



DURHAM CULTURAL ROADMAP



Arts Management Consultants
www.mjrparkers.net
margie.reese@gmail.com



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary Durham Cultural Roadmap Phase One.....	1
MJR Partners Phase Two	3
Data Collection Methods.....	5
Data Analysis and Synthesis	5
Ethical and Equity Commitments.....	5
MJR Partners Engagement Summary:	
Listening, Learning, and the Numbers Behind the Work.....	6
Outcomes.....	9
Community Context.....	10
The Future: Industry, Visitors, and Demographic Change	15
Discovery to Decision: Setting the Stage for Action.....	21
Durham Cultural Roadmap: Recommendations	22
Recommendation 1: Build Management Capacity.....	24
Comparative Local/City/County Arts Agencies	25
Durham Peer Cities: Municipal Arts Support.....	26
Proposed Staffing and Salary Framework	26
Annual Personnel Budget Summary	27
Establishing Management Capacity.....	28
Comparative Local/City/County Arts Agencies	28
Implementation Planning Notes	30
Recommendation 2: Establish a Clear Cultural Investment Framework.....	33
Purpose	34
Background and Rationale.....	34
Core Components of the Framework.....	35
Implementation Planning Notes	35
Outcome.....	35
Recommendation 3: Launch and Align Cultural Grantmaking Programs.....	37
Purpose	38
Background and Rationale.....	38
Example Program Types	38
Implementation Considerations	39
Proposed Implementation Steps	39
Timeline.....	41
Potential Collaborators	41
Outcome.....	42
Recommendation 4: Align Cultural Governance and Funding Structures.....	43
Purpose	44
Background and Rationale.....	44
Recommendation.....	44
Key Areas of Alignment	44
Implementation Considerations	45
Proposed Implementation Steps	45
Outcome.....	47

Recommendation 5: Create a Structured Arts–Business Partnership Platform (Durham Cultural Action Partnership).....	48
Purpose	49
North Carolina Models: Approaches	49
Background and Rationale.....	49
Corporate Partners	50
Strengthening Regional Identity.....	50
Implementation Considerations	51
Getting Started:	51
Proposed Implementation Steps	51
Potential Collaborators	53
Outcome.....	53
From Sponsorship to Partnership.....	53
Recommendation 6: Expand Arts Learning and Creative Access Countywide.....	54
Purpose.....	55
Background and Rationale	55
Recommendation	55
Key Focus Areas	55
Implementation Considerations.....	56
Proposed Implementation Steps	56
Key Principle	60
Outcome	60
Recommendation 7: Expand Artist Workspace and Cultural Production Infrastructure.....	61
Purpose	62
Background and Rationale.....	62
Implementation Steps	62
Timeline.....	64
Strategic Approach.....	64
Implementation Considerations	65
Timeline.....	65
Outcome.....	65
Recommendation 8: Cultivate Cultural Leadership and Sector Capacity	66
Purpose	67
Background and Rationale.....	67
Recommendation.....	67
Key Focus Areas.....	67
Implementation Considerations	68
Outcome.....	68
Proposed Implementation Steps	68
Recommendation 9: Launch a Durham Arts & Culture Incubator	70
Purpose	71
Background and Rationale.....	71
Core Functions.....	71
Implementation Considerations	72
Proposed Implementation Steps	72

Timeline (Aligned with the broader plan).....	74
Arts & Culture Incubator — Comparable Models	74
Outcome.....	74
Recommendation 10: Commit to a Phased Cultural Investment and Implementation Horizon (5–10 Years)	75
Purpose	76
Background and Rationale.....	76
Phased Investment Approach	76
A phased approach may include:.....	76
Implementation Considerations	77
Outcome.....	77
Recommendations Summary & Closing	78
Recommendations — At a Glance	78
Closing: An Unmistakably Durham Future.....	78
Executive Summary: Closing Statement	80
Appendix A	81
Appendix B	86
Appendix C	90



Major the Bull, Artists Michael Waller and Leah Foushee Waller

Executive Summary

Durham Cultural Roadmap

Phase One

Phase One of the Durham Cultural Roadmap, facilitated by AMS Planning & Research (2024), offered a comprehensive look at the city's cultural ecosystem through interviews, focus groups, surveys, asset mapping, and community conversations.

Participants consistently affirmed the need for:

- Recognition of Durham's creatives and culture bearers
- More accessible cultural spaces
- Greater racial equity in leadership and funding
- Affordable housing and working spaces for artists
- Clear, inclusive, multilingual communication
- More public art in more places
- Expanded opportunities for youth
- Preservation of heritage, memory, and cultural identity

Phase I Engagement and Findings Summary

Situation Analysis conducted and reported by AMS Planning & Research

AMS Planning & Research provided the Durham Cultural Roadmap with a robust foundation for planning. As the City and County's lead consultant, AMS orchestrated a discovery process that reached over 1,350 voices through community and venue surveys, public input sessions, a visioning workshop, focus groups and interviews.



As AMS moved through its “assets and opportunities” phase (Phase 1), their inquiry concentrated on gathering and analyzing quantitative data, 987 community survey responses, 55 venue-user surveys, public input sessions, interviews, and focus groups to identify broad themes. These research assets provided the following data-rich background knowledge that would inform continued planning:

Participant profile: Survey respondents were overwhelmingly white (78 %), female (68 %), older (63 % aged 40+), and homeowners (76 %); nearly half reported household incomes above \$100K. This underscores that Phase 1 feedback came mostly from higher-income, longer-term residents and suggests that Phase 2 outreach should intentionally broaden participation.

- High interest and engagement – More than two-thirds (69 %) reported being extremely interested in arts and culture, 52 % identify as artists or cultural workers, and 87.9 % had attended a public performance in the past year. These statistics capture the respondents’ strong cultural participation.
- Top barriers and needs – Affordable housing was the top priority for 62 % of artists and cultural workers. Key barriers to participation included cost, lack of centralized information outlets, the expense of creative space, and competition for public and private funding support.
- Five structural themes – Growth pressures on affordable housing, the need for multiple forms of support, a strong desire for public-sector leadership, geographic/spatial equity (access to venues and neighborhood-based offerings), and information/visibility gaps.
- Priority areas – Increased funding, equity /accessibility/ inclusion, arts learning for young people, information and awareness, protection of Durham’s cultural identity.

Phase I Strategic Takeaway:

- Phase II should focus on:
 - Policy-based solutions
 - New funding models
 - Governance structures for the City/County
 - Implementation strategies tied to measurable outcomes

MJR Partners Phase Two

In February 2025, MJR Partners was commissioned to continue the planning process. The MJR Partners process is grounded in extensive listening, research, and relationship-building while remaining mindful of community survey fatigue. Residents and stakeholders participated through questionnaires, site visits, focus groups, town halls, and individual conversations across the city and county.

MJR Partners' data collection was informed by a qualitative, community-engaged research methodology designed to elevate lived experience, surface diverse perspectives, and ground recommendations in the realities of Durham's cultural ecosystem. The approach emphasized depth over breadth, recognizing that meaningful cultural planning requires trust-building, contextual understanding, and sustained engagement.

Research Design

The methodology combined purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, open-ended dialogue, and facilitated group conversations to gather rich, narrative-based data. This design allowed for both consistency across conversations and flexibility to follow themes emerging from participants' lived experiences.

The research process unfolded in two interconnected phases—*Building Understanding* and *Implementation Readiness*. Each was intentionally designed to deepen insight while supporting actionable outcomes.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling approach was used to ensure representation across roles, geographies, cultural traditions, and levels of institutional access. Participants were intentionally selected based on their direct engagement in Durham's cultural life, including:

- Artists and culture bearers
- Leaders of cultural and arts organizations
- Educators and youth-serving professionals
- Community historians and tradition-keepers
- Civic partners and public-sector stakeholders
- Informal cultural producers and grassroots organizers

This strategy prioritized voices that are historically underrepresented in cultural planning processes, including artists and leaders of color, artists with disabilities, immigrant and diasporic communities, and individuals working outside formal nonprofit or institutional structures.

The MJR Partners approach was strengthened by the City/County-contracted, locally based Creative Engagement Team led by Monèt Noelle Marshall & R. Stein Wexler* (AKA The Department of Make/Believe). This team of artist/action researchers reinforced the "grit" of Durham as they embedded their research into the spaces and places where residents work, play, shop and bring their authentic selves and identities into the cultural fabric of Durham. Their sensitivity and advocacy for the multiple ways in which creativity shows up in Durham was underscored by a steady sense of loyalty, respect, and care. MJR Partners was honored to work alongside this powerful team.

The Creative Engagement Team facilitated:

- 6 public community-wide events
- 378 attendees/participants
- 15,010 social media engagement touchpoints

Their emphasis on listening to a wide range of voices and gathering stories ensured that the Cultural Roadmap moved from data collection into a deeper exploration of lived experiences.

This evidence-based narrative ensures that the Roadmap is both data-informed and anchored in the lived experiences of Durham's diverse cultural communities.

As Phase I progressed, MJR Partners' work in Phase II engagement reinforced and deepened these findings. Across conversations, the Durham community proved to be not only responsive, but remarkably forthcoming and clear in how residents see themselves, grounded in a strong sense of place, and proud of the city's cultural history.

Participants spoke with honesty about both preservation and change. There was a shared understanding that Durham's cultural identity is not static but actively shaped by those who live and work here. Community members expressed a deep respect for the histories that define Durham—particularly those rooted in African American legacy, civil rights, and long-standing neighborhood traditions—while also articulating a forward-looking vision for how culture should evolve.

What emerged was not simply a list of needs, but a collective aspiration: to build a cultural system that reflects Durham's distinct character—one that is inclusive, locally grounded, and responsive to its full range of voices.

Residents were willing to engage in difficult conversations about equity, access, and representation, while also expressing optimism about what is possible with objective civic leadership and sustained investment. There is a clear desire for fairness in a cultural ecosystem that supports artists and culture bearers, protects heritage, and creates opportunities for future generations.

This combination of candor, pride, and vision provides a strong foundation for the recommendations that follow, anchoring the Cultural Roadmap in both community voice and a shared commitment to shaping a cultural future that is uniquely Durham. Durham's cultural sector does not lack vision—it requires alignment, infrastructure, and sustained investment to meet the ambitions the city has set for itself. This roadmap outlines a practical, achievable path forward: clarifying roles, strengthening systems, and expanding access to resources across the cultural ecosystem. The question is no longer whether Durham can become a leading arts and cultural destination, but whether it will make the deliberate choices necessary to do so. The opportunity is clear. What comes next is execution.



Margie Johnson Reese, Principal
MJR Partners

James Adams
Yolanda Alameda
Gerry McCants
Brandon McKnight

Dr. Marlena McKnight
J Reese
Constance White

**The full Department of Make/Believe report can be reviewed in Appendix A: The Department of Make-Believe Community Engagement Reports*



Data Collection Methods

Multiple qualitative methods were employed to support triangulation and deepen understanding:

- **Semi-structured interviews** followed a flexible protocol with guiding questions aligned to the Four Pillars, allowing participants to shape the conversation and raise issues most relevant to their experiences.
- **Open-ended interviews and listening sessions** emphasized storytelling and reflection, creating space for participants to articulate aspirations, concerns, and definitions of cultural value in their own language.
- **Small-group discussions and facilitated dialogues** supported collective sense-making and revealed shared challenges, points of tension, and opportunities for collaboration.
- **One-on-one stakeholder conversations** allowed for deeper exploration of sensitive topics such as funding inequities, power dynamics, access barriers, and institutional trust.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Qualitative data were analyzed through an iterative review process that included:

- Thematic coding of interview and discussion notes
- Identification of recurring patterns, tensions, and priority needs
- Cross-referencing insights with Phase One findings

Ethical and Equity Commitments

The MJR Partners methodology was guided by clear ethical commitments:

- Equity-centered inquiry — centering historically excluded voices as essential knowledge holders
- Transparency — sharing emerging themes and validating findings with partners and advisory groups
- Accessibility — leading multiple engagement formats and minimizing participation barriers
- Relational accountability — prioritizing trust, reciprocity, and long-term relationship-building

MJR Partners Engagement Summary: Listening, Learning, and the Numbers Behind the Work

Total Participants: 1,168

January 2025: Initial Site Visit

- Met over 3 days with 16+ arts and non-profit organizations —108 participants
- Durham Arts Council hosted meetings and interviews (2 sessions) —25 participants

March 2025: Public Art Tour Day

- MJR Partners team member, Constance White (Public Art Manager, City of Austin, TX) met with City and County staff and Public Art committee members —15 participants

March 27, 2025: Durham Cultural Roadmap Planning Group (CRPG) Workshop

Workshop discussion topics:

- Overview of local arts agencies
- Governance structures
- Discussion of joint or separately organized City/County agencies
- Overview of private non-profit agencies.

MJR Partners posed two essential questions to the CRPG that would guide further public inquiry:

1. What is your non-negotiable? (General response – maintain commitment to equity and inclusion) and,
2. What conditions must exist for Durham’s arts, humanities, and cultural sector to meet the community’s needs in the future? (General response – transparent funding systems)

April – July 2025: Data Collection

65 completed online surveys — ongoing

2,800 email blasts to Durham African American subscribers to *Spectacular Magazine* and views on the magazine’s website. The post informed residents about the launch of the Cultural Roadmap planning process. (These numbers are not included in engagement totals.)

6 online focus group sessions — 145 participants

Focus group topics:

- Structures of local arts agencies
- Facilities
- Arts learning
- Storytelling/community collaboration
- Leadership and professional development
- Policy and process

Interviews — With business and corporate funders (current and potential), and representatives of the Durham Chamber of Commerce.

(Appendix B: Interviews — With business and corporate funders (current and potential), and representatives of the Durham Chamber of Commerce.)

Town Hall Meeting 1

May 24, 2025

86 attendees

Meeting Topics:

- Introduced Planning Team
- Presented Summary of Phase I
- Established an Understanding of Cultural Planning: “What’s the Big Idea?”



