known. In this way, we found that film was a powerful tool to promote different modes of knowledge, perspectives on civic discourse and exposure of audiences to new ways of thinking about the past."

TEAM BIOS

Rebecca Bertrand

Rebecca Bertrand became the Executive Director of newportFILM in October 2017 after spending two years as the organization's Managing Director. Bertrand holds an MA in American Material Culture from the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture at the University of Delaware and a BA in Historic Preservation from Salve Regina University. She has over a decade of experience working in the Rhode Island nonprofit sector, holding previous positions at the Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre and the Newport Art Museum where she worked from 2012-2015 in various roles including the Director of Development and Interim Executive Director. She is a previous recipient of funding from the van Beuren Charitable Foundation for executive coaching and was a 2015 member of the Rhode Island Foundation's Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence Emerging Nonprofit Leaders program. In her position at newportFILM, Bertrand worked to expand the organization's educational outreach efforts to reach more than 1,200 students each year, diversify funding sources and increase newportFILM's cross-organizational collaborations within Newport County.

Bertrand left newportFILM on July 31, 2021 to serve as the first Executive Director at the New York Yacht Club's Foundation for Historic Preservation, also in Newport.

G. Wayne Miller

G. Wayne Miller is an American writer and filmmaker, and podcaster. He is a staff writer at *The Providence (R.I.) Journal* and Visiting Fellow at Salve Regina University's Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy, in Newport, RI, where he is co-founder and director of the *Story in the Public Square* program and co-host and co-producer of the national PBS/SiriusXM Radio show *Story in the Public Square*.

WATCH

Link to *Story in the Public Square* episode:
<https://www.pbs.org/video/story-in-the-public-square-2282021-b0s34c/>

Link to virtual audience discussion:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13g241jKcU>

Pilot project teams also reflected that many, if not all, of their activities outside *Culture Is Key* are aligned with these civic health impacts, indicating that the work of cultural organizations likely strengthens civic health every day—we just need to evaluate it, and recognize it.

All pilot project teams chose to conduct online surveys, an unsurprising choice given the constraints and possibilities of the pandemic. Some teams also conducted interviews and discussions with project participants, in a reflection of the importance of stories and qualitative data in understanding impact. Across the board, these surveys revealed that program participants learned new information and encountered new perspectives through the work of the cultural organizations, and in a number of cases, were inspired to take action in their communities. As mentioned earlier, the Tomaquag Museum worked with journalist Tom Meade to “improve our evaluation process to meet the new virtual world, plus added many questions that demonstrate civic engagement, learning, and continuation beyond the one hour program.” In keeping with the concept of bridging differences through cultural work, the Tomaquag Museum’s surveys asked about whether the program had provided a new understanding of a people or a culture different than the participant’s, if the participant had an idea of an action to take, and if they discussed their experience with others (see p. 28 for results).

Like the Tomaquag Museum’s, newportFILM’s survey evaluated civic health impact by assessing whether participants had gained new perspectives on historical narratives (see p. 30 for results). Similarly, Pushed Learning and Media’s survey asked whether listening to *Generation Green New Deal* and watching related videos made respondents more likely to be civically engaged; to think more about the climate crisis; and to be empowered to impact climate change (see p. 22 for results). As demonstrated in the “Civic Health Impact” sections of each project profile, the results of these surveys were overwhelmingly positive, indicating the connections between cultural organizations’ work and the civic health of the state.

By including questions about civic health-related project outcomes in their evaluations, the pilot project teams could obtain a stronger, more specific understanding of the positive civic health impact of the work that they do. By the end of the project, Tomaquag Museum Executive Director Lorén Spears found that this civic health-focused framework provided the museum with a new lens on their existing mission and programs:

Promoting and engaging in civic learning...is what we do every day, and this project helped us understand it utilizing different terminology.

In other words, the Tomaquag Museum, and likely every cultural organization in Rhode Island, has been strengthening Rhode Island’s civic health through their mission and activities since their founding. By considering their work through the lens of civic health impact, cultural organizations can more fully understand the work they already do, and consider how to thoughtfully strengthen it, and the civic health of their communities.

A Call for Partnerships: “Break Down Your Silos and Ways of Doing Things in the Past”

- According to newportFILM’s Rebecca Bertrand, “Civic life **is defined** by the work of cultural organizations.” For Bertrand, that cultural work fundamentally constitutes and
- contributes to the civic life of the state, serving as a “***builder of a series of bridges*** -
- uniting people together despite a range of differences between us.” Pushed Learning and Media’s Eric Axelman invoked the related image of cultural organizations as the “***lifeblood***” of a civic body, reflecting that “it’s all about having as many different paths to communication between different elements of a community.”

These images—of bridges, of lifeblood—indicate the fundamental importance of connection-building in cultural work, and in strengthening the civic health of the state. These connections can and should extend to partnerships between cultural organizations and journalists, which can benefit both professionals and communities. The partnerships forged during *Culture Is Key* have already continued beyond the pilot projects: newportFILM and G. Wayne Miller plan to continue to work together, while Josh Short of the Wilbury Theatre Group and Ana González created an in-person version of *Capture the Block* during August 2021. Rebecca Bertrand of newportFILM emphasized the importance of funding to support the partnership with *Story in the Public Square*, which was “something we wanted to do for a really long time, but never had the reason to do it, and that’s always a difficult thing to justify to a board...so having a reason to make something happen is...especially helpful when you’re like, ‘This is funded, we have to do this.’”

Of course, these partnerships shed light on a much larger cultural ecosystem beyond the *Culture Is Key* project that can be leveraged to make civic health impacts across the state. The Tomaquag Museum “already work[s] with more than 100 organizations impacting civic engagement & health...across sectors, for example, environmental, tourism, education (pre-K-12 & secondary), healthcare, arts, social justice, historical, museums, agriculture, and more,” while Bertrand reflected that partnerships are “the air that newportFILM breathes.” In terms of participating in this ecosystem, Bertrand recommends that organizations “break down their silos and the ways of doing things in the past,” a shift in mindset that may be inspired by commitment to community that spans cultural organizations.

And what might this commitment to community look like? In the words of the Providence Public Library’s Janaya Kizzie:

Question your own expertise, get out of the way, become facilitators instead of directors, channel resources to activities and projects that have already been put in process by community members, based on the need that they have identified, and that need assistance to get off the ground or get to the next level.

In doing so, cultural organizations put the civic health of their communities first.

WHEN THE HUMANITIES COUNCIL conceptualized the *Culture Is Key* project, we were hopeful, but not certain, that there would be a strong connection between indicators of civic health and the activities and perspectives of cultural organizations. We were surprised and inspired by the extent to which many and various organizations throughout the state already articulated these indicators and put them into practice. Among the 64 organizations that participated, there was a strong consensus that contributing to civic health is, or should be, an important part of their mission, values, and practices. In documenting and amplifying these contributions, as well as the challenges organizations meet in doing this work, we call for greater investment in humanities, arts, and culture to support the renewal of civil society.