Town Hall Meeting 2

September 25, 2025

111 attendees

Structured as highly interactive input sessions, this Town Hall asked participants to engage in a series of small group (booth) discussions:

Input discussion 1: Balance Asset Distribution – Grants & Contracts

- What disciplines are least represented currently in City/County funding programs?
- Who are the legacy groups in the City/County of Durham?
- What venues currently exist and/or are needed?

Input discussion 2: Cultivate Leadership

- Consider how the City, the County, corporate donors, foundations, and partners like the Durham Arts Council ensure that systems of support are responsive, strong, connected, and impactful.

Input discussion 3: Inspire Evolution & Foster Collaboration

- Working toward creating a learning path for a county-wide system for arts learning.
- Imagine how learning in and through the arts can be deepened and broadened across arts

disciplines, science, history, and the humanities to engage residents across multiple identities and age groups throughout Durham County.

Input discussion 4: Balance Assets & Foster Collaboration: A Mapping Activity

- Where would you like to “see” workspaces for artists, programming, and exhibitions venues in the city/county?

Input discussion 5: Neighborhood Voices, Shared Visions

- How does creativity thrive close to home, in neighborhoods, schools, churches, community centers, and spaces for artists to work?
- How do we lift local voices?
- What are existing government agencies/departments where the arts could intersect and add value?

Input discussion 6: The Gateway (Tourism, Festivals & Special Events)

- Durham’s arts and events are a gateway that boosts tourism and economic vitality and enhances civic pride. Possible strategies: local arts calendar, strengthening legacy and major institutions, investing in festivals, public art, and developing emerging artists.

Input discussion 7: The Open Horizon (Tell Us What We Missed)

- Space to share ideas, needs, or visions for Durham’s cultural future that may not fit into the other groups.
- What else should be on the roadmap?



The graphics above for each meeting represent the summary comments.

August 21, 2025: Discussion with CRPG only

Presentation/discussion of proposed pillars for developing the plan

4 Pillars (synthesis of public engagement to date)

- Cultivate Leaders
- Foster Collaboration
- Balance Asset Distribution
- Inspire Evolution

November 13, 2025 Joint Visioning Meeting

26 attendees: Durham Cultural Roadmap Planning Group, Durham Cultural Advisory Board & Public Art Committee

Ongoing meetings/work sessions with Durham Cultural Roadmap Planning Group

- 9 meetings and work sessions
- 210 individual or small group meetings
- Final Interactive Town Hall

Special session and site visits:

- Festival Organizers Listening Session – 25 participants
- Special meeting with Durham Arts Council Board
- Interviews with African American faith leaders
- Interviews with nonprofit leaders and key voices representing the area's Latino perspectives, led by Yolanda Alameda, MJR Partners
- Tour and learning visit with Durham Housing Authority
- Tour of potential adaptive reuse County-owned facilities
- Site visit to Museum of Durham History

Outcomes

This qualitative, participatory approach ensured that the Cultural Roadmap reflects not only sector-wide trends, but also the lived experiences, wisdom, and aspirations of Durham residents. The resulting recommendations are grounded in narrative evidence and designed to support durable strategies that extend beyond the planning horizon.

The creation of the Cultural Roadmap recommendations was shaped by a process designed to honor community voice, build trust, and strengthen alignment across the cultural sector. This process unfolded across two phases, each contributing distinct insights and momentum toward a shared vision.



Building Understanding

While **Phase One** (AMS) laid the groundwork for this Roadmap by gathering stories, data, concerns, and aspirations from across Durham, **Phase Two** expanded the engagement footprint while focusing on implementation readiness. MJR Partners worked closely with City and County staff, the Durham Cultural Advisory Board, the Durham Cultural Roadmap Planning Group, and community members to ***translate insights into a sustainable framework for action.***

As engagement deepened, **community members reinforced** the need for:

- Stronger partnerships between cultural organizations and civic agencies
- Long-term sustainability for cultural spaces
- Clarity around roles, responsibilities, and governance
- More programming in historically underserved areas
- Pathways for youth into creative careers
- Support for artists to live, work, and thrive in Durham
- Continued preservation of heritage and cultural memory

Across both Phase One and Phase Two, a consistent message emerged: Durham's cultural ecosystem is full of energy but requires *intentional investment and coordination to reach its full potential.*

Community Context

Understanding Durham's **Grit as a Cultural Asset**

In conversations and interviews with Durham residents, when describing their community, one word surfaced consistently: *gritty*. In this context, grit does not signal roughness for its own sake, but rather a history of persistence, self-determination, and reinvention. Research and public engagement affirmed that Durham's identity has been shaped by communities that learned to adapt under pressure, build institutions with limited resources, and hold fast to place even as economic and social forces shifted around them.

From its industrial roots and labor history to the rise of Black entrepreneurship and community institutions along Parrish Street, and through the long arc of civil rights activism, Durham's cultural life has been forged through challenge as much as aspiration. Neighborhoods, artists, and cultural workers have repeatedly responded to disruption—not by retreating, but by organizing, creating, and rebuilding.

Durham's Scholars, Storytellers, and Stewards of Civic Memory

Durham's civic identity has been shaped not only by industry and growth, but by a lineage of scholars, writers, artists, and documentarians who interpreted its history from within the community and placed it in national context. Their work frames Durham's story as one of Black enterprise, labor, migration, activism, and cultural resilience. Residents shared the following names with pride:

John Hope Franklin — Historian

A Durham native and one of the most influential American historians of the 20th century, Franklin's scholarship situated Durham within the broader Black freedom struggle and civic life.

Pauli Murray — Writer, Scholar, Activist

Raised in Durham, Murray's writings and legal scholarship shaped national conversations on race, gender, and civil rights, grounding them in lived Southern experience.

Raymond Gavins — Historian

A leading interpreter of Black political leadership and civic institutions in Durham and the South; founding director of Duke's Center for Documentary Studies.

Jaki Shelton Green — Poet and Cultural Voice

Former North Carolina Poet Laureate whose work reflects Black Southern place, memory, and belonging, continuing Durham's tradition of cultural narration through language.

Leslie Brown — Historian

Scholar of African American women, labor, and urban life whose work highlights the civic and cultural contributions of Black women in Durham.

Alex Harris — Photographer and Writer

Co-founder of the Center for Documentary Studies, his visual work captures Durham and the South as lived environments shaped by history and change.

Beverly McIver — Visual Artist

Durham-based painter whose work reflects Black family, memory, and emotional truth.

Institutional Memory Keepers

Durham's story is also stewarded by institutions that function as collective authors of civic memory, including:

- The Durham Arts Council
- The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University
- The Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice
- The Museum of Durham History

- Durham County Library (North Carolina Collection)
- Hayti Heritage Center
- Carolina Theatre of Durham
- Museum of Life and Science
- Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University

Residents refer to these scholars, artists, and institutions as “cultural anchors.” Their commitment to documenting and celebrating the city’s history ensures that Durham’s stories are preserved not as nostalgia, but as **living civic knowledge**—informing how the city understands itself and the essential role culture continues to play in its future.

Durham’s “grit” is not a branding device; it is a record of collective endurance and ingenuity. It explains why artists in Durham are also organizers, why cultural spaces double as civic spaces, and why creativity in Durham is closely tied to questions of equity, belonging, and voice.

Uniquely Durham

These characteristics distinguish Durham from peer cities and should be recognized as strategic assets rather than conditions to be softened or erased. Durham’s history of cultural spaces doubling as civic spaces offers more than context—it provides a tested model for future creative investment. The Hayti Heritage Center, the Durham Armory, and Stagville State Historic Site demonstrate that when cultural places are trusted as sites for dialogue, learning, and collective reflection, they become engines for civic engagement and creative response.

Together, these examples suggest a framework for future cultural development in Durham as one that prioritizes adaptability, public access, and civic relevance. Rather than creating entirely new models, the City can build on this legacy by intentionally supporting creative endeavors that combine artistic practice with community convening, education, and problem-solving.

In this way, Durham’s cultural infrastructure becomes a launch pad for future creativity, meaning artists are positioned as civic partners, cultural organizations are supported financially and empowered as community anchors, and creative projects are evaluated not only for artistic excellence, but for their capacity to foster participation, dialogue, and shared understanding.

As Durham continues to grow, the task is not to replace grit with a false sense of polish, but to ensure that cultural policies protect the people, places, and practices that have carried the city through periods of change. During public talk-back sessions, participants often expressed a temptation to measure Durham’s cultural success against cities with larger or sleeker facilities. While investment and refinement matter, Durham’s cultural strength has never depended on imitation or external validation.

The city’s most impactful cultural moments have emerged from authenticity, experimentation, and responsiveness to local conditions, not from striving to resemble elsewhere. When misunderstood, comparison can create a false sense of success in the arts—one measured by appearance rather than substance, visibility rather than value.

Durham’s history suggests a different metric: cultural vitality is defined by participation, relevance, and trust. These qualities are not diminished by informality or edge; they are often strengthened by them.

Durham can articulate its own standards of cultural excellence—standards rooted in community engagement, creative risk, and civic contribution. In this context, *grit* should sharpen Durham’s voice, not smooth away the characteristics that make its cultural ecosystem distinct.



Sources of Insight and Points of Intersection

One of the most influential resources informing this planning process was the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Durham, North Carolina. Adopted in October 2023, the plan articulates a clear commitment that aligns closely with the mandate of the Durham Cultural Roadmap Planning process:

“Our Comprehensive Plan needs to be written to address racial equity in how we grow, to reflect the needs and priorities of our entire community, and to begin to address the historical inequities of past decisions.”

Section 2.1 of the Durham Comprehensive Plan—Durham’s Equitable Growth Framework—further outlines an important objective under the *Sense of Place* Goal (page 23):

“We need to acknowledge and tell the full story of Durham’s rich culture, history, and the strength of its communities, particularly Indigenous, Black, and Hispanic/Latino communities. We need to recognize that a community is built by the contributions of all its people and that honest public history is not just a record of wealth and privilege. We need to preserve and create physical evidence of that history in our community so that Durham’s residents—particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents—can see their past, present, and future reflected in this place. We need to recognize Durham’s historic buildings and places as living artifacts of our shared public history and thoughtfully preserve them to enrich our future.

We need to empower residents to tell the stories of their own cultures and history, and combat systems that benefit from erasure or minimization of that history.” Durham Comprehensive Plan adopted 2023

The Durham Comprehensive Plan provided important context regarding shared civic priorities, implementation lessons, and documented outcomes.

The Durham Cultural Roadmap is appropriately situated as a component of *Engage Durham*, “a new initiative to ensure that all Durham voices are involved in City and County Projects.” As the City and County joint Comprehensive Planning continues, the Cultural Roadmap planning process considered how arts and culture could advance and intersect with emerging and established goals such as inclusive growth, deepening community engagement, workforce development, neighborhood stabilization, and equitable access.

Durham’s cultural ecosystem, artists and arts organizations, historians, writers, researchers, scientists, and educators help residents understand the past, interpret the present, and imagine the future. In this context, the Durham Cultural Roadmap should be at the epicenter of framing new civic policies and revising existing ones. ***Cultural policy likewise should emerge not as a parallel effort, but as a catalytic tool for advancing City and County comprehensive planning and civic goals.***

For the purposes of this Roadmap, arts and culture are understood broadly to include creative expression, humanities, public history, storytelling, and the sciences—particularly where research, discovery, and

interpretation intersect with public learning, civic identity, and community engagement. The Cultural Roadmap therefore positions arts and culture not as a stand-alone sector, but as a cross-cutting strategy that strengthens and accelerates outcomes already identified by the City and County.

The Cultural Roadmap identifies specific points of intersection where cultural strategies can support implementation and outcomes related to the City/County shared vision for future development:

- **Economic and Workforce Development Plans**

Cultural investment supports small businesses, creative entrepreneurship, and talent retention—contributing to local economies and workforce pipelines already prioritized by the city.

- **Equity and Inclusion Frameworks**

Cultural organizations and artists function as trusted intermediaries in historically underserved communities, strengthening engagement and participation efforts outlined in equity-focused plans.

- **Neighborhood and Place-Based Plans**

Cultural spaces and programming reinforce neighborhood identity, support stabilization, and activate public spaces in ways aligned with community-centered development strategies.

- **Education and Youth Development Plans**

Arts learning, cultural literacy, and creative skill-building complement broader educational goals by supporting engagement, critical thinking, and pathways into creative and cultural careers.

In addition to existing economic, equity, and community development strategies, Durham is actively advancing long-range tourism planning that aligns with the goals of the Cultural Roadmap. The Durham Destination Master Plan provides a 20-year vision for the city as a welcoming, innovative, and inclusive destination that honors its history, supports residents, and strengthens the local economy through thoughtful visitor engagement and infrastructure development. This plan identifies more than 60 strategic initiatives, including expanding quality events and festivals, enhancing parks and connectivity, and creating vibrant attractions that contribute to Durham’s cultural vitality and economic resilience.

The Discover Durham’s Durham Destination Master Plan provides a 20-year vision for the city as a welcoming, innovative, and inclusive destination that honors its history, supports residents, and strengthens the local economy through thoughtful visitor engagement and infrastructure development. This plan identifies more than 60 strategic initiatives, including expanding quality events and festivals, enhancing parks and connectivity, and creating vibrant attractions that contribute to Durham’s cultural vitality and economic resilience. **Durham Next supports the work of the Destination Master Plan, a 501c3 operated and managed by Discover Durham.**

The Durham Cultural Roadmap builds on these desired outcomes by advancing the recognition that artists, arts, culture, and creative experiences are foundational assets for Durham’s visitor economy. Local arts and tourism should not be treated as competing priorities. Durham’s experience demonstrates that cultural vitality rooted in local communities is a primary driver of destination appeal. Visitors are drawn to places with distinct cultural identities, and those identities are sustained first and foremost by artists, cultural workers, and institutions serving residents.

Effective policy recognizes this relationship and avoids framing cultural investment as a trade-off between residents and visitors. Cultural organizations and events are among the major contributors to visitor engagement — from festivals and performances to historic sites and public art — and, when aligned with tourism planning, can expand economic opportunity for local creators and small businesses while enhancing quality of life for residents. Integrating cultural strategies with tourism goals ensures that Durham’s creative ecosystem is both recognized as a driver of destination appeal and supported as a community-centered pillar of long-term economic and social vitality.



The Future: Industry, Visitors, and Demographic Change

Durham is entering a period of accelerated transformation shaped by shifts in industry, population growth, and its expanding role as a regional and national destination. These changes present both opportunity and responsibility. The Cultural Roadmap is grounded in the recognition that arts and culture must evolve alongside these forces—serving as stabilizers during transition, engines of innovation, and anchors of identity. Durham’s economy continues to move beyond its historic industrial base toward a diversified mix of life sciences, health care, education, technology, and creative enterprise.

While this evolution brings investment and jobs, it also reshapes land use, workforce needs, and community dynamics. This transition is reshaping how people live, work, and gather, creating both opportunity and pressure. Recognizing Durham as a city in active economic transformation underscores the importance of culture as a tool for stabilizing infrastructure, ensuring that growth does not erase history, and that innovation is grounded in place and shared civic life. Cultural organizations and artists have historically played a critical role during such transitions—interpreting change, preserving memory, and helping communities navigate new economic realities.

Comparative study: Arts investment

Peer cities per capita investment in the arts

[See Appendix D](#)

Visitor Economy and Destination Growth

Durham’s growing visibility as a destination—supported by long-range tourism planning—signals increased demand for authentic, meaningful experiences. Visitors are drawn not simply to amenities, but to places with distinct cultural identities, strong local narratives, and vibrant creative communities. Durham’s cultural assets are therefore not peripheral to tourism growth; they are foundational to it.

The Cultural Roadmap recognizes that a healthy visitor economy depends on a thriving local arts ecosystem. Aligning cultural investment with tourism planning allows Durham to expand economic impact while maintaining integrity—ensuring that increased visitation supports local

artists, cultural organizations, and neighborhoods rather than displacing them.

Durham's population is becoming larger, more diverse, and more economically complex. Growth has brought new residents, students, workers, and visitors, while long-standing communities face increasing pressure from rising costs and changing neighborhoods. These demographic shifts heighten the importance of cultural policy as a tool for inclusion, belonging, and continuity.

Arts and culture provide shared spaces for dialogue, learning, and connection across differences.

What we learned about the city, its new residents, and its historic communities emphasized the demand for equitable access to cultural resources, support for community-based organizations, and investment in artists whose work reflects and serves Durham's evolving population. In doing so, the Roadmap affirms that growth should not come at the expense of cultural memory, representation, or trust. Likewise, **resources to protect cultural memory and encourage creativity should not be limited to a narrow set of arts producers.**

Visibility of Durham's Growing Latino Community in the Arts Sector

Durham's growing Latino community is increasingly visible across the arts sector—not through a single institution or aesthetic, but through a widening range of cultural practices, organizations, and informal creative networks. This visibility reflects both demographic change and the community's active role in shaping Durham's contemporary cultural life.

Latino artists, musicians, dancers, designers, and tradition-bearers contribute to Durham's cultural ecosystem through festivals, public art, performance, foodways, faith-based gatherings, and neighborhood-based cultural expression. Much of this activity takes place in community settings rather than traditional arts venues, underscoring the importance of recognizing informal and grassroots cultural production as integral to the city's arts landscape.

The presence of Latino culture is also evident in the increased use of public space for cultural expression: street festivals, music events, markets, and celebrations that blend art, social life, and civic gathering. These practices align with Durham's long-standing tradition of cultural spaces doubling as civic spaces and demonstrate how emerging communities adapt and extend existing models to meet evolving needs.

At the organizational level, **Latino-led and Latino-serving groups often operate with limited resources while carrying significant cultural responsibility.** Their work frequently intersects with education, youth development, language access, and community advocacy, positioning arts and culture as tools for belonging and participation as well as creative expression. The Cultural Roadmap recognizes that fully supporting Durham's arts ecosystem requires intentional strategies to ensure that Latino artists and cultural organizations are visible, resourced, and included in decision-making. Doing so is not an act of accommodation, but an investment in the city's present and future cultural vitality.

Throughout the planning process, advisors to the plan and elected officials called our attention to the need to be explicit about including the perspectives and needs of the Latino artists and Latino cultural community writ large. At first glance, this insistence could be interpreted as redundant or patronizing. Our sentiment is that engagement with culturally specific communities should signal a commitment to meaningful inclusion. However, given the fragmented nature of intentional and policy-based art support, and the broader limitations of the current funding landscape, that assumption does not hold.

In the absence of sustained infrastructure and coordinated support for the arts sector in general, visibility and access to resources for Latino artists cannot be taken for granted.

As a result, MJR Partners has had to be especially careful that its own inquiry not be perceived as disingenuous in attempting to respond to the rapid fire of reminders to be inclusive.

Visitor Economy and Destination Growth

Durham's growing visibility as a destination—supported by long-range tourism planning—signals increased demand for authentic, meaningful experiences. Visitors are drawn not simply to amenities, but to places with distinct cultural identities, strong local narratives, and vibrant creative communities. Durham's cultural assets are therefore not peripheral to tourism growth; they are foundational to it.

The Cultural Roadmap recognizes that a healthy visitor economy depends on a thriving local arts ecosystem. Aligning cultural investment with tourism planning allows Durham to expand economic impact while maintaining integrity, ensuring that increased visitation supports local artists, cultural organizations, and neighborhoods rather than displacing them.

Current Cultural Funding Structures

Durham's cultural sector benefits from a network of public and nonprofit funding programs that provide important support for artistic activity and community engagement. At the state level, the North Carolina Arts Council distributes grants to organizations, local arts agencies, and individual artists across the state, including Durham-based organizations. These programs play an important role in sustaining exhibitions, performances, arts education initiatives, and community-based cultural programming.

Locally, Durham organizations also benefit from **grant programs administered through the Durham Arts Council** as well as cultural initiatives supported by the City of Durham, including public art investments that contribute to the city's civic landscape and neighborhood vitality. These resources provide meaningful opportunities for artists and cultural organizations and demonstrate Durham's longstanding commitment to the arts.

At the same time, community engagement conducted for this Cultural Roadmap revealed several structural limitations in the current funding environment. Many available grants are designed primarily to support specific programs, performances, or short-term projects rather than ongoing infrastructure, facilities, or long-term organizational planning. While **project-based funding is valuable, it can make it difficult for cultural organizations to build administrative capacity, maintain space, or invest in strategic growth.**

Individual artists face similar challenges. Public funding opportunities for artists are relatively limited and often provide modest, project-based awards that support specific creative work but rarely provide sustained support for studio space, equipment, or long-term career development.

Public art initiatives offer another important form of investment in Durham's cultural life by activating public spaces and commissioning artists to contribute to the city's visual landscape. However, these commissions are typically project-based and highly competitive, meaning they support only a portion of Durham's broader creative community.

Durham County Support for Arts and Culture (Summary)

Durham County contributes to the local cultural ecosystem through several initiatives that support arts programming, cultural institutions, and public art. Much of this support is provided through partnerships with nonprofit organizations, cultural institutions, and community programs rather than direct operating grants to arts organizations.

Durham County's current approach reflects a commitment to integrating arts and culture into civic spaces and community programming. At the same time, the dispersed nature of these initiatives suggests an opportunity to strengthen coordination between the City/County, nonprofit organizations, and private partners in order to build a more comprehensive cultural development framework for Durham.



Durham County operates a Public Art Program, established by resolution of the Board of County Commissioners in 2019. The program commissions and maintains artworks in County facilities and public spaces and works in partnership with the City of Durham's Cultural and Public Art Program and advisory bodies such as the Cultural Advisory Board and Public Art Committee.

These projects enhance civic spaces, reflect community history, and engage residents through creative expression in public environments.

Durham County also supports arts and cultural activity through partnerships with major cultural institutions and programs that serve residents throughout the region. These include cultural festivals, performing arts venues, libraries, and community arts programming. In many cases, the County's role is to provide facility support, program partnerships, or shared funding with the City of Durham and nonprofit organizations.

Private Non-Profit Partner: Durham Arts Council

A sizable amount of grant funding that reaches Durham artists and arts organizations is administered through nonprofit intermediaries such as the Durham Arts Council, which distributes grants for artists and arts organizations through programs such as Season Grants and Emerging Artists Grants, provides arts learning and artists exhibition space, and facilitates other initiatives that support arts programming and creative projects.

These grants help support exhibitions, performances, and community-based arts programming throughout Durham County.

Together, these funding programs represent meaningful public investment in Durham's cultural life. At this point, the structure of current funding streams tends to support discrete projects rather than the broader cultural infrastructure needed to sustain a thriving creative ecosystem.

Public Funding for the Arts in Durham (Overview) Insert 2

Funding Source	Administered By	Primary Purpose	Who It Supports	Key Limitations
North Carolina Arts Council Grants	State of North Carolina	Supports arts programming, exhibitions, performances, and arts education	Nonprofit arts organizations and some individual artists	Primarily project-based; limited funding for infrastructure, facilities, or long-term organizational planning
Grassroots Arts Program	NC Arts Council (distributed locally through Durham Arts Council)	Supports local arts activities and community-based programs	Local nonprofits, artists, and cultural programs	Relatively small grants; primarily supports programming rather than operational capacity
Durham Arts Council Season Grants	Durham Arts Council	Supports annual programming/local arts organizations	Durham nonprofit arts organizations	Focused on programming; limited funds for long-term organizational infrastructure
Artist Support Grants	Regional consortium / Durham Arts Council	Small grants to individual artists for creative work and professional development	Individual artists	Small project-based awards; not designed to support sustained artistic careers
City of Durham Cultural & Public Art Program (Percent for Art)	City of Durham	Commissions artists for public artworks tied to city capital projects	Artists selected through competitive processes	Project-specific; limited number of commissions; does not broadly support arts organizations
Festival and Event Support	City of Durham / Tourism-related funding	Supports cultural festivals and events that activate public spaces and attract visitors	Event producers and cultural organizations	Short-term event funding; does not provide ongoing support for cultural infrastructure



Interpreting Public Funding for the Arts Chart

This analysis summarizes what the current public funding landscape for arts and culture in Durham reveals. While multiple funding sources exist, the structure and limitations of these resources point to broader systemic patterns that shape the cultural ecosystem.

Key Takeaways

- Funding is predominantly project-based, with **limited support for long-term sustainability**.
- There is **minimal investment in cultural infrastructure** such as facilities and institutional capacity.
- Artist support exists but **does not sustain long-term careers**.
- Funding streams are fragmented across agencies with **no unified strategy**.
- The system supports cultural activity but **not long-term growth**.
- There is **little dedicated funding for** long-term cultural development, including **leadership pipelines**, workforce development, or institutional growth.
- Technical and management assistance for the cultural sector does not exist on this chart. That critical element is clearly the missing “middle layer” in the Durham cultural system.

The current funding ecosystem is designed to activate cultural programming but does **not sufficiently support the systems** that sustain it. Organizations are funded to produce work, but not to build the infrastructure, staffing, and long-term planning capacity required for growth and stability.

This pattern reveals a critical gap: while **Durham supports cultural activity, it lacks a coordinated investment strategy** to sustain the people, places, and institutions that make that activity possible. **Technical and management assistance** for the cultural sector does not exist on this chart. That critical element is clearly the missing “**middle layer**” in the Durham cultural system

The Durham Cultural Roadmap responds to these gaps by proposing a more balanced approach to cultural investment—one that supports not only programming, but also organizational capacity, cultural infrastructure, and long-term sector development.



Bull Moon Rising Event, Artist Luke Jerram

Discovery to Decision: Setting the Stage for Action

Durham City and County came together in response to the public's call for a more robust and coordinated approach to strengthening the cultural sector and reaffirming public support for arts and culture. The recommendations that follow respond directly to the collective aspirations, priorities, and ideas gathered through the Durham Cultural Roadmap planning process, conducted between January and December 2025.

Together, the Plan and its recommendations provide clear pathways for the City, County, and their appointed representatives to guide sequenced investment in Durham's deep cultural assets and advance strategies that strengthen the local creative economy over the long term.

Successful implementation of the Cultural Roadmap will require coordination across multiple civic agencies, alongside sustained engagement with private and philanthropic partners. More importantly, it will require strategic decision-making that builds public trust through transparency, clarity of purpose, and consistent follow-through on the commitments outlined in this Plan.

The Cultural Roadmap also serves as a call to action to establish clear, forward-looking direction in the allocation of public resources that support local artists and cultural organizations while contributing to Durham's broader civic and economic vitality.

Throughout the planning process, participants emphasized the importance of examining the City and County's most visible public interface, grantmaking programs, and understanding how funding structures shape community impact both immediately and over time.

Taken together, the engagement process, historical research, and review of City and County plans revealed both Durham's cultural strengths and the structural gaps limiting their full impact. While Durham benefits from deep cultural assets, strong community identity, and an active creative sector, participants consistently identified fragmentation, capacity constraints, and unclear pathways for investment and partnership as barriers to long-term sustainability.

At the same time, the planning process underscored the need to resist short-term responses driven solely by funding gaps. Instead, the recommendations prioritize building the systems, frameworks, and partnerships necessary to sustain cultural investment amid shifting national funding priorities and long-term economic change.

As we continued to examine support for artists of color across Durham County, we heard more explicitly from African American artists that the realities of equity are not fully aligned with the public sector's often-stated commitment to equity and inclusion. The legacy of African American memory keepers, scholars, and artists referenced earlier in this report may now be more nostalgia than practice.

While research reveals numerous plans, reports, and public statements affirming Durham's commitment to racial equity, the translation of those commitments into sustained cultural investment is uneven. In some cases, what begins as a philosophical declaration becomes time-bound, charted through discrete transactional initiatives as a measure of civic responsibility.