As stated in the *Executive Summary* (p. 4), several insights and recommendations have emerged from *Culture Is Key*:

1. IMPACT: Cultural organizations make a positive impact on Rhode Island's civic health through their public-facing activities.

» **NEXT STEP:** Identifying, strengthening, and evaluating these impacts—efforts to which this report seeks to contribute—would make this work more visible and better resourced.

2. SUSTAINED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: To strengthen civic health, cultural organizations must genuinely invite and sustain engagement with their local communities.

» **NEXT STEP:** Support and amplify cultural organizations' existing community-engaged practices, and provide resources for cultural organizations seeking to strengthen their community engagement.

3. SHARED COMMITMENT WITH JOURNALISTS: Cultural organizations and journalists have a shared commitment to supporting informed and dynamic community discourses, but this potential is in large part unrealized in Rhode Island.

» **NEXT STEP:** Nurture the natural points of collaboration between journalists and cultural organizations around community storytelling, as well as shared work on clarifying and focusing dialogues, and correcting misinformation and broadening perspectives.

4. SECTOR-WIDE CHALLENGES: Cultural organizations face challenges to focusing on civic health as a result of institutional cultures that don't support this work; limited financial resources; and limited staff capacity.

» **NEXT STEP:** A shared framework that includes indicators of civic health and measurable outcomes could create positive, tangible demonstrations of impact and platforms for advocacy.

5. PARTNERSHIP: By working in partnership with one another and outside the sector, cultural organizations can share resources, generate new perspectives and ideas, and positively affect civic health in their communities. However, working in partnership requires time, energy, and resources dedicated to shared visioning and coordination.

» **NEXT STEP:** Developing a shared sector-wide understanding of civic health impact, as well as greater incentives and resources dedicated towards supporting partnerships, can facilitate partnerships that directly strengthen civic health.

Taken together, these insights and recommendations suggest that there is great potential for culture, humanities, and arts to strengthen civic health — and that they already do. Moreover, cultural organizations and journalists can do more together to contribute to informed community participation and well-being. Shared strategies and measures in the culture, humanities, and arts sector can improve civic health, and therefore, our shared future.

Rhode Island Council for the Humanities Project Team

Elizabeth Francis, PhD
Executive Director

As Executive Director of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, Elizabeth Francis leads the Council's promotion of public history, cultural heritage, civic education and community engagement. She works with the Council's board of directors and leaders in government, higher education, and cultural organizations to connect humanities resources and perspectives with challenges and opportunities in the state. Overseeing the Council's relationship with the National Endowment for the Humanities, Francis helps to position the Council's work more broadly as well as to build partnerships and initiatives.



Before her role at the Council, Francis worked in Corporate and Foundation Relations at Brown University for 10 years. She earned her doctorate in American Studies at Brown, and her book, *The Secret Treachery of Words: Feminism and Modernism in America*, was published by the University of Minnesota Press. She completed her bachelor's degree at Hampshire College. She has taught at Brown—most recently a course on philanthropy and civil society in Spring 2019; the University of Rhode Island; and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In addition, she has been on the board of the International Charter School in Pawtucket, RI, and chaired the Grants Committee as a member of the board at the Humanities Council. As a member of the RI Commerce Corporation board in 2013-2014, Francis co-authored a strategic plan to develop the creative and cultural economy. She is a member of the Advisory Council for the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage at Brown University and the College of Arts and Sciences at Bryant University. Francis serves as a director on the Board of The Public's Radio and is Vice President of the Community Advisory Board for Rhode Island PBS. In 2017, she joined the Advisory Council for the Dirt Palace at the Wedding Cake House, a Providence-based feminist art collective.



Mary Kuan
Research Consultant

Mary Kuan is a Taiwanese-American artist and domestic violence advocate. She received both her BFA in Painting and MA in Art & Design Education from the Rhode Island School of Design. Her life and creativity are collectively dedicated towards building a world—alongside multiple communities and care webs—bent towards liberation one moment, project, and relationship at a time.

Julia Lazarus

Culture Is Key Civic Health Fellow

Julia Lazarus is an experience designer and cultural project producer interested in creative audience engagement, public humanities program development, and strategic cultural planning. She came to the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities' Culture is Key fellowship from her role as Assistant Director of Online Learning & Innovation at Brown University's School of Professional Studies, where her team developed and delivered both fully online and blended courses for high school students, Brown undergraduates, professional adults, and Brown's global public. Her prior work included museum programming, educational technology, multimedia content production, community journalism, and film, in projects for Microsoft Network, Scholastic, StoryCorps, NOOK Kids, and The Museum of Modern Art, among others. Lazarus holds an MA in Public Humanities from Brown University, as well as degrees in literature from Duke University and Wesleyan University. She is passionate about making art and ideas accessible and relevant to audiences, and the ways in which culture contributes to vibrant civic life and public spaces.



Julia Renaud

Associate Director of Grants and Strategic Initiatives

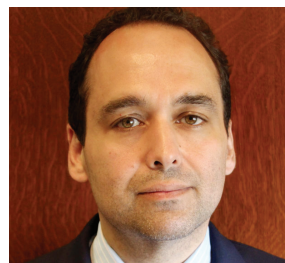
Julia Renaud brings a professional, academic, and personal passion for the public humanities to her work at the Council. In supporting grantmaking and strategic initiatives, she is thrilled to contribute to Rhode Island's cultural life and civic health. Prior to joining the Council, Renaud served in public programs, archival, curatorial, and communications roles in museums and cultural organizations in New York and Providence. Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, she holds an MA in Public Humanities from Brown University and an AB, *summa cum laude*, in American History and Literature with a minor in History of Art and Architecture from Harvard University.

Advisory Committee

Gonzalo A. Cuervo

Former Deputy Secretary, Rhode Island Department of State

Gonzalo Cuervo is a proud Rhode Islander and public administrator who formerly served as Deputy Secretary of State. Previously, he served as Chief of Staff to the Mayor of Providence and Communications Director for the City of Providence and the RI Department of State. Cuervo serves on the boards of Crossroads, the Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University, the Providence Cultural Equity Initiative, Roger Williams Park Conservancy, and Teatro ECAS. He is a past board member of the Providence Performing Arts Center, an occasional contributor to *Acontecer Latino* newspaper, and a co-host of the Spanish language podcast, *Zona de Promesas*. He holds a BS in Human Services from Springfield College and certificates in Municipal Leadership from Bryant University's Hassenfeld Institute for Public Leadership and in Communication and Media Studies from Universidad de Antioquía, Medellín, Columbia.