The strength of Durham's African American cultural legacy is powerfully on exhibit at the Hayti Cultural Center; however, that same level of visibility and intentional promotion is not consistently reflected in Durham's strategic and sustained investment in the area's contemporary African American culture keepers and creatives.

That disconnect may not be by design; however, it does reflect the absence of sustained, policy-based investment. In either case, the impact is clear as artists of color continue to relocate to other communities, taking with them the richness of cultural expression and heritage that might otherwise shape and strengthen Durham's future.

The Durham Cultural Roadmap 1) positions arts and culture as part of Durham's **economic and civic infrastructure**, supporting creative entrepreneurship, adaptive reuse of industrial and commercial spaces, and workforce pathways that complement broader development strategies, and 2) insists that this is the moment when **intent becomes courage**, when policy must take precedence over practice, and the measure of commitment is no longer what Durham says, but what Durham is willing to do.

From Practice to Policy

The recommendations that follow constitute the Durham Cultural Roadmap. They define a coordinated, phased plan for City and County action—grounded in community input, aligned with public priorities, and designed to guide implementation over time.

Durham Cultural Roadmap: Recommendations

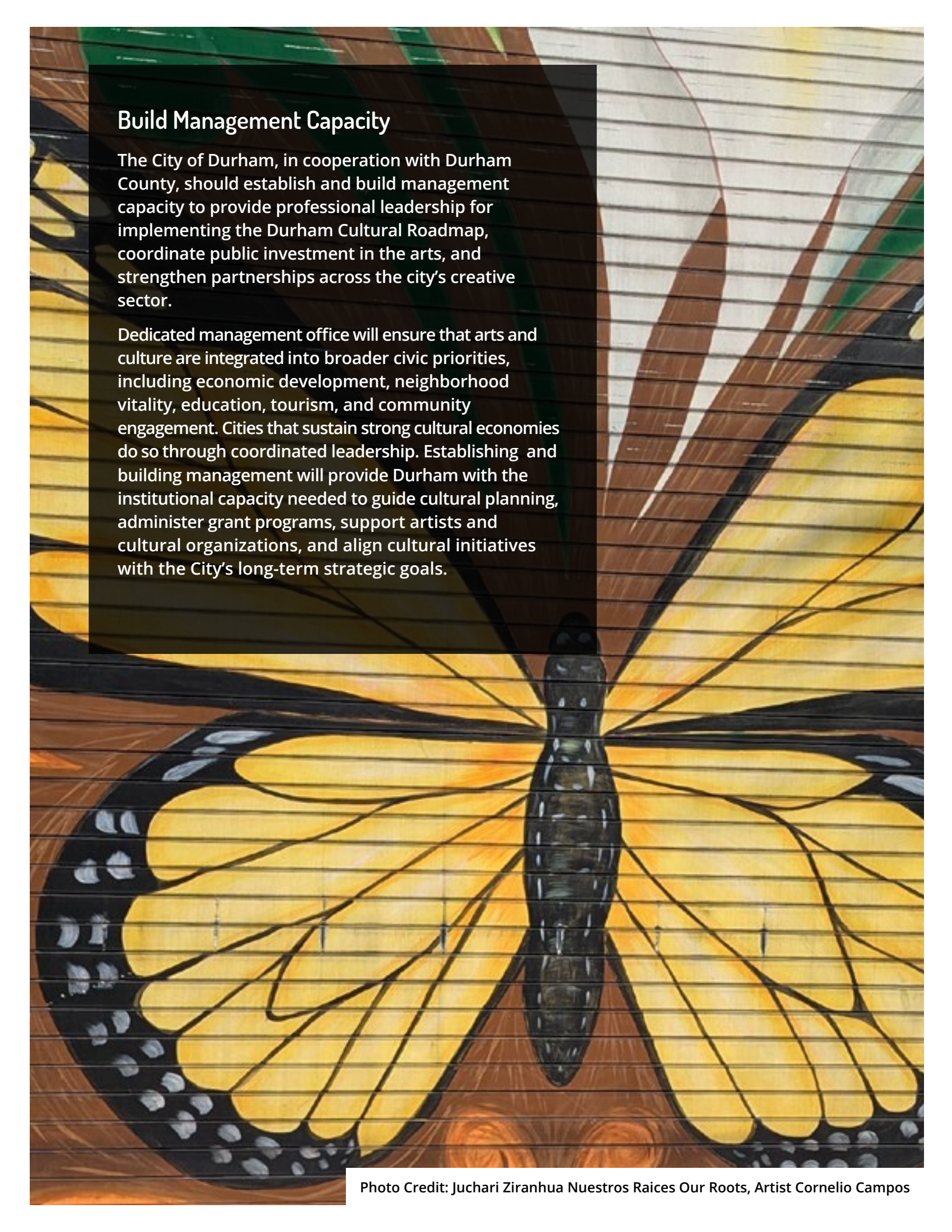
1. **Build Management Capacity** – Establish a dedicated management structure within the City structure to coordinate strategy, steward public investment, and ensure accountability across City and County efforts.
2. **Establish a Clear Cultural Investment Framework** – Adopt shared principles and definitions that clarify how public cultural resources are allocated, evaluated, and aligned with community goals.
3. **Launch and Align Cultural Grantmaking Programs** – Deploy coordinated grant programs that move resources into the community in equitable, transparent, and timely ways.
4. **Align Cultural Governance and Funding Structures** – Reduce fragmentation by clarifying roles, aligning advisory bodies, and coordinating funding systems across City and County.
5. **Create a Structured Arts-Business Partnership Platform** – Engage the private sector as long-term partners in cultural vitality, workforce development, and regional identity.
6. **Expand Arts Learning and Creative Access Countywide** – Ensure equitable access to arts learning and creative opportunities in neighborhoods and community-based settings across the County.



7. **Expand Artist Workspace and Cultural Production Infrastructure** – Support creative production by increasing access to affordable, flexible workspace for artists.
8. **Cultivate Cultural Leadership and Sector Capacity** – Strengthen the people who sustain Durham’s cultural ecosystem through leadership development, professional learning, and public participation.
9. **Launch a Durham Arts and Culture Incubator** – Create a platform for experimentation, cross-sector collaboration, and innovation aligned with the Roadmap.
10. **Commit to a Phased Cultural Investment and Implementation Horizon (5–10 Years)** – Adopt a long-term, sequenced approach to cultural investment that balances urgency, accountability, and sustainability.

Together, these recommendations form a coordinated cultural strategy—one that balances stewardship and innovation, invests in people and infrastructure, and reflects the character and values that make Durham *“unmistakably Durham.”*

The final section of this Roadmap presents the Unmistakably Durham Big Idea—a leadership challenge that reframes arts and culture as civic infrastructure embedded in growth. It asks City and County leaders to consider how future development can intentionally carry Durham’s cultural voice forward.



Build Management Capacity

The City of Durham, in cooperation with Durham County, should establish and build management capacity to provide professional leadership for implementing the Durham Cultural Roadmap, coordinate public investment in the arts, and strengthen partnerships across the city's creative sector.

Dedicated management office will ensure that arts and culture are integrated into broader civic priorities, including economic development, neighborhood vitality, education, tourism, and community engagement. Cities that sustain strong cultural economies do so through coordinated leadership. Establishing and building management will provide Durham with the institutional capacity needed to guide cultural planning, administer grant programs, support artists and cultural organizations, and align cultural initiatives with the City's long-term strategic goals.

Comparative Local/City/County Arts Agencies

This chart compares several peer cities that support arts and cultural development through small municipal arts offices reporting within city administrative structures. The examples illustrate different approaches to cultural funding, staffing, and program priorities.

City	Arts Office / Agency	Established	Mission / Purpose	Staff Structure	Budget / Funding Model
New Orleans, LA	Mayor's Office of Cultural Economy	2010	Supports the city's cultural economy including artists, musicians, and festivals	Small team within the Mayor's Office coordinating programs and partnerships.	Cultural Economy Funding Program provides grants and support for organizations.
St. Louis, MO	Regional Arts Commission	1985	Regional arts funding agency supporting artists, organizations, and community cultural initiatives.	~15 staff with a board appointed by city and county leaders.	Public funding through dedicated tax revenue and grants.
Norfolk, VA	Commission on the Arts & Humanities	1978	Promotes arts participation and supports non-profit arts organizations.	Commission with cultural affairs staff supporting city programs.	Municipal grants program and public art initiatives.
Arlington, VA	Cultural Affairs Division	1990	Integrates arts and culture into community life through public art, grants, and partnerships.	Approximately 6–8 staff within Parks & Recreation reporting through County Manager.	County funding supports grants, cultural programs, and partnerships.
Asheville, NC	Arts & Cultural Affairs / Arts Partnership	1994	Strengthens the city's creative economy and cultural identity through public art and artist support.	Small professional team (approx. 6–8 staff across city and partner agency).	City appropriations, public art funding, and nonprofit partnerships.
Birmingham, AL	Office of Cultural Affairs	2017	Supports arts organizations, artists, and cultural initiatives across neighborhoods.	Small municipal office (approx. 4–6 staff).	City funding supports grants, cultural initiatives, and partnerships.

These examples illustrate how mid-size cities organize municipal support for arts and culture through relatively small offices that coordinate grants, public art programs, and partnerships with nonprofit arts organizations. Even with modest staffing, these offices play a critical role in aligning arts policy with economic development, tourism, and community development priorities.

Durham Peer Cities: Municipal Arts Support

The chart below compares Durham's current cultural program structure with several peer cities that operate small municipal arts offices. The comparison highlights differences in staffing, program scope, and the range of cultural services provided.

City	Municipal Arts Office	Staff Size	Key Programs	Program Scope
Durham, NC	Cultural & Public Art Program	3–5 staff	Public art commissions, cultural initiatives, partnerships	Primary focus on public art and project-based cultural programs
Asheville, NC	Arts & Cultural Affairs / Arts	6–8 staff	Artist grants, public art, cultural planning, arts promotion	Integrated cultural development and creative economy support
Birmingham, AL	Office of Cultural Affairs	4–6 staff	Cultural grants, public art, neighborhood arts initiatives	Focus on community arts and neighborhood revitalization
Norfolk, VA	Commission on the Arts & Humanities	5–7 staff	Arts grants, public art, arts education partnerships	Municipal grantmaking and cultural advocacy
New Orleans, LA	Mayor's Office of Cultural Economy	5–8 staff	Creative economy initiatives, cultural business support, festivals	Arts integrated with economic development and tourism

These peer cities operate city arts offices with modest staff sizes but broader program mandates. In addition to grantmaking and public art programs, these agencies coordinate technical assistance, creative economy initiatives, cultural marketing, and partnerships that strengthen the long-term sustainability of the cultural sector.

Proposed Staffing and Salary Framework

City of Durham-aligned recommendations with peer-city reference points

Purpose. Suggested salaries for a proposed management, anchored to Durham municipal ranges and cross-checked against Raleigh and Richmond comparables.

Planning assumptions: Director role positioned below Durham's largest operating department heads but high enough to recruit a credible citywide leader; manager roles calibrated to Durham manager/analyst bands and peer grants/engagement roles; administrative role aligned to current Durham administrative coordinator ranges. Budget with 30% added for benefits and payroll burden.

Position	Comparable municipal anchor points	Recommended Durham salary range	Budgeted cost w/30% benefits	Rationale
Director of Cultural Affairs	Durham General Services Director: \$145,602–\$232,962; Raleigh Budget Director hiring range up to \$160,000	\$115,000–\$150,000	\$169,000–\$201,500	Citywide strategic lead. Set below Durham's largest operating directors, but high enough to recruit credible executive-level cultural leadership.
Grants & Programs Manager	Raleigh Grants and Compliance Supervisor hiring range: \$66,546–\$91,800; Durham Development Services Manager \$80,299–\$124,474	\$82,000–\$98,000	\$106,600–\$127,400	Public funds, compliance, and evaluation role; should sit in an upper manager band.
Community Engagement / Sector Development Manager	Durham Engagement Consulting Manager hiring range: \$113,401–\$136,081; Richmond Community Outreach and Engagement Coordinator: \$47,161–\$84,669	\$85,000–\$102,000	\$110,500–\$132,600	Field-facing strategy role spanning stakeholder engagement, sector development, and technical assistance.
Administrative Coordinator	Durham Administrative Coordinator: \$63,242–\$98,103; Raleigh Executive Management Coordinator hiring range: \$47,440–\$64,000; Richmond Administrative Technician Senior: \$45,302–\$75,464	\$63,000–\$78,000	\$81,900–\$101,400	Operational backbone for procurement, scheduling, grants administration, records, and office systems.

Annual Personnel Budget Summary

Scenario	Total annual Base salaries	Benefits @ 30%	Total personnel budget
Low	\$360,000	\$108,000	\$468,000
Midpoint	\$396,500	\$118,950	\$515,450
High	\$433,000	\$129,900	\$562,900

Planning note: For the Roadmap draft, this scenario is a suggested and strong placeholder.

As Durham grows and cultural investment becomes more complex, reliance on ad hoc coordination or partial staff capacity is no longer sufficient. Dedicated arts and culture management is essential in order to:

- Translate policy into action
- Align public investment with community priorities
- Coordinate across departments and funding streams
- Support partnerships with artists, organizations, and private-sector collaborators

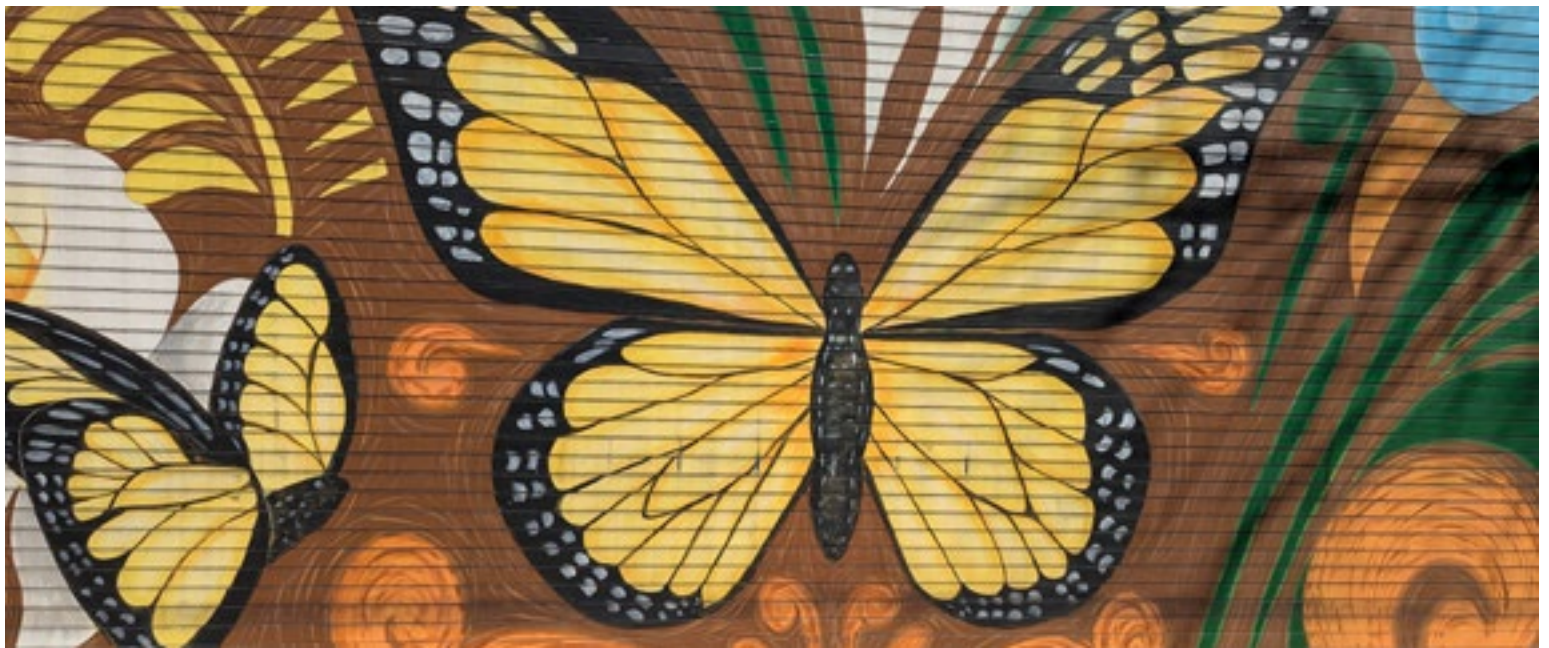
Establishing Management Capacity is the foundational step that enables every other recommendation in this Roadmap to be implemented with coordination accountability and sustained impact.

Establishing and Building Management Capacity

Current City staff who support arts and culture initiatives are experienced, knowledgeable, and deeply committed. However, their responsibilities are distributed across multiple priorities, limiting the ability to provide the sustained, dedicated focus that a growing cultural sector now requires.

Public Sources of Funding for the Arts in Durham (Overview)

Funding Source	Administered By	Primary Purpose	Who It Supports	Key Limitations
North Carolina Arts Council Grants	State of North Carolina	Supports arts programming, exhibitions, performances, and arts education	Nonprofit arts organizations and some individual artists	Primarily project-based; limited funding for infrastructure, facilities, or long-term organizational planning
Grassroots Arts Program	NC Arts Council (distributed locally through Durham Arts Council)	Supports local arts activities and community-based programs	Local nonprofits, artists, and cultural programs	Relatively small grants; primarily supports programming rather than operational capacity
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Comparative Local/City/County Arts Agencies

The chart below compares Durham’s current cultural program structure with several peer cities that operate small municipal arts offices. The comparison highlights differences in staffing, program scope, and the range of cultural services provided; and offers a comparison between several peer cities that support arts and cultural development through small municipal arts offices reporting within city/county administrative structures.

City	Municipal Arts Office	Staff Size	Key Programs	Program Scope
Durham, NC	Cultural & Public Art Program	3–5 staff	Public art commissions, cultural initiatives, partnerships	Primary focus on public art and project-based cultural programs
Asheville, NC	Arts & Cultural Affairs / Arts	6–8 staff	Artist grants, public art, cultural planning, arts promotion	Integrated cultural development and creative economy support
Birmingham, AL	Office of Cultural Affairs	4–6 staff	Cultural grants, public art, neighborhood arts initiatives	Focus on community arts and neighborhood revitalization
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New Orleans, LA	Mayor’s Office of Cultural Economy	5–8 staff	Creative economy initiatives, business support, festivals	Arts integrated with economic development and tourism

These examples illustrate how mid-size cities organize municipal support for arts and culture through relatively small offices that coordinate grants, public art programs, and partnerships with nonprofit arts organizations. Even with modest staffing, these offices align arts policy with economic development, tourism, and community development priorities. In addition to grantmaking, these agencies coordinate technical assistance, creative economy initiatives, marketing, and partnerships that strengthen the long-term sustainability of the cultural sector.

Implementation Planning Notes

1.1 Convene regular meetings with director-level staff teams in the appropriate City and County offices to develop mutual agreements regarding funding, staffing, and joint reporting systems. Prepare a statement or joint agreement for proposing to City and County leadership to consider establishing the Office of Arts and Culture. (City/County upper management)

1.2 Management Framework

Example Relationship Chart

Office of Arts and Culture Development Framework
Potential City and County Roles + Investment Tiers

CITY OF DURHAM	DURHAM COUNTY	SHARED
Programming and access Funding and grant programs Zoning and cultural districts Equity initiatives Office of A/C operating support CIP planning	Capital investment (land, buildings) Libraries and community services Public art integration Office of A/C operating support	Strategic planning Community engagement Co-funded projects Zoning and cultural districts Sustainability planning 5-year assessment/review

Four-Tier Cultural Investment Model

Tier	Description
Tier 1	County-led major capital projects
Tier 2	Public/private partnerships
Tier 3	Adaptive reuse and small capital support
Tier 4	City-led program activation grants using City and County-owned existing spaces

1.2.1 Review existing internal policy directions as necessary to position management within the construct of the agreed-upon City/County decision-making process. If possible, align the Office of Arts and Culture as an independent division of an existing department in a way that prioritizes arts and culture as a deliverable of “core” public services.

1.2.2 Convene regular meetings with heads of City/County departments involved with planning, public and neighborhood services, libraries and other relevant departments, to explore interdepartmental collaborations.

1.2.3 Confer with City/County Human Resources Department to develop position description and establish salary levels for selected director and/or all staffing positions to be hired. Propose recommended new position(s) and financial implications to appropriate management within City/County Managers’ offices.

Sample director position description attached.

1.3 Recruit and Hire Staff

1.3.1 Determine a staff leadership team (task force) to set timelines, develop recruitment strategies, and manage the recruitment and hiring process for selected staff position(s).

1.3.2 Share staffing plan with the Durham Arts Board and the public as appropriate.

1.3.3 Update the public on proceedings as appropriate.

1.3.4 Offer the position to the candidate who meets the requirements for the position as agreed upon.

Timeline: Near-term – ongoing.

Potential collaborators: City/County leadership; City/County departments; arts organizations.

Outcomes: Enhanced visibility of the Office of Arts and Culture; increased cross-departmental collaborations; recruitment, vetting, and hiring of selected staff position(s) necessary to establish the Office of Arts and Culture.

EXAMPLE: Position Description

Director, Durham Office of Arts and Culture

Salary Grade: TBD Salary Range: TBD

The purpose of this classification is to direct, plan, and oversee programs, services, and initiatives that promote arts, culture, and heritage within Durham County.

Essential Functions:

The following duties are normal for this position. The omission of specific statements of the duties does not exclude them from the classification if the work is similar, related, or a logical assignment for this classification. Other duties may be required and assigned.

Manages, directs, and evaluates assigned staff; oversees employee work schedules to ensure adequate coverage and control; reviews timesheets; approves/processes employee concerns and problems and counsels or disciplines as appropriate; completes employee performance appraisals; directs work; acts as a liaison between employees and City/County administrators and elected officials; and trains staff in operations, policies, and procedures.

Organizes, prioritizes, and assigns work; prioritizes and schedules work activities in order to meet objectives; ensures that subordinates have the proper resources needed to complete the assigned work; monitors status of work in progress and inspects completed work; consults with assigned staff to assist with complex/problem situations and provide technical expertise; and provides progress and activity reports to City/County administrators and elected officials.

Directs the vision, planning, and implementation of long-term goals, objectives, and policies for the City/County's arts and cultural programs and facilities; establishes strategic priorities aligned with City and County goals and community needs; evaluates emerging trends in the cultural sector to guide policy and resource decisions; and fosters innovation, cultural equity, and sustainability in all program areas to ensure the department remains responsive and forward-thinking.

Plans, designs, and administers a wide range of arts and cultural programs, including public art initiatives, community festivals, cultural heritage projects, and arts education efforts; allocates resources and oversees

program delivery to ensure efficiency, quality, and inclusivity; monitors program outcomes, evaluates performance, and implements improvements based on data and community feedback; and coordinates staff and contractors to ensure programs meet objectives and reflect the City/County's diverse cultural landscape.

Develops, oversees, and monitors the departmental budget to ensure fiscal accountability and alignment with program priorities; identifies funding opportunities, prepares grant applications, and negotiates sponsorships and partnerships that support and expand cultural programming; tracks expenditures, forecasts financial needs, and prepares financial reports for executive and elected officials; and manages contracts and procurement processes in compliance with City/County regulations.

Builds and sustains strong relationships with artists, cultural organizations, community leaders, and the general public to ensure broad participation in arts and cultural initiatives; organizes community forums, stakeholder meetings, and outreach events to gather input and promote transparency; designs programs that are accessible and inclusive, representing the diversity of the City/County's population; and acts as a visible ambassador for arts and culture within the community and across regional networks.

Researches, drafts, and recommends cultural policies and strategies that advance community engagement, creative economy growth, and cultural preservation; advises City/County leadership and governing boards on cultural priorities, best practices, and policy impacts; prepares and presents comprehensive reports, policy briefs, and recommendations to boards, commissions, and executive leadership; and collaborates with legal and administrative staff to ensure policies comply with county, state, and federal regulations.

Manages the planning, commissioning, acquisition, installation, and maintenance of public art and cultural assets; leads artist selection processes, coordinates with design professionals, and ensures compliance with public art guidelines; oversees the conservation and documentation of the City/County's public art collection; and collaborates with architects, engineers, and community stakeholders to integrate art into public spaces and capital projects.

Cultivates and maintains strategic partnerships with local governments, educational institutions, nonprofits, and private-sector organizations to advance cultural initiatives; develops interagency agreements and collaborative projects that leverage shared resources and expertise; promotes regional arts development and creative industry growth through coalition building and cooperative planning; and strengthens relationships that enhance cultural tourism, education, and economic development.

Directs communication strategies that raise awareness of City/County cultural programs, events, and initiatives; oversees marketing, branding, and media outreach to ensure consistent messaging and strong public engagement; collaborates with internal and external partners to produce promotional materials, digital content, and public information campaigns; and represents the department in public forums, media interviews, and community events to highlight the value and impact of the arts in civic life.

Minimum Qualifications:

Bachelor's degree in arts administration, public administration, cultural studies, or a related field required; master's degree preferred; seven years of progressively responsible experience in arts, culture, or community development programs, including three years in a management or supervisory capacity; or any equivalent combination of education, training, and experience which provides the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities for this job.

Specific License or Certification Required: Must possess and maintain a valid North Carolina driver's license.

Recommendation 2:

Establish a Clear Cultural Investment Framework



Purpose

Following the establishment of arts and culture management capacity, the City and County should adopt a clear, shared cultural investment framework to guide how public resources are allocated, aligned, and evaluated over time.

This recommendation creates the **policy backbone** of the Cultural Roadmap—setting expectations, increasing transparency, and ensuring that cultural investment advances equity, access, and long-term public value.

Background and Rationale

Throughout the planning process, participants consistently expressed confusion about how cultural funding decisions are made, how different funding streams relate to one another, and how organizations or individuals can meaningfully engage with public support systems. Multiple funding mechanisms—grants, contracts, commissions, and partnerships—currently operate in parallel, often without a shared set of principles or a clear public narrative.

Without a coherent framework, cultural investment risks appearing fragmented, exclusionary, or reactive, even when resources are limited and intentions are strong. A clear investment framework allows the City and County to articulate *why* and *how* decisions are made—building public trust while improving coordination and effectiveness.

The City and County should adopt a **cultural investment framework** that clearly defines:

- The purpose of public investment in arts and culture
- The types of funding mechanisms used (e.g., grants, contracts, commissions, partnerships)
- The goals each mechanism is designed to achieve
- How equity, access, and community benefit are considered in decision-making

This framework should apply across City and County cultural funding programs and be used to guide program design, evaluation, and communication with the public.

Core Components of the Framework

A clear cultural investment framework should:

- Distinguish between **grants, contracts, fees for service**, and **commissions**, clarifying appropriate use and expectations for each
- Establish transparent criteria for eligibility, review, and decision-making
- Align funding priorities with adopted cultural, equity, and community development goals
- Provide consistency across agencies and funding streams while allowing flexibility for different program purposes
- Set realistic expectations regarding match requirements, reporting, and public outcomes.

Implementation Planning Notes

This framework is not intended to restrict creativity or standardize cultural expression. Rather, it provides a **shared decision-making structure** that supports fairness, clarity, and accountability. It also creates a foundation for training public grant panelists, aligning advisory roles, and improving coordination among existing funding entities.

The framework should be developed with public input and revisited periodically to ensure responsiveness to community needs and changing conditions.

2.1 Funding Delivery: The City and County should consider the method of delivery of funding for the arts in Durham. (Grants provide flexible support to artists and organizations through grantmaking. Contracts are issued for specific cultural services and public outcomes are aligned with specific civic priorities.)