Stephanie Fortunato

***Director, Department of Art, Culture + Tourism,
City of Providence***

Stephanie Fortunato has been the Director of Providence's Department of Art, Culture + Tourism since 2016. She leads the Department at the intersection of cultural planning and urban development, collaborating with local communities to create arts-based policies and partnerships that strengthen neighborhoods and transform public spaces. Previously,

Fortunato was director of programs for The Pawtucket Foundation and a consultant with Jane Clark Chermayeff Associates, LLC. She serves on the boards of WaterFire and the Providence-Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau, and on advisory committees for Congressman James Langevin's Arts and Culture Committee and the New England Foundation for the Arts, among others. She holds a MA in Public Humanities from Brown University and a BA in Humanities from Providence College.

Gayle L. Gifford

President, Cause & Effect, Inc.

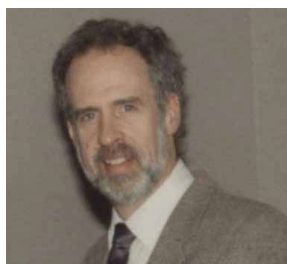
Gayle L. Gifford, MS, ACFRE, is a nationally known consultant, author, and trainer with more than 30 years of experience in organization development, board governance, public engagement, and fund development for the nonprofit and public sectors. Prior to co-founding Cause & Effect, Inc. in 1996, Gifford was a valued department head and senior manager leading strategy, planning, advocacy, revenue and program growth, and quality efforts at Plan International USA, Save The Bay, and City Year RI. Gifford holds a MS in Management from Antioch University New England and a BA from Clark University, where she studied urban geography. She has been a long time instructor in the Masters in Public Humanities program at Brown University. Gifford is author of two books and contributor to four others on nonprofit governance and fundraising. Gifford served on the board of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities (2002 - 2008) and as chair of the board (2006 - 2008).



Renee Hobbs, EdD

Professor of Communication Studies & Director, Media Education Lab, Harrington School of Communication and Media, University of Rhode Island

Renee Hobbs, EdD, is an internationally recognized authority on digital and media literacy education. Through community and global service and as a researcher, teacher, advocate and media professional, Hobbs has worked to advance the quality of digital and media literacy education in the United States and around the world. She is Founder and Director of the Media Education Lab, whose mission is to improve the quality of media literacy education through research and community service. She has published 10 books and over 150 articles in scholarly and professional journals. Hobbs holds an EdD in Human Development from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a MA in Communication from the University of Michigan, and a BA with a double major in English Literature and Film/Video Studies from the University of Michigan.



Francis J. Leazes, Jr., MPA, PhD

Professor of Political Science and Public Administration & Director of the Public Administration Program, Rhode Island College

Francis J. Leazes, Jr., MPA, PhD, is a Professor of Political Science and Public Administration at Rhode Island College (RIC) in Providence. He chaired the Political Science Department at RIC, and for two decades directed the RIC-URI Cooperative Master of Public Administration Program. He is the author of articles on nonprofit administration, urban politics, public budgeting and finance, and he co-authored *Providence: The Renaissance City*, a political analysis of Providence in the years 1960-2000. His current teaching and research interests include program evaluation, economic development, arts, culture and tourism, and the educational opportunities presented by digital technology and public cemeteries.

Leazes holds a BA from the College of the Holy Cross in History, a MA in History from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and both a MPA and PhD in Political Science from the University of Connecticut, Storrs.

Torey Malatia

President, CEO & General Manager, The Public's Radio

Torey Malatia is President, CEO, and General Manager of Rhode Island Public Radio, dba The Public's Radio. Best known as the creator of forward-looking audio content, and, with his friend, Ira Glass, co-creator of *This American Life*, Malatia is a leading figure in public media strategic thinking in the United States, and has written and lectured extensively about public media's role as a public trust. Malatia entered media as a journalist and continues in this role. He has written for the *Scottsdale Daily Progress*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Phoenix Magazine*, the alternative weekly *New Times*, and numerous periodicals including the public media trade publication, *Current*. Malatia holds a MA and BA in English Literature from Arizona State University and pursued postgraduate study at the University of Toronto in Middle English literature. He most recently attended the Executive Education Program at The University of Chicago Booth School of Business.



Todd Trebour

Organizations Program Director, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts

Todd Trebour is the Organizations Program Director at the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA). Trebour manages and oversees the agency's support for organizations, including grants, programs, and services. A strong believer in the power of partnerships and networks, Trebour has co-piloted several new initiatives at RISCA since he started in 2018, including affinity group convenings of organizations; an Arts and Cultural Advocacy Workshop series with the United Way of Rhode Island, City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, and the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities; and an Advancing Cultural Equity Workshop and Technical Assistance Program in partnership with the Rhode Island Foundation. Currently, Trebour is serving his second term on the Emerging Leaders Advisory Council at Americans for the Arts (AFTA) and is AFTA's State Arts Advocacy Captain representing Rhode Island. Trebour holds a BA in Music Performance from Whitman College, a MM in Voice from Rice University, and a certificate in nonprofit management from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.



Joe Wilson, Jr.

Actor; Member of the Resident Acting Company & Coordinator of Activism through Performance, Trinity Repertory Company; Assistant Professor/Artist-in-Residence, Wheaton College; Adjunct Professor, Emerson College

Joe Wilson, Jr. holds a BA in Political Science from the University of Notre Dame, and a MFA in Acting from the University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theatre training program. He has worked On Broadway (2000 Tony Award-nominated production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and 2018 Tony Award-nominated *Iceman Cometh* starring Denzel Washington), and Off Broadway, as well as performed in regional theaters around the country. He has taught acting and art activism, and lectured at high schools, colleges, universities and at conferences locally and around the country. Wilson is in his 16th season as a member of the Resident Acting Company at Trinity Repertory Company, and is the Founder of Trinity Rep's Center for Activism and Performance, as well as the producer of the annual community art-making collaboration *America Too* held at Trinity Rep every fall.

He has been honored by the Rhode Island Black Heritage Foundation, and is a Fox Foundation Fellow for Distinguished Achievement in the Arts. In 2019, Wilson was honored by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities with its Public Scholar Award and also received the Providence NAACP's Medgar Evers Award for Public Service. Most recently, Wilson was inducted into the City of Providence 2020 MLK Hall of Fame for Outstanding Service. Wilson currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Manton Avenue Project in Olneyville, and the Center for Reconciliation at the Cathedral of Saint John in collaboration with the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island.

David Yokum, JD, PhD

Director, The Policy Lab, Brown University; Adjunct Associate Professor at the Watson Institute, Brown University; Senior Advisor to The Lab @ DC



David Yokum, JD, PhD, is Director of The Policy Lab at Brown University, where he leads a wide portfolio of work leveraging scientific methods to improve public policy and operations. Yokum was previously the founding director of The Lab @ DC in the D.C. Mayor's Office and, before that, a founding member of the White House's Social & Behavioral Sciences Team and director of its scientific delivery unit housed at the U.S. General Services Administration. President Obama institutionalized the latter work in Executive Order 13707, "Using Behavioral Science Insights to Better Serve the American People." All three ventures were exemplars of building internal-to-government scientific capacity and partnerships with universities, which have since inspired replications across the world.

Yokum's work—from the world's largest field experiment of a police body-worn camera program, to building algorithms that predict the location of rats, to a Form-a-Palooza initiative systematically re-designing all government forms—has been published in diverse outlets (e.g. *Nature Human Behavior*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, *Health Affairs*, and *Governing Magazine*), received widespread media coverage (*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, NPR, etc.), and impacted individuals and communities across the country. He holds a JD and PhD (psychology: cognition and neural systems) from the University of Arizona, a MA in Bioethics & Medical Humanities from the University of South Florida, and a BS in Biology from Birmingham-Southern College.

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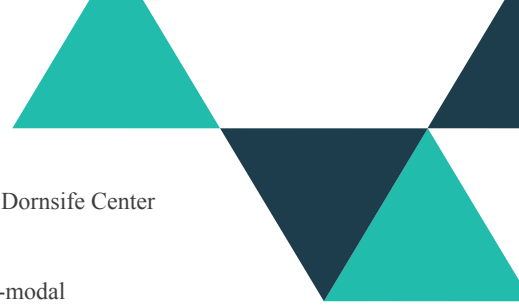
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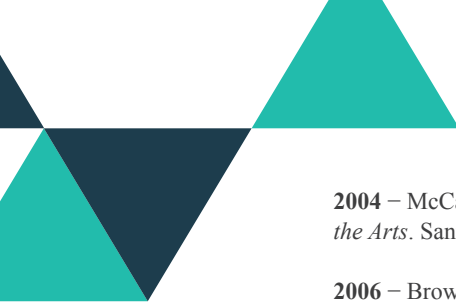
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Culture Is Key Participants



● **Survey & Interview Respondents**

Anonymous (14)

AS220, Providence

Blackstone Valley Historical Society, Lincoln

Coggeshall Farm Museum, Bristol

Community String Project, Bristol

Dirt Palace Public Projects, Providence

Frequency Writers, Providence

Friends of Adrian Hall, Providence

Gallery Night Providence, Providence

Generation Citizen, Providence

Jamestown Arts Center, Jamestown

Jamestown Community Piano Association,
Jamestown

Jamestown Historical Society, Jamestown

Jesse M. Smith Memorial Library, Burrillville

Kingston Chamber Music Festival, Kingston

Lippitt House Museum, Providence

Manton Avenue Project, Providence

Media Education Lab, Kingston

Music on the Hill, East Greenwich

Narragansett Historical Society, Narragansett

New Urban Arts, Providence

Newport Restoration Foundation, Newport

Old Slater Mill Association, Pawtucket

Pawtucket Arts Collaborative, Pawtucket

Preservation Society of Newport County,
Newport

Providence Athenaeum, Providence

Providence Children's Film Festival,
Providence

Providence Public Library, Providence

Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport

Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence

Rhode Island Kung Fu and Lion Dance Club,
Providence

Rhode Island Urban Debate League,
Providence

Riverzedge Arts, Woonsocket

Rogers Free Library, Bristol

RPM Voices of Rhode Island, Providence

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre,
Warwick

Sankofa Community Connections, Newport

South County History Center, Kingston

Southside Community Land Trust, Providence

Spectrum Theatre Ensemble, Providence

Stages of Freedom, Providence

The Steel Yard, Providence

Teatro ECAS, Providence

United Theatre, Westerly

Warwick Center for the Arts, Warwick

What Cheer Writers Club, Providence

Wilbury Theatre Group, Providence

The Womxn Project Education Fund, South
Kingstown

● **Pilot Project Teams**

newportFILM, Newport

Providence Public Library, Providence

Pushed Learning and Media, Providence

Tomaquag Museum, Exeter

Wilbury Theatre Group, Providence

Survey and Interview Questions

Key aspects of the survey/interview design and methodology were:

- **QUESTIONS:** A mix of quantitative and qualitative questions to capture experiences, practices, and perspectives of respondents. Interviews included all survey questions, along with some questions unique to the interviews reflecting the format's opportunity for more expansive qualitative responses.
- **TARGET RESPONDENTS:** All Rhode Island cultural non-profits were invited to participate, including humanities-focused organizations such as historic sites, historical societies, preservation societies, libraries, and museums. Arts-focused organizations and general cultural organizations were also welcome to provide their input. This approach acknowledged the overlapping nature of the arts and humanities within the cultural sector, but also the distinctive character of the humanities sector.

The *Culture Is Key* team sought to ensure that respondents of both the survey and interviews represented a diversity of geographic locations in the state; a diversity of types and sizes of organizations, and a diversity of demographics among staff, Board members, and audiences served. These organizational characteristics were determined via publicly accessible information.

- **OUTREACH:** The Council directly invited 218 cultural organizations in the state to participate in the survey; shared the opportunity with partner organizations; and publicized the invitation via its own e-newsletter to over 3,000 subscribers. The team also requested interviews from staff at a sample of cultural organizations, who were selected per the criteria described above.
- **PARTICIPANTS:** A total of **61 practitioners** participated in the survey and interviews: **49 survey respondents** and **12 interview participants**. A full list of participating organizations can be found in *Appendix: Culture Is Key Participants* (p. 34).

Full Culture Is Key Survey and Interview Questions

I - CIVIC HEALTH MINDSET AND RESPONSIVENESS TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

Question 1 - When you hear the phrase “civic health,” what do you think of?

Question 2 - To what extent does your organization orient its mission and activities towards impacting civic health in Rhode Island?

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- Not at all

Question 2b (INTERVIEW ONLY): What motivates this orientation?

Question 3 - What are some examples of work your organization is doing related to civic health?

Question 3b (INTERVIEW ONLY): How, if at all, have the following recent national civic crises changed your organization’s ideas about its civic purpose or role?

- The pandemic?
- The movement for racial justice?
- Partisan polarization?

Question 3c (INTERVIEW ONLY): What information does your organization use to try to understand your community’s pressing civic needs and concerns?

II - LENSES FOR LOOKING AT CIVIC HEALTH IMPACT

Question 4 - One way of looking at civic health impact is through the lens of **program outcomes** — or intended results — of any opportunities the public has to engage with your organization, which could include public programs, exhibitions, reading rooms, community spaces, or other offerings.

Our research for the *Culture is Key* project has identified a number of such outcomes (see below) that may reflect the work of Rhode Island cultural organizations.

Please select which outcomes, if any, are most relevant to your organization’s work (select as many as apply). For 2-3 of the outcomes you identify, please provide an example in the space that follows below.