Grants	Contracts
Support the organization’s work	Purchase a specific service
Flexible use (within guidelines)	Fixed scope of work
Application + review process	Procurement / RFP
Outcome-oriented process	Deliverable-oriented
Lower administrative control	Higher administrative control

Outcome

By establishing a clear cultural investment framework, Durham strengthens public trust, reduces structural barriers to participation, and ensures that limited resources are deployed strategically and equitably. This recommendation enables subsequent actions—i.e., grantmaking programs, partnerships, and funding alignment—to function coherently as part of a unified Cultural Roadmap.

This recommendation establishes the shared rules and principles that guide all cultural investment decisions that follow.

2.2 Funders Roundtable: Convene a Funders Roundtable to review the City/County cultural investment framework as a leadership/partnership step, aligning public, private, and philanthropic resources to advance shared priorities, expand impact, and ensure long-term sustainability of Durham’s cultural ecosystem.

2.3 Establish Guiding Principles – City/County Arts Advisory Boards. **This supplemental recommendation establishes the compass by which the success of the Roadmap will be measured and guided.**

Example Guiding Principles for funding the arts in Durham:

- Recognize, honor, preserve, and celebrate Durham’s cultural heritage.
- Provide access to artistic and cultural activities for all citizens
- Advocate for capital and operating resources for arts and cultural organizations, programs, and artists that serve the community.
- Support the delivery of services and programs that address the needs of individuals as well as neighborhoods and communities.
- Give priority to programs that dissolve boundaries, promote better human relationships, and build a sense of community.
- Devote special attention to the development and education of children and their families, as both arts patrons and artists.
- Encourage and prioritize collaboration, communication, and community building between and among arts groups, educational institutions, civic organizations, public agencies, and private enterprise.
- Establish a long-range plan that periodically reviews the Durham Cultural Roadmap.
- Integrate the arts into cultural tourism and economic development efforts.
- The City/County shall not designate any one cultural organization as the exclusive or official recipient of City/County grants/contracts for any individual art form or cultural activity.
- The City offers contracts to eligible organizations and individual artists for cultural services through programs administered by the management structure to guarantee equitable distribution of available funding as determined by the City/County.

2.4 Draft the Guiding Principles, with input from and made visible to private philanthropic donors. Make the process and outcomes available for public review.

2.5 Submit the Guiding Principles to City /County for review and approval.

Facilitating This Recommendation: Interim Implementation Lead (0–12 months)

Facilitation or recommendation might be done by:

Contract consultant or partner organization
Internal reassigned staff

Reports back to:

City/County managers or their assigned manager

Facilitator Responsible for:

Coordinating all steps
Managing timeline
Preparing materials
Keeping public informed



Recommendation 3:

Launch and Align Cultural Grantmaking Programs

Purpose

With management capacity established and a cultural investment framework in place, the City and County should launch cultural grantmaking programs aligned with the Guiding Principles adopted by the Funders Roundtable. This set of clearly defined programs moves public resources into the community in timely, transparent, and equitable ways.

This recommendation focuses on **implementation**—ensuring that cultural investment reaches artists, organizations, and neighborhoods while reinforcing the values and priorities outlined in the Cultural Roadmap.

Background and Rationale

Throughout the planning process, participants emphasized the need for public cultural investment that is accessible, responsive, and visible in the near term. While long-term systems and infrastructure are essential, communities also expressed urgency around getting resources into the hands of artists and cultural organizations that are navigating immediate pressures related to growth, rising costs, and shifting funding landscapes.

At the same time, engagement revealed confusion and frustration caused by overlapping or disconnected funding programs, inconsistent requirements, and unclear distinctions between grants, contracts, and commissions. Aligning grantmaking programs within a shared framework creates clarity for applicants and strengthens public confidence in how resources are distributed.

The City and County should establish and align a portfolio of cultural grantmaking programs that reflect purpose, scale, and community needs. These programs should be clearly named, well-communicated, and designed to work together as part of a cohesive cultural investment system.

Grantmaking programs should be structured to balance **immediate impact** with **long-term capacity building**, and to support both individual artists and organizations across disciplines and neighborhoods.

Example Program Types

While specific program design and phasing should be refined during implementation, grantmaking programs might include:

- **Mini-Grants and Rapid Response Grants**
Small, flexible awards that support immediate creative activity, experimentation, and community-based projects
- **Neighborhood and Place-Based Cultural Grants**
Funding that supports cultural programming rooted in neighborhoods, community spaces, and local partnerships
- **Teaching Artist and Cultural Practitioner Contracts**
Support for artists working in educational, community, and civic settings through short-term or project-based engagements
- **Operating and Program Support Grants**
Multi-year or annual support for cultural organizations that provide consistent public benefit and community access
- **Professional Development and Capacity-Building Funds**
Resources that strengthen organizational sustainability, leadership skills, and artistic practice

Implementation Considerations

Grantmaking programs should:

- Be aligned with the cultural investment framework established in Recommendation 2
- Use transparent review criteria and trained public panelists
- Minimize administrative burden, particularly for small and emerging organizations
- Include evaluation practices appropriate to program scale and purpose
- Be communicated and vetted with City/County Legal and Risk Management offices clearly and consistently to reduce confusion and structural barriers

Grantmaking should also be coordinated across City and County funding streams to reduce duplication and ensure alignment with broader civic goals.

Proposed Implementation Steps

3.1 Establish the Grantmaking Framework

3.1.1 Confirm the role of grantmaking within the broader cultural investment framework, clearly distinguishing grants from contracts, technical assistance, and other forms of cultural support.

3.1.2 Define the core goals of the grantmaking portfolio, including equitable access, neighborhood reach, organizational stability, creative innovation, and public participation.

3.1.3 Develop a simple public-facing structure that explains how the grant programs work together as one coordinated system rather than as unrelated opportunities.

3.2 Define the Portfolio of Programs

3.2.1 Identify and name each grant category clearly so applicants can understand the purpose and fit of each opportunity.

3.2.2 Define the purpose, eligible applicants, funding range, match requirements, and expected outcomes for each category.

3.2.3 Ensure that the full portfolio reflects differences in scale and need, serving individual artists, grassroots groups, neighborhood-based efforts, and long-standing cultural organizations.

Possible categories may include:

- Mini-Grants / Rapid Response Grants
- Neighborhood and Place-Based Cultural Grants
- Teaching Artist and Cultural Practitioner Contracts
- Operating and Program Support Grants
- Legacy Operating Support
- Professional Development and Capacity-Building Support

3.3 Align Programs Across City and County

3.3.1 Review existing City and County arts-related funding streams, contracts, and cultural support mechanisms to identify overlap, gaps, and inconsistencies.



3.3.2 Determine which entity will administer which program areas while ensuring that all opportunities are presented publicly as part of one coordinated cultural investment system.

3.3.3 Develop shared terminology, review standards, and communication practices so applicants experience the system as coherent, accessible, and transparent.

3.4 Build Guidelines and Administrative Infrastructure

3.4.1 Draft guidelines for each program, including eligibility, timelines, allowable uses, reporting expectations, and review criteria.

3.4.2 Establish a common annual application calendar so applicants can anticipate deadlines and plan accordingly.

3.4.3 Create standard review tools, scoring rubrics, and award agreements appropriate to the scale and purpose of each funding category.

3.4.4 Design an administrative process that minimizes burden, particularly for small and emerging organizations and first-time applicants. Vet guidelines with Legal and Risk Management to ensure limited burdens on grant seekers.

3.5 Advance Equity and Access

3.5.1 Build equity criteria into program design to ensure that historically underrepresented artists, culturally specific organizations, and underserved neighborhoods have meaningful access to resources.

3.5.2 Provide multiple access points for participation, including technical assistance, office hours, multilingual materials, and application support.

3.5.3 Review match requirements carefully so they do not unintentionally exclude smaller organizations or communities with fewer fundraising resources.

3.6 Establish Review and Decision-Making Processes

3.6.1 Recruit and train diverse public panelists and advisory reviewers to evaluate applications.

3.6.2 Define the role of staff, advisory bodies, and elected leadership in making funding recommendations and final approvals.

3.6.3 Ensure that review processes are transparent, consistent, and aligned with adopted cultural goals and public accountability standards.

3.7 Communicate the Portfolio Clearly and review guidelines with Legal and Risk Management to ensure limited burdens on grant seekers.

3.7.1 Launch the portfolio with a clear public guide explaining each grant category, eligibility guidelines and how to apply.

3.7.2 Use a unified name and visual identity for the overall funding system so the public understands it as one coordinated investment strategy.

3.7.3 Conduct outreach through community briefings, webinars, partner organizations, and multilingual communication channels.

3.8 Pilot, Evaluate, and Refine

3.8.1 Launch an initial round of priority programs, beginning with categories most urgently needed by the community.

3.8.2 Track participation, applicant diversity, geographic reach, and administrative effectiveness.

3.8.3 Gather feedback from applicants, panelists, and community partners after the first funding cycle.

3.8.4 Refine guidelines, timelines, and funding categories based on lessons learned.

3.9 Integrate Grantmaking into Long-Term Cultural Investment

3.9.1 Align annual grantmaking with the City and County budget cycle and with the long-term priorities of the Durham Cultural Roadmap.

3.9.2 Connect grantmaking to other strategies in the plan, including arts learning, cultural leadership, creative workforce development, artist workspace, and institutional stability.

3.9.3 Periodically review the portfolio to ensure it continues to reflect Durham's growth, cultural diversity, and evolving community needs.

Timeline

- Phase 1 (0–6 months): Framework design, program definition, and internal alignment
- Phase 2 (6–12 months): Guidelines, review process, communications, and pilot launch
- Phase 3 (12–24 months): Evaluation, refinement, and expanded rollout
- Ongoing: Annual review, alignment, and adaptation

Potential Collaborators

- New Arts Management; City and County leadership; Durham Arts Council; cultural advisory bodies; artists and cultural organizations; community-based partners; philanthropic and private-sector stakeholders.



Outcomes

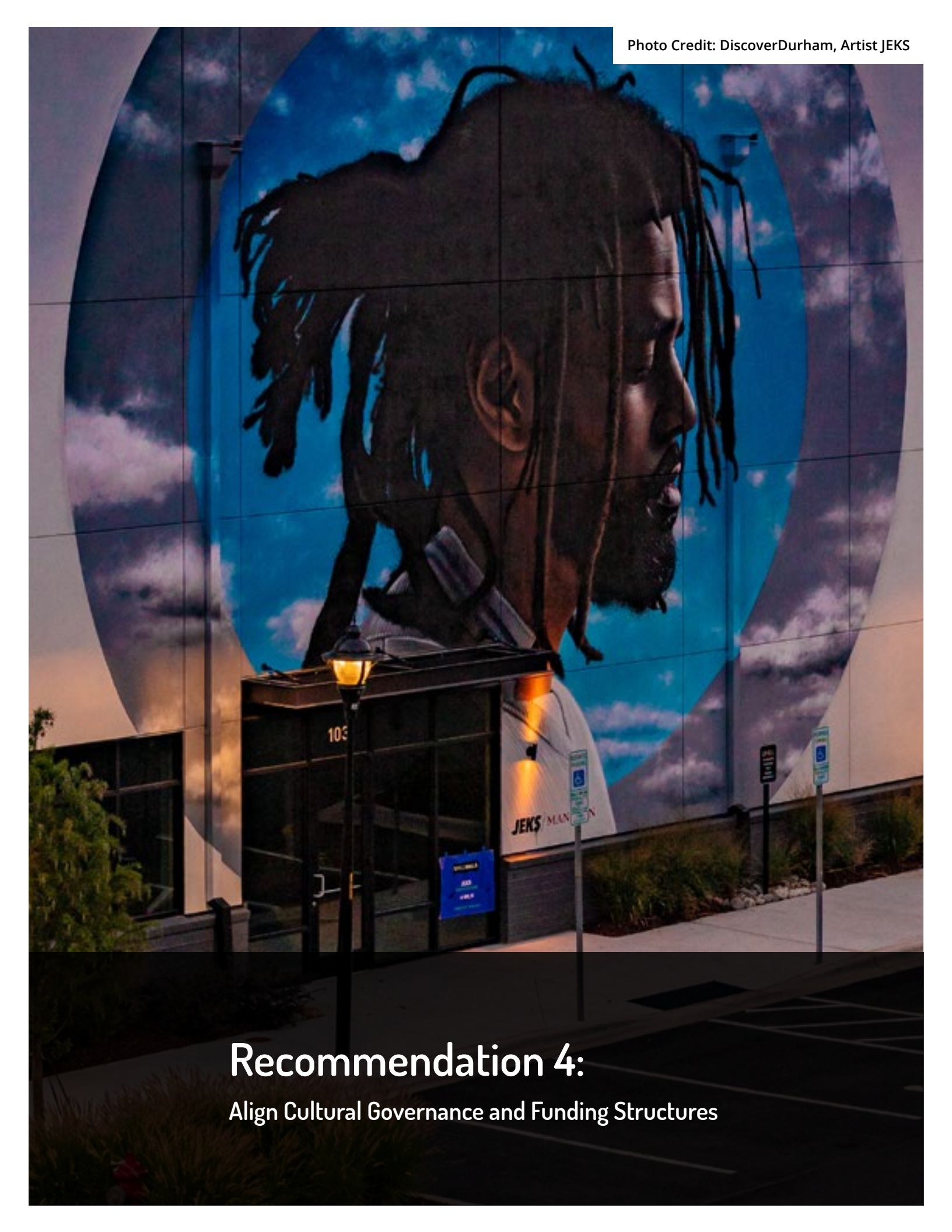
- A clearly defined and publicly understandable cultural grantmaking system
- Stronger alignment across City and County cultural funding
- More equitable access to public arts support
- Reduced confusion for applicants
- Stronger connection between funding decisions and Durham’s long-term cultural goals

Outcome

The establishment of a coordinated cultural grantmaking portfolio enables the City and County to move public investment into direct community impact—supporting artists, strengthening cultural organizations, and expanding access to cultural activity across Durham.