- bridging differences and facilitating social bonding
- cultivating sense of belonging and agency in the public sphere
- facilitating community visioning and problem-solving
- facilitating informed and inclusive discourse **
- illuminating diversity of community identity and experiences
- increasing knowledge and deepening understanding of contexts
- hosting communal experiences
- promoting multiple modes of knowledge and shared authority
- supporting cultural resilience and continuity
- strengthening feeling of stewardship for one’s local community

*** option mistakenly left out of survey until midway through circulation.*

Question 4b (INTERVIEW ONLY): Are there any outcomes of your work related to civic health that you do not see reflected in this list?

Question 5 - Another way of looking at civic health impact is through the lens of aspects of civic life with which an organization’s mission or its programs may engage. These connections may surface in the work of cultural organizations in the themes and topics of organizational activities, in cross-sector collaborations, or any other ways in which participants may have encountered these aspects through the work of your organization.

Our research for the *Culture Is Key* project has identified a number of such aspects of civic life (below) with which Rhode Island cultural organizations may engage.

Please select which aspects, if any, your organization may have engaged with in recent years (select as many as apply). For 2-3 of the aspects you select, please provide an example in the space that follows below.

- agriculture and food
- community organizing and leadership
- economic and/or workforce development
- environment and/or energy
- equity, diversity, inclusion
- health
- housing
- journalism and media literacy
- organized faith-based activities and/or religion
- public utilities and infrastructure
- public safety
- pre-K-12 schools and/or higher ed
- sense of place (including built environment and preservation)
- voting and/or electoral participation
- youth development

III - EVALUATING IMPACT (INTERVIEW ONLY)

Question A. How does your organization measure its effectiveness in achieving the civic health outcomes we just discussed? What tools or types of information have you found to be most informative (e.g. program evaluations, talking with participants, surveys, interviews, attendance at events, press attention, social media attention, etc.)?

Question B. Thinking about the civic health impacts we just discussed, what has been the most meaningful information your organization has learned from participants about the impact of your programs on the state's civic health?

IV - CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS & JOURNALISM (INTERVIEW ONLY)

Question C - *Culture Is Key* is exploring potential overlaps between the missions and practices of cultural organizations and journalists/media producers in terms of civic health impacts. One example: both fields have a commitment to an informed public, share information about civic issues with their communities, and facilitate informed dialogue about those issues.

Do you find that the work of your organization around civic issues is related to the work of journalists/media producers? If so, what is an example of that? Have you produced any work or pursued any collaborations that have explicitly engaged with journalism topics, practices, or journalists themselves?

V - CHALLENGES (INTERVIEW ONLY)

Question D. What one thing do you think your organization could do, if anything, to strengthen or expand the civic impact of your programs?

Question E. What are the chief barriers your organization faces in its civic-oriented work?

Question F. What are the top three resources that would be most useful to your organization in overcoming those barriers & which organizational priorities would those resources serve?

VI - BASIC ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

Finally, please share some information about your organization.

Question 6 - What is the name of your organization?

Question 7 - Which of the following categories best describes your organization?

- Cultural organization
- Community organization
- Historic site
- Historical society
- Library
- Museum
- Preservation society
- Other (please specify)

Question 8 - Which of the following best describes your organization's audience? (Select all that apply.)

- General public
- Children & families
- Teens
- Adults
- Senior citizens
- K-12 schools
- Higher education
- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities
- LGBTQ+ communities
- Low-income communities
- Rural communities
- Urban communities
- Other (please specify)

Question 9 - Which of the following reflect your organization's sources of funding? (Select all that apply.)

- Fees for goods and/or services (e.g. ticket sales)
- Membership program
- Individual donations, major gifts, and bequests
- Corporate donations
- Grants from private funders
- Grants from public (city, state, or federal) funders
- Endowment income
- Other (please specify)

Question 10 - What is your organization's current operating expenses budget range?

- \$0 - \$100,000
- \$100,000 - \$500,000
- \$500,000 - \$1 million
- \$1 million - \$3 million
- Above \$3 million
- Other (please specify)

Question 11 - How many staff members of each type work at your organization?

Full-time

- 0
- 1-5
- 5-10
- 10-30
- 30-50
- 50-100
- 100+
- Other (please specify)

Part-time

- 0
- 1-5
- 5-10
- 10-30
- 30-50
- 50-100
- 100+
- Other (please specify)

Volunteer

- (Approximate Number)
- 0
- 1-5
- 5-10
- 10-30
- 30-50
- 50-100
- 100+
- Other (please specify)

Question 12 - Taking into account both your staff and your board(s), is your organization led by individuals who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Other (please specify)

Question 13 - Taking into account both your staff and your board(s), is your organization led by individuals who identify as female or non-binary?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Other (please specify)

Question 14 - In which Rhode Island city/town is your organization located?

VII - CLOSING

Question G (INTERVIEW ONLY): Is there any other organization or practitioner, within Rhode Island or beyond, who you think is a model of particularly strong civic-oriented practice?

Question H (INTERVIEW ONLY): Is there any other organization that you think we should speak with for this project?

Question 15 - If you are willing to be contacted for follow-up questions, or would like to receive updates about the *Culture Is Key* initiative, please share your email address here.

Question 16 - Is there anything else you would like us to know?

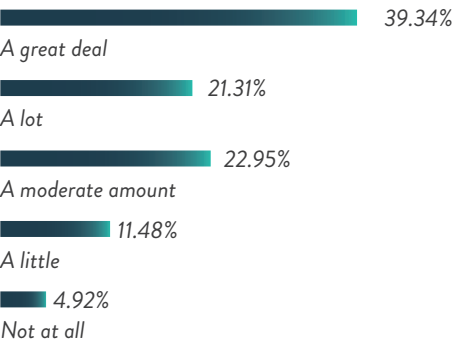
Full Quantitative Survey Data

This section presents the full, aggregated quantitative results of the Culture Is Key survey. The full, aggregated qualitative results are not included in the interest of space as well as respecting our respondents' anonymity. Please contact the Humanities Council with any questions or for any further information.

Q2 To what extent does your organization orient its mission and activities towards impacting civic health in Rhode Island?

Answered: 61

Skipped: 0

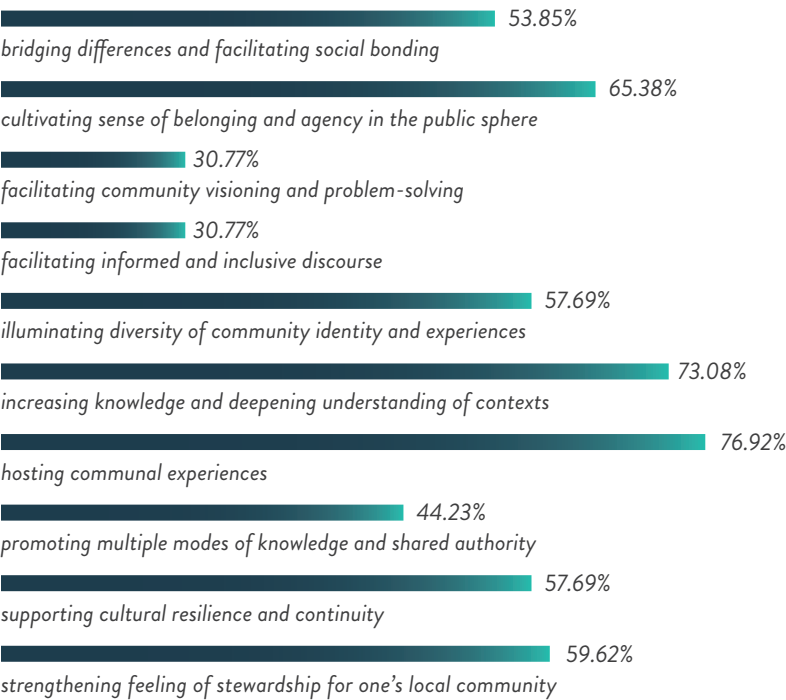


(100%)

Q4 One way of looking at civic health impact is through the lens of program outcomes—or intended results—of any opportunities the public has to engage with your organization, which could include public programs, exhibitions, reading rooms, community spaces, or other offerings. Our research for the *Culture is Key* project has identified a number of such outcomes (below) that may reflect the work of Rhode Island cultural organizations. Please select which outcomes, if any, are most relevant to your organization’s work (select as many as apply). For 2-3 of the outcomes you select, please provide an example in the space that follows below.

Answered: 52

Skipped: 9

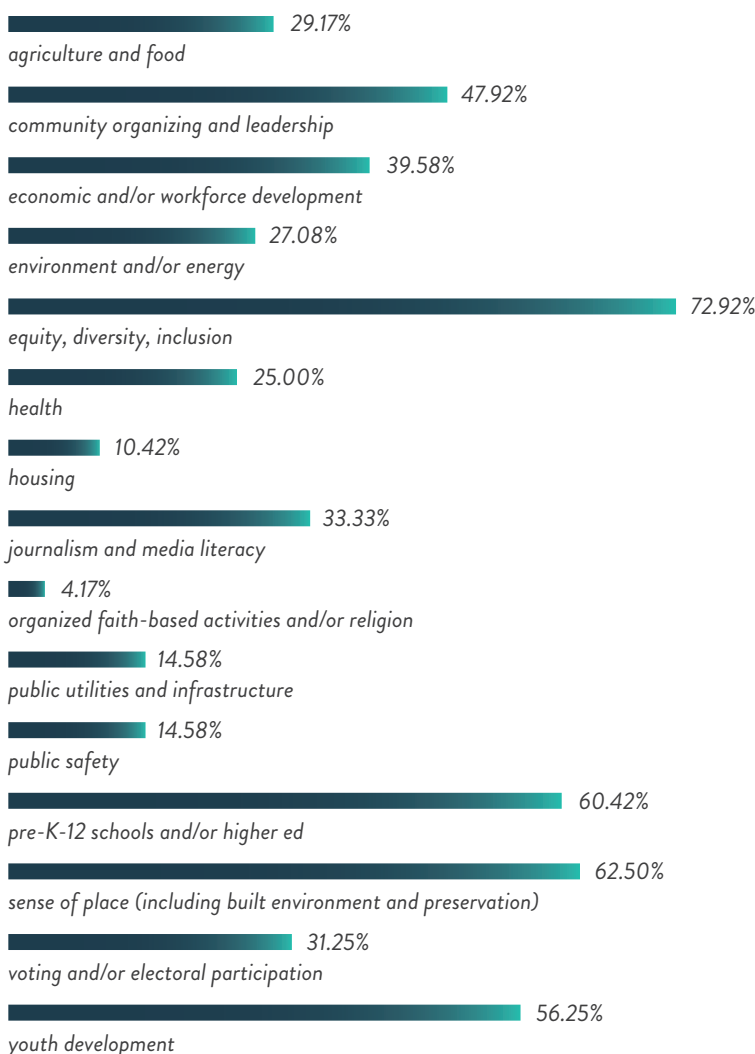


(100%)

Q5 Another way of looking at civic health impact is through the lens of aspects of civic life with which an organization’s mission or its programs may engage. These connections may surface in the work of cultural organizations in the themes and topics of organizational activities, in cross- sector collaborations, or any other ways in which participants may have encountered these aspects through the work of your organization. Our research for the Culture is Key project has identified a number of such aspects of civic life (below) with which Rhode Island cultural organizations may engage. Please select which aspects, if any, your organization may have engaged with in recent years (select as many as apply). For 2-3 of the aspects you select, please provide an example in the space that follows below.

Answered: 48

Skipped: 13

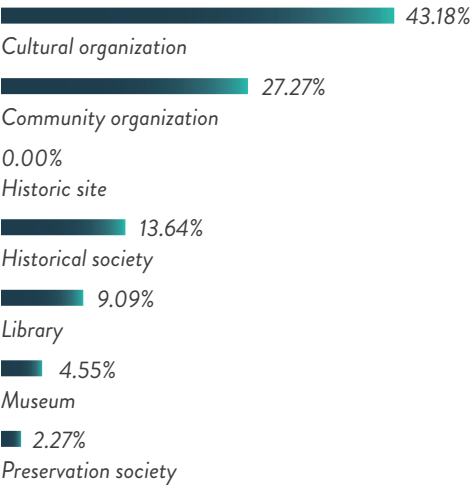


(100%)

Q7 Which of the following categories best describes your organization?