This approach delivers near-term visible outcomes through funded projects and programs, while building a consistent, transparent system for allocating cultural resources over time.

By aligning grantmaking with broader City and County priorities, this recommendation translates policy into action and strengthens the long-term sustainability of Durham’s cultural ecosystem.

A large mural of a man with dreadlocks, likely a reggae artist, is painted on a building facade. The mural is set within a large circular frame that appears to be a window or a decorative opening. The background of the mural is a vibrant blue sky with white clouds. The man has a beard and is looking slightly to the right. The building is illuminated by warm streetlights, and the overall scene is captured at dusk or dawn. In the foreground, there is a sidewalk, a parking lot, and some landscaping. A sign on the building reads "JEKS MAN".

Recommendation 4:

Align Cultural Governance and Funding Structures



Purpose

To support effective implementation of the Cultural Roadmap, the City and County should align cultural governance and funding structures to reduce fragmentation, improve coordination, and ensure that public cultural investment is coherent, accessible, and accountable. This should also include public entities distributing public dollars for artists and arts organizations.

This recommendation focuses on **how decisions are made and carried out**, ensuring that multiple cultural funding and advisory structures operate in alignment rather than in isolation.

Background and Rationale

Throughout the planning process, participants consistently described confusion about where to seek support, how decisions are made, and how cultural funding and advisory bodies relate to one another. While Durham benefits from multiple funding streams, programs, and advisory structures, these systems often operate independently, creating barriers for artists, organizations, and residents seeking to engage.

Fragmented governance can unintentionally reinforce inequities, favor those with insider knowledge, and place unnecessary administrative burden on applicants and staff.

Aligning governance and funding structures improves transparency, reduces duplication, and strengthens public trust without diminishing the value of existing programs or partners.

Recommendation

The City and County should review and align cultural governance, advisory, and funding structures to ensure they function as an integrated system in support of the Cultural Roadmap. This alignment should clarify roles, improve coordination, and establish shared accountability across departments and programs.

The goal is not consolidation for its own sake, but **coherence**—ensuring that cultural investment decisions are guided by shared priorities, consistent processes, and clear public communication.

Key Areas of Alignment

Alignment efforts should include:

- Clarifying roles and relationships among cultural advisory bodies, commissions, and funding entities

- Coordinating cultural grantmaking, contracts, and commissions across City and County departments
- Ensuring consistent communication and public-facing information about cultural opportunities
- Aligning evaluation and reporting practices with adopted cultural goals and equity priorities
- Creating clear pathways for community input and feedback

Implementation Considerations

Alignment should be undertaken collaboratively, with respect for existing expertise and institutional knowledge. Changes should prioritize clarity, efficiency, and accessibility rather than increased administrative complexity.

This recommendation also supports the development of trained public grant panelists and adjudicators, helping ensure that decision-making reflects community values and diverse perspectives.

Proposed Implementation Steps

Aligning public and private sector funding structures
(Mapping may be outsourced to a city/county vendor or partner)

4.1 Map the Existing Governance and Funding Landscape

4.1.1 Identify all City, County, nonprofit, and advisory entities currently involved in distributing, recommending, managing, or influencing public cultural funding.

4.1.2 Document the current roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, and funding relationships of each entity, including formal boards, commissions, staff offices, intermediary organizations, and relevant philanthropic partners.

4.1.3 Prepare a clear governance and funding map showing how artists, organizations, and residents currently encounter the system.

4.2 Assess Gaps, Overlap, and Barriers

4.2.1 Review the current structure to identify overlap, duplication, conflicting roles, and areas where responsibility is unclear.

4.2.2 Identify barriers experienced by applicants and stakeholders, including administrative burden, fragmented communication, inconsistent timelines, and lack of clarity regarding decision-making processes.

4.2.3 Examine whether current structures unintentionally reinforce inequities by favoring those with greater access to information, relationships, or institutional familiarity.

4.2.4 Assess the degree of alignment or fragmentation between public funding and philanthropic investment across Durham's cultural sector.

4.3 Clarify Governance Roles and Relationships

4.3.1 Define the distinct roles of City and County leadership, the staff and management framework within local government, advisory boards or commissions, and nonprofit intermediary organizations in cultural decision-making.

4.3.2 Clarify which entities advise, which administer, and which approve or authorize funding decisions.

4.3.3 Establish a shared governance framework that defines how these entities will communicate, coordinate, and make decisions moving forward.

4.3.4 Affirm that decision-making authority for public cultural funding rests with the City and County, ensuring accountability, transparency, and compliance with public policy requirements.

4.4 Align Funding Structures Across the System

4.4.1 Review current cultural funding mechanisms across City and County agencies to determine how they can be better aligned in purpose, timing, and communication.

4.4.2 Distinguish clearly between grants, contracts, public art commissions, technical assistance, and other investment tools so each mechanism has a defined role.

4.4.3 Develop shared principles for public cultural investment—including transparency, equity, accountability, and accessibility—that can be applied across agencies.

4.4.4 Engage philanthropic partners to align funding priorities, timelines, and areas of investment with the City and County's cultural investment framework, reducing duplication and increasing collective impact.

4.5 Create Coordinated Public-Facing Information

4.5.1 Develop a unified public guide to Durham's cultural support system that explains available funding opportunities, advisory structures, review processes, and points of contact.

4.5.2 Standardize communications practices across entities, including timelines, terminology, eligibility language, and public notices.

4.5.3 Ensure that artists, organizations, and residents experience the system as navigable and understandable, even where multiple entities remain involved.

4.6 Establish Coordination Mechanisms

4.6.1 Create a regular coordination structure among entities involved in cultural funding and governance, such as quarterly interagency alignment meetings.

4.6.2 Establish a Cultural Funders Coordination Table that includes City and County representatives, philanthropic partners, and key intermediaries to share information, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for aligned or complementary investment.

4.6.3 Develop procedures for information-sharing, calendar alignment, and coordination of major funding cycles or program changes.

4.6.4 Ensure that philanthropic participation supports alignment and coordination while maintaining the City and County's authority over public funding decisions.

4.7 Strengthen Accountability and Public Trust

4.7.1 Define reporting expectations and accountability measures for entities administering or advising on public cultural investment.

4.7.2 Establish procedures for public feedback, review, and periodic assessment of how the governance system is functioning.

4.7.3 Ensure that changes to governance and funding structures are communicated clearly and publicly to build trust and reduce confusion.

4.8 Pilot and Refine the Aligned Structure

4.8.1 Implement the aligned governance and coordination approach through selected funding cycles or initiatives to test effectiveness.



4.8.2 Gather feedback from staff, advisory bodies, applicants, philanthropic partners, and community stakeholders.

4.8.3 Refine roles, processes, and coordination mechanisms based on lessons learned.

4.9 Integrate Alignment into Long-Term Cultural Governance Model

4.9.1 Incorporate the aligned governance model into the management's ongoing responsibilities and reporting systems.

4.9.2 Maintain regular coordination with philanthropic and private-sector partners as part of Durham's long-term cultural investment strategy.

4.9.3 Periodically review governance and funding alignment to ensure continued responsiveness to community needs, growth, and cultural priorities.

Outcome

The alignment of cultural governance and public funding structures establishes a clear, coordinated system for how cultural decisions are made and how public resources are distributed across Durham. This recommendation ensures that Durham's cultural system functions as a coordinated whole rather than a collection of disconnected parts.

This approach reduces fragmentation, clarifies roles and responsibilities, and improves coordination among City, County, advisory, philanthropic, and partner organizations. As a result, artists, organizations, and residents can navigate funding systems more easily, while the City and County strengthen transparency, accountability, and public trust in cultural investment.



Recommendation 5:

Create a Structured Arts–Business Partnership Platform

(Durham Cultural Action Partnership)

The City and County should support the creation of a structured arts–business partnership platform that provides a durable forum for collaboration between Durham’s arts and cultural sector, corporate partners, educational institutions, and civic leadership. This platform should be designed to strengthen alignment—not to replace existing relationships or create a fundraising committee alone.

Purpose

The purpose of the partnership platform is to **move from transactional sponsorship to strategic partnership** by creating shared understanding, coordinated investment, and collective responsibility for Durham's cultural and economic vitality.

North Carolina communities already demonstrate elements of arts-business collaboration. This recommendation builds on those models—aligning them into a coordinated, intentional framework for Durham.

North Carolina Models: Approaches

Regional Collaboration (Triangle Area)

Piedmont Laureate Program – A multi-jurisdictional partnership involving Raleigh, Durham, Orange County, and arts councils.

Public-Private-Nonprofit Partnership (Wake County)

United Arts Council of Raleigh & Wake County – Aligns County funding, municipal priorities, and private sector investment. Demonstrates a coordinated model where government, nonprofit intermediaries, and private partners work together to deliver cultural investment.

Business + Artist Collaboration (Raleigh)

Raleigh Murals Project – Connects artists, local businesses, and public support to activate commercial corridors. Illustrates how arts and business partnerships can directly support placemaking, economic activity, and neighborhood identity.

Wilson Arts Partner Program (Wilson, NC)

Provides structured opportunities for businesses to support arts organizations with clear recognition and engagement. Demonstrates a simple, scalable entry point for business participation in arts and culture.

City of Durham Cultural and Public Art Program – Existing public investment structure supporting artists and public art. Durham already has core elements in place and can build from an existing foundation.

The 2004 Durham Cultural Masterplan called for partnerships between artists, business leaders, and public officials, reinforcing that this recommendation builds on Durham's own history and prior planning efforts.

Background and Rationale

As Durham continues to grow as an innovation-driven city within the Research Triangle, the relationship between arts, culture, and the private sector must evolve beyond episodic sponsorship toward sustained partnership. Throughout the Durham Cultural Roadmap planning process, business leaders, cultural practitioners, educators, and civic stakeholders expressed interest in deeper, more coordinated collaboration that aligns cultural investment with workforce development, community wellbeing, and regional competitiveness.

Arts and culture contribute directly to factors increasingly prioritized by employers, including talent attraction and retention, quality of life, community identity, and inclusive growth. Yet Durham currently lacks a consistent, visible structure through which corporate partners, cultural organizations, educational institutions, and public agencies can align priorities, share learning, and pursue joint initiatives. This gap limits the long-term impact of private-sector engagement and places disproportionate responsibility on individual organizations to broker relationships independently.



Corporate Partners

Corporate partners across the Triangle increasingly recognize that long-term success depends on more than infrastructure and incentives. Companies seek places where employees want to live, where communities are vibrant and inclusive, and where innovation is supported by creativity and cultural exchange.

Arts+Business and Cultural Partnership for Durham

Advancing Corporate Values and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Commitments

Many companies prioritize equity, community engagement, and social impact as part of their ESG responsibilities. Investing in arts and culture offers visible, place-based opportunities to advance these commitments while strengthening the communities in which employees live and work.

Strengthening Regional Identity

Durham's cultural assets enhance the Triangle's collective narrative as a place where innovation and creativity coexist—reinforcing its national and global reputation as a competitive, livable, and forward-thinking region.

The Cultural Roadmap supports building pathways for collaboration between Durham's arts sector and the corporate community—moving beyond transactional sponsorships toward long-term partnerships that align business priorities with community benefit. This shift reflects the growing recognition that culture is not ancillary to regional success, but central to talent, innovation, and civic vitality.

Arts + Business Councils support member organizations by offering enriching arts and cultural engagement opportunities for employees, all while bolstering the creative economy. These advocacy agencies mount advocacy efforts, collect data, recognize arts supporters, and train future board leaders to strengthen business and arts partnerships.

Additional Functions of a Structured Arts+Business Partnership Platform:

- Create regular opportunities for dialogue and coordination between business leaders, artists, cultural organizations, educators, and public agencies
- Align cultural investment with workforce development, education, neighborhood vitality, and community engagement goals

- Support career pathways across the arts, humanities, sciences, and creative industries
- Encourage place-based investment that strengthens civic identity and supports equitable growth
- Translate corporate values, including Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) commitments, into visible, community-centered impact

Implementation Considerations

This platform should be Durham-specific, reflecting the city's cultural identity, economic landscape, and values rather than replicating models from elsewhere.

Getting Started:

1. Mayor and County leadership convene a roundtable of business, arts, education, and community leaders
2. Identify a few shared priorities
3. Launch 2–3 pilot projects that show how this can work
4. Learn from those pilots before expanding

Its structure, membership, and scope should be developed collaboratively during early implementation of the Cultural Roadmap, with participation from City and County leadership, corporate partners, and representatives of the arts and cultural sector.

This partnership should be positioned as a connector and multiplier, supporting and reinforcing other Roadmap recommendations related to arts learning, cultural workforce development, artist workspace, leadership cultivation, and creative entrepreneurship.

Proposed Implementation Steps

5.1 Define the Purpose and Scope

5.1.1 Confirm the purpose of the platform as a mechanism for aligning arts, culture, business, and civic priorities rather than as a fundraising committee alone.

5.1.2 Define the platform's initial goals, including support for workforce development, neighborhood vitality, cultural visibility, creative career pathways, and place-based investment.

5.1.3 Establish the effort as a pilot initiative during its start-up phase, with a clear timeline, scope, and evaluation process.

5.2 Identify Convening Leadership

5.2.1 Designate City and County leadership to convene the initiative, with the Mayor and County leadership serving as public-facing conveners and City/County management providing operational coordination.

5.2.2 Identify a small planning group of cross-sector representatives to shape the initial agenda, including business leaders, arts and cultural leaders, educators, workforce partners, and public-sector staff.

5.2.3 Clarify roles for public leadership, private-sector participants, and cultural partners so expectations are clear from the outset.

5.3 Convene an Initial Durham Cultural Action Partnership Roundtable

5.3.1 Convene an initial roundtable to introduce the concept, review the Cultural Roadmap, and identify shared interests across sectors.