Answered: 44

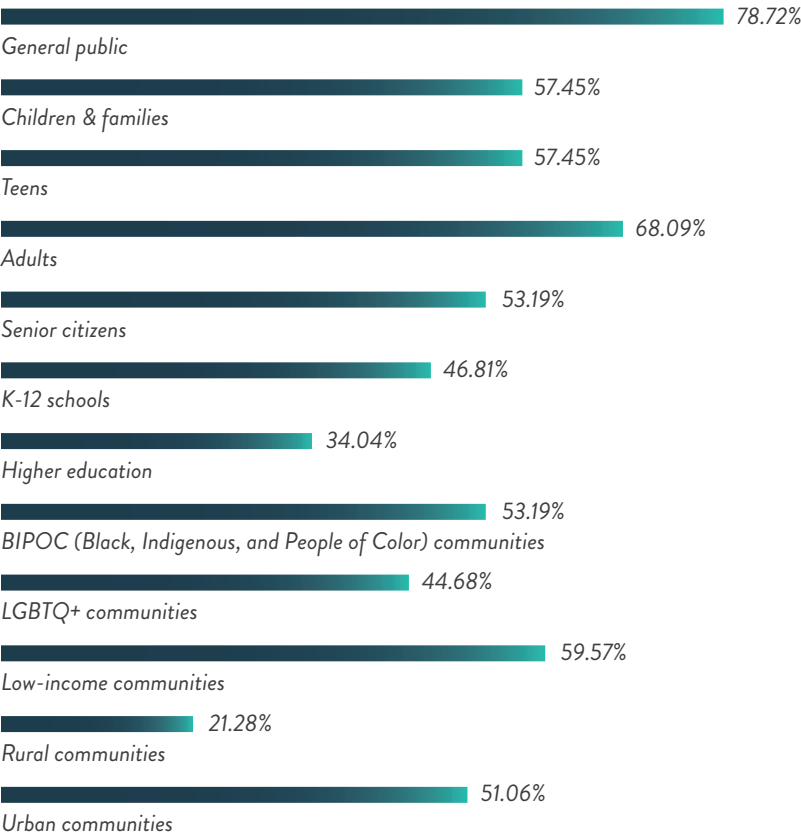
Skipped: 17



Q8 Which of the following best describes your organization's audience? (Select all that apply.)

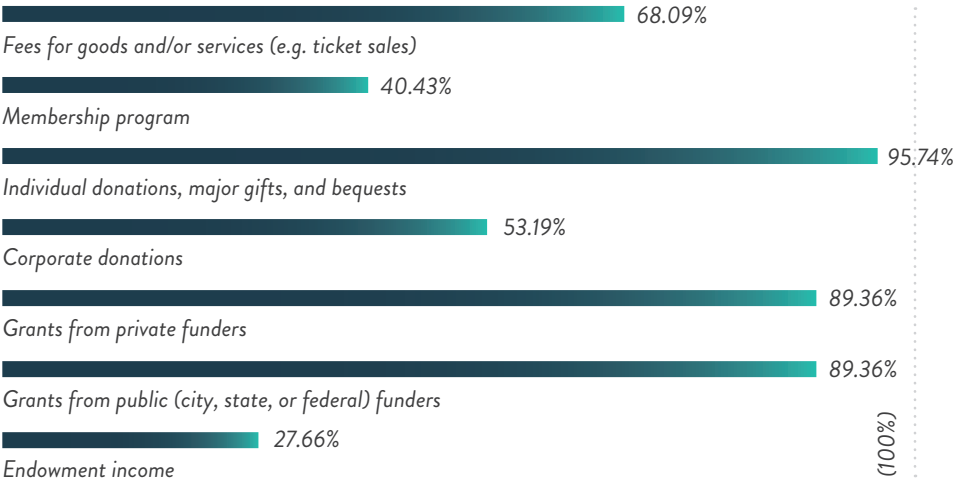
Answered: 47

Skipped: 14



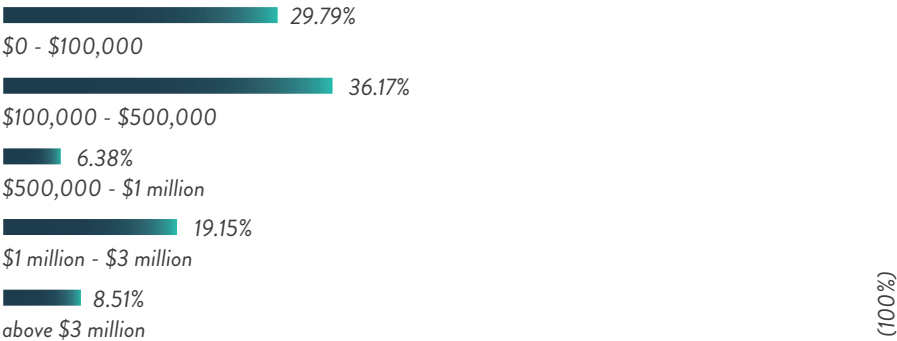
Q9 Which of the following reflect your organization’s sources of funding? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 47
Skipped: 14



Q10 What is your organization’s current operating expenses budget range?

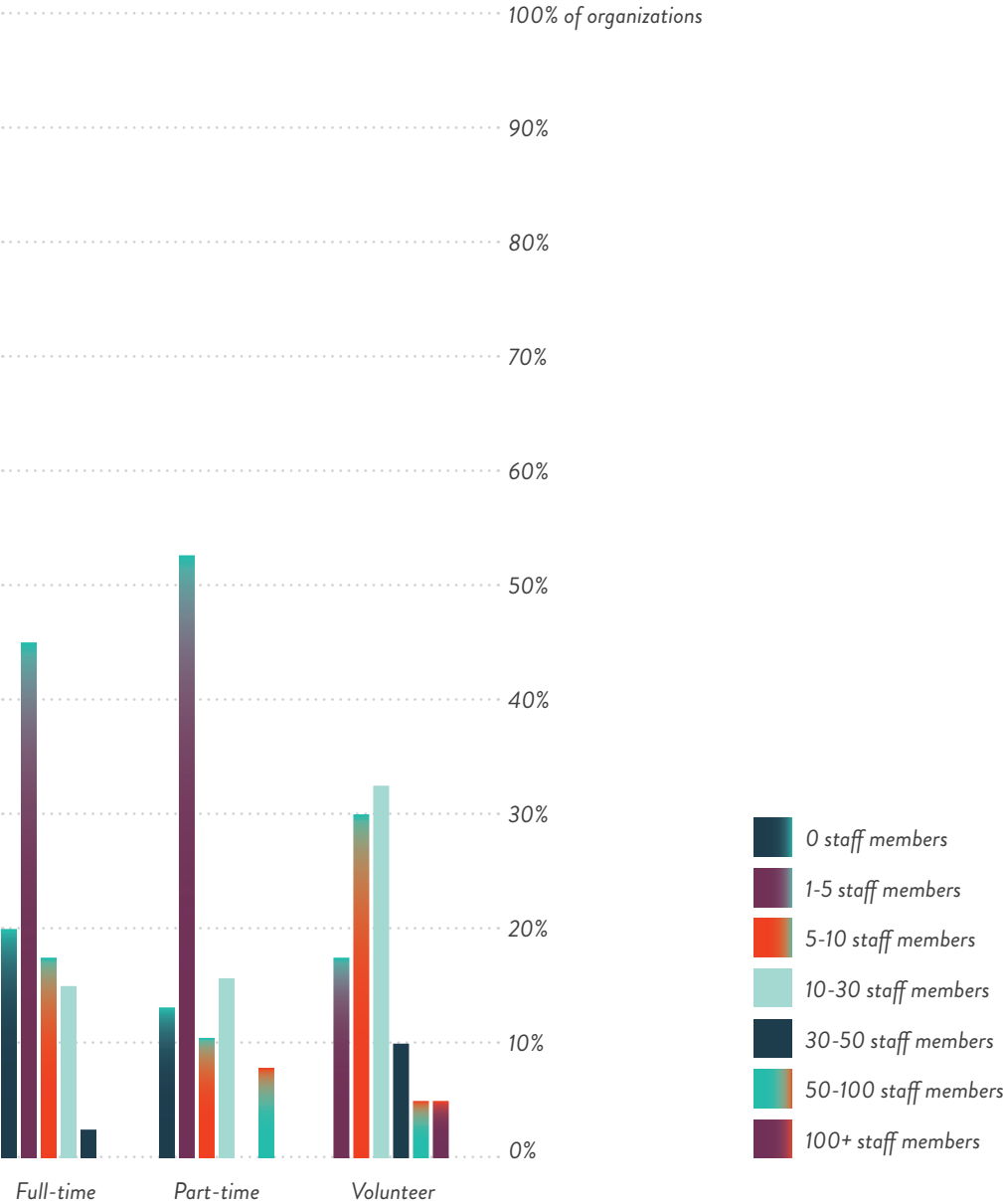
Answered: 47
Skipped: 14



Q11 How many staff members of each type work at your organization?

Answered: 46

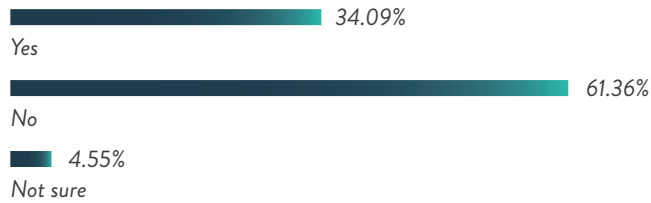
Skipped: 15



Q12 Taking into account both your staff and your board(s), is your organization led by individuals who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)?

Answered: 44

Skipped: 17



Q13 Taking into account both your staff and your board(s), is your organization led by individuals who identify as female or non-binary?

Answered: 44

Skipped: 17



Q14 In which Rhode Island city/town is your organization located?

Answered: 47

Skipped: 14

<i>Barrington</i>	<i>0 organizations</i>
<i>Bristol</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Burrillville</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Central Falls</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Charlestown</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Coventry</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Cranston</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Cumberland</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>East Greenwich</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>East Providence</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Exeter</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Foster</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Glocester</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Hopkinton</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Jamestown</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Johnston</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Lincoln</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Little Compton</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Middletown</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Narragansett</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>New Shoreham</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Newport</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>North Kingstown</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>North Providence</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>North Smithfield</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Pawtucket</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Portsmouth</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Providence</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Richmond</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Scituate</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Smithfield</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>South Kingstown</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Warren</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Warwick</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>West Greenwich</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>West Warwick</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Westerly</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Woonsocket</i>	<i>1</i>

FROM A HISTORIC SITE:

"I think one of the greatest things that I have learned is that people are listening... It was the 2016 election, and a woman came in the day after the election and she was just devastated...And, again, remaining objective, she brought her daughter, and we sat back and we talked about politics. We talked about the first election, which was 1796...what that meant, and what our country was founded on. Getting her to make some of the connections, and talking to the mom and just being like, 'All right, how are you feeling? Where is this coming from? Have there been historical comparisons, where somebody has been elected, and people have felt the way that you are feeling? Why are we concerned? Where do we go with this?'" Again, trying to be objective.

She came back to me a few days later, and her husband was an adjunct at a local college and wasn't going to be here for more than a few months. And the mom looked at me and said, 'Listen, after our conversation the other day, I've made a decision. I'm going to homeschool my daughter, because rather than torture her with going to a school, having to make new friends and then leave in a few months and whatnot... What I learned from you is that I can go to cultural institutions like yours and I can get what I believe her education should be.' And that was huge. That was one of the biggest moments in my career. It made that very difficult day worth it. But it also made me understand that people aren't looking at museums and cultural institutions as the resources that they truly are."

FROM A PUBLIC LIBRARY:

“For me, and for most of my staff, it’s the stories that people come in to tell us. Like a person that came in and said, ‘I’m on unemployment, I don’t know what to do. You guys helped me,’ and, ‘I have a sick child, I don’t know what they have, can you help me?’ It’s stuff like that. I would say on a regular basis, we see this and what kind of impact you had on someone’s life. You can’t count it, but you can see in their face that you’ve made some kind of difference in their life. For us, that’s what we kind of live for here. That makes all of every stress that we have, such as leaking toilets and whatnot, all worthwhile.”

FROM A CULTURAL HERITAGE ORGANIZATION:

“I’ve always been very committed to supporting small, local businesses in Providence. We’ve done many shows for free over the years for civic events, businesses that just started, many heritage festivals or community festival events, whether it’s paid, low pay, unpaid, pro bono. I think a mission of the organization has always been to try to be a positive contributor to its community, to its state, and that is done through collaboration with organizations, individuals, or businesses. And that’s something we’ve done since the beginning...Civic collaboration, cooperation, civic health, is something that is very important to us.”

The Humanities Council is deeply grateful to all who have conceptualized, supported, and participated in this project. We celebrate Rhode Island's vibrant ecosystem of cultural organizations and their tireless staff, who work every day to strengthen the civic health of our state.

Funding through the Responsive Grant Program of the Rhode Island Foundation as well as the *Democracy and the Informed Citizen* Initiative of the Federation of State Humanities Councils and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supported the Council to design and implement this project.

Nearly 70 staff members at Rhode Island cultural organizations, nine journalists, and nine Advisory Committee members working with the project's Civic Health Fellow, the Council's Executive Director and Associate Director of Grants and Strategic initiatives, and a Research Consultant participated in *Culture Is Key*.

Culture Is Key was initially developed by Logan Hinderliter, the Humanities Council's former Associate Director of Grants and Partnerships, who is now in law school and contributing to civic life in new ways.

Thanks to...

All *Culture Is Key* survey and interview participants

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All *Culture Is Key* pilot project teams

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Laurie Zierer, Pennsylvania Humanities Council



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RHODE ISLAND COUNCIL *for the* HUMANITIES

The Rhode Island Council for the Humanities seeds, supports, and strengthens public history, cultural heritage, civic education, and community engagement by and for all Rhode Islanders. As the only dedicated source of funding for public humanities in Rhode Island, we are proud to support museums, libraries, historic sites, schools, preservation and historical societies, community and cultural organizations, individual researchers and documentary filmmakers to bring Rhode Island's stories to life and to amplify the state's many diverse voices.

The Humanities Council was established in 1973 as an independent state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), which was founded in 1965 thanks to the leadership of Rhode Island's own late Senator Claiborne Pell. A private nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, the Council is supported by federal funds from NEH as well as by individuals, corporations, and foundations. We are one of 56 humanities councils found in every state and U.S. territory.

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IMAGES & CREDITS

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