5.3.2 Present a limited number of priority partnership opportunities tied to Durham's existing goals, such as workforce readiness, creative entrepreneurship, corridor activation, or youth pathways into cultural and creative careers.

5.3.3 Use the roundtable to test interest, gather feedback, and identify potential founding partners.

5.4 Establish Priority Areas for Partnership

5.4.1 Identify two to three initial focus areas where business, civic, and cultural interests naturally intersect.

5.4.2 Ensure these focus areas align with existing City and County priorities, including economic development, education, neighborhood stabilization, workforce development, and equitable growth.

5.4.3 Prioritize partnership opportunities that can produce visible public benefit and demonstrate value early.

5.5 Create a Simple Participation Structure

5.5.1 Develop a participation model that allows partners to engage at different levels, including:

- strategic advisors
- project partners
- funding or investment partners

5.5.2 Clarify that the City and County are conveners and coordinators, while partners contribute expertise, resources, visibility, and alignment.

5.5.3 Establish a meeting and communications schedule to support continuity without creating unnecessary bureaucracy.

5.6 Launch Pilot Projects

5.6.1 Select two to three pilot initiatives that reflect the platform's purpose and can demonstrate early success.

5.6.2 Define the scope, roles, resources, and expected outcomes for each pilot project.

5.6.3 Align pilot projects with workforce development, education, neighborhood vitality, or cultural activation goals so they reflect shared civic priorities.

5.7 Connect the Platform to Workforce, Education, and Community Goals

5.7.1 Coordinate with education and workforce partners to connect arts and culture to internships, mentorships, apprenticeships, and leadership development opportunities.

5.7.2 Encourage place-based investment strategies that strengthen neighborhood identity, support local business activity, and increase cultural visibility.

5.7.3 Translate corporate and philanthropic priorities, including Environmental, Social, and Governance commitments, into visible community-based cultural outcomes.

5.8 Communicate and Expand

5.8.1 Publicly recognize founding partners and participating organizations as contributors to Durham’s cultural and civic future.

5.8.2 Share results from pilot projects and early partnerships to build momentum and attract broader participation.

5.8.3 Use lessons from the pilot phase to refine the structure and determine whether the platform should continue, expand, or be formalized further.

5.9 Integrate into Long-Term Cultural Strategy

5.9.1 Incorporate the platform into the management framework’s long-term partnership and investment strategy.

5.9.2 Maintain regular cross-sector convenings to support shared learning, aligned investment, and collaborative planning.

5.9.3 Periodically review the platform’s effectiveness in advancing Durham’s cultural, economic, and community goals.

Timeline

- **Phase 1 (0–6 months):** Define purpose, identify leadership, and convene initial roundtable
- **Phase 2 (6–12 months):** Establish focus areas, participation structure, and pilot projects
- **Phase 3 (12–24 months):** Launch pilots, evaluate results, and expand participation
- **Ongoing:** Coordination, refinement, and integration into long-term implementation

Potential Collaborators

Implementation support may be secured through philanthropic or private-sector investment to build short-term capacity. All work will be directed by City and County leadership to ensure alignment with public priorities and accountability standards.

Collaborators may include the staff and management framework within local government; Mayor and County leadership; City and County management; Chamber of Commerce; major employers; philanthropic partners; Durham Arts Council; cultural organizations; workforce and education partners; neighborhood stakeholders.

Outcome

By establishing a structured arts–business partnership platform, Durham positions culture as a shared civic and economic asset—one that connects private-sector leadership with public purpose and ensures that corporate engagement contributes meaningfully to the long-term strength, inclusivity, and sustainability of the city’s cultural ecosystem.

Implementation lead may be outsourced to a consultant or to a City/County contractor to manage day-to-day operational tasks.

From Sponsorship to Partnership

Durham’s Cultural Roadmap is designed not only to strengthen the city’s arts ecosystem, but to contribute to the cultural, economic, and workforce vitality of the broader Research Triangle region. As Durham continues to grow as an innovation hub within a highly competitive regional economy, arts and culture play a critical role in talent attraction, retention, and quality of life—factors increasingly prioritized by corporate and institutional partners across the Triangle.

Recommendation 6:

Expand Arts Learning and Creative Access Countywide

This recommendation is not a directive to create a new organization, but an invitation to explore whether better coordination can expand access and strengthen existing efforts.

Purpose

To ensure that creativity is accessible to residents across Durham County, the City and County should expand arts learning and creative access in neighborhood and community-based settings. This recommendation positions arts learning as a public good, supporting youth development, workforce readiness, and lifelong engagement with culture.

A citywide and countywide arts learning organization serves as a coordinating backbone for arts education—aligning schools, cultural organizations, teaching artists, and community partners to expand access, improve quality, and ensure that all young people have meaningful opportunities to engage in the arts.

This approach does not replace or compete with existing organizations. Instead, it strengthens and connects the work already happening across Durham.

Background and Rationale

Throughout the planning process, participants emphasized that access to arts learning is uneven across neighborhoods and populations. While Durham benefits from strong cultural institutions and school-based programs, many residents—particularly young people, families, and historically underserved communities—experience limited access to sustained, high-quality creative opportunities outside of traditional venues.

Arts learning supports more than artistic skill. It strengthens critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving—capacities essential to educational success, workforce development, and civic participation. As Durham grows, ensuring equitable access to creative experiences is central to building inclusion, belonging, and long-term community resilience.

Recommendation

The City and County should establish a coordinated approach to arts learning and creative access that prioritizes neighborhood-based delivery, cross-sector partnerships, and equitable distribution of resources across Durham County.

This approach should complement existing school and institutional programs while expanding opportunities in community spaces such as libraries, recreation centers, cultural sites, and neighborhood organizations.

Key Focus Areas

Arts learning and creative access efforts should:

- Support **out-of-school and community-based arts learning** for children and youth
- Engage **teaching artists and cultural practitioners** through project-based contracts
- Expand access to creative programming in neighborhoods with limited cultural infrastructure
- Encourage partnerships among arts organizations, schools, libraries, parks, health providers, and community groups
- Integrate arts learning with broader goals related to education, workforce development, and youth wellbeing



Implementation Considerations

Arts learning initiatives should be aligned with the cultural investment framework established in Recommendation 2 and supported through grantmaking and partnerships outlined in Recommendations 3 and 5. Programs should be designed to be flexible, culturally responsive, and accessible to participants of various ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

This recommendation also creates opportunities for private-sector and philanthropic partners to support creative learning as part of broader commitments to education, workforce development, and community vitality.

Implementation Notes

The City and County might pursue funding through the North Carolina Arts Council to support pilot arts learning initiatives, particularly those that demonstrate collaboration between schools, artists, and community organizations. These funds would support program implementation and testing, while longer-term coordination and infrastructure will be developed through local investment and partnerships.

Proposed Implementation Steps

(This recommendation might be outsourced to an existing City/County partner-vendor)

6.1 Start with a Listening and Mapping Phase

6.1.1 Identify existing arts learning providers across Durham:

- schools
- arts organizations
- teaching artists
- after-school programs
- community-based initiatives

6.1.2 Document what is already happening:

- who is serving which students
- where gaps exist
- where duplication occurs

6.1.3 Share findings back with the community before proposing any structure.

6.2 Convene a Voluntary Arts Learning Working Group

6.2.1 Invite a small, representative group of:

- arts organizations
- educators
- teaching artists
- youth-serving organizations

6.2.2 Clearly state that participation is **voluntary** and this is not a governing body.

6.2.3 Frame the purpose: To explore how coordination—not consolidation—could improve access to arts learning.

6.3 Define 1–2 Shared Priorities

Examples:

- improving access to the arts in neighborhoods
- better coordination between schools and providers
- shared information for families

6.3.1 Agree on *one or two problems worth solving together*

6.4. Pilot Simple Coordination Tools

Example: Shared calendar of arts learning opportunities; what's available in City/County agencies and facilities.

6.4.1 Simple referral or matching system

6.4.2 Joint outreach to schools or families

6.5 Test a Small Collaborative Pilot

6.5.1 Launch one pilot project such as:

- coordinated summer arts programming
- shared teaching artist pool
- joint school partnership

6.5.2 Define roles, participation, and outcomes

6.6 Provide Support—Not Control

6.6.1 The City/County may provide:

- coordination support
- small pilot funding
- communications support

6.6.2 The City/County will NOT:

- direct programming
- replace organizations
- control artistic or educational content



6.7 Evaluate and Decide Together

6.7.1 Gather feedback from participants:

- what worked
- what didn't
- what is needed

6.7.2 Determine collectively:

- whether coordination should continue
- what form it should take

6.8 Consider Formal Structure

6.8.1 Explore options such as:

- network models
- partnership models
- intermediary organization

Durham Cultural Implementation Initiative Funding Strategy (Arts Learning + Arts-Business Pilot Phase)

Strategy Overview

This initiative could be launched using a blended funding approach that combines public investment, philanthropic support, and private-sector participation. The goal is to establish early implementation capacity, demonstrate impact through pilot programs, and build a sustainable long-term model.

Funding Approach

- Public funding provides legitimacy and base support
- Philanthropy supports start-up capacity and pilot programs
- Private sector contributes to workforce and community-based initiatives
- Partners align resources around shared outcomes rather than isolated projects

Priority Funding Sources

Public:

- City and County seed funding
- State and federal arts and workforce grants

Philanthropy:

- Triangle Community Foundation
<https://trianglecf.org>
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of NC Foundation
<https://www.bcbsncfoundation.org/overview-and-opportunities/>
- Burroughs Wellcome Fund
<https://www.bwfund.org/>
- William R. Kenan Jr. Fund
<https://kenancharitabletrust.org/about-us/>

Private Sector:

- Blue Cross NC
- Duke University Health System
- Additional local employers and corporate partners

Sample Ramp-Up Budget for select program recommendations (\$400,000)

Implementation Capacity – \$150,000

- Interim Implementation Lead
- Coordination and convenings

Pilot Arts Learning Programs – \$150,000

- School and community pilots
- Teaching artist fees and materials

Arts-Business Pilot Projects – \$60,000

- Workforce pathways and internships
- Neighborhood and corridor activations

Communications and Evaluation – \$40,000

- Public engagement materials
- Evaluation and documentation

Funding Structure (Example)

- City/County: \$75,000
- Lead Foundation: \$100,000
- Additional Foundations: \$125,000–\$150,000
- Corporate Partners: \$75,000–\$100,000
- Total Target: \$375,000–\$400,000

Value Proposition

This initiative connects arts learning, workforce development, and community investment. It provides:

- Expanded access to arts learning
- Youth workforce pathways
- Activated neighborhoods and public spaces
- Stronger alignment across sectors



Key Principle

Public leadership guides the work. Philanthropic and private-sector partners align investment to accelerate impact without directing public funding decisions.

Outcome

This funding strategy enables Durham to move from planning to coordinated action—building implementation capacity, demonstrating early success, and positioning arts and culture as a driver of economic vitality, education, and community well-being.

This approach creates a pathway for stronger coordination across Durham’s existing arts learning efforts, helping organizations, schools, and artists work more effectively together. It focuses on improving access and communication while respecting the leadership and expertise already present in the community.

By starting with small, collaborative efforts, the City and County support a more connected and inclusive arts learning environment for young people across Durham.

By expanding arts learning and creative access countywide, Durham ensures that creativity is not concentrated in a few institutions or neighborhoods but embedded in everyday community life. This investment strengthens youth development, supports teaching artists, and reinforces culture as a shared civic resource—essential to Durham’s future.

This recommendation ensures that access to creativity keeps pace with Durham’s growth.

This approach should complement existing school and institutional programs while expanding opportunities in community spaces such as libraries, recreation centers, cultural sites, and neighborhood organizations.

Recommendation 7:

Expand Artist Workspace and Cultural Production Infrastructure

Expanding artist workspace and cultural production infrastructure requires a coordinated approach between the City and County, with each playing a distinct and complementary role.

The County's role is primarily tied to land use, development, and urban planning, while the City's role focuses on access, community-serving facilities, and programmatic support.

Purpose

To sustain Durham's creative economy and cultural vitality, the City and County should expand access to affordable, functional space for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural organizations.

This includes studios, rehearsal space, production facilities, and small-scale venues where creative work is produced, developed, and shared with the public.

The City and County are not expected to build or operate artist spaces directly. Instead, **their role is to create the conditions, partnerships, and incentives that enable these spaces to be developed and sustained** by a range of partners.

As Durham continues to grow, this recommendation focuses on ensuring that the spaces needed for creative work remain available, accessible, and integrated into the city's broader development.

This recommendation focuses on **where creative work happens**—ensuring that artists and cultural organizations have the space needed to produce, rehearse, exhibit, and engage the public as Durham continues to grow.

It is not limited to studios—it includes:

- rehearsal space
- maker space
- production facilities
- small performance and exhibition spaces

Background and Rationale

Throughout the planning process, artists and cultural organizations consistently identified access to workspace as a critical challenge. Rising property values, redevelopment pressure, and limited purpose-built facilities have made it increasingly difficult for artists to secure stable, affordable spaces to work and present their work.

While artist housing received significant public attention during engagement, participants also emphasized that **workspace—not housing alone—is essential** to sustaining creative production. Without adequate space for making, rehearsing, exhibiting, and gathering, Durham risks losing the very cultural activity that defines its identity and fuels its creative economy.

Durham's history as an industrial city offers unique opportunities to rethink underutilized or publicly owned spaces as sites for creative production, community engagement, and cultural exchange.

Implementation Steps

7.1 Assess Existing Cultural Space and Needs

7.1.1 Inventory existing artist workspace and cultural production facilities across Durham, including studios, rehearsal spaces, performance venues, and maker spaces.

7.1.2 Identify gaps in availability, affordability, and geographic distribution, with attention to underserved neighborhoods and disciplines.

7.1.3 Map underutilized or vacant properties—public and private—that may be suitable for cultural use.

7.2 Define the City and County Role



7.2.1 Establish the City and County as facilitators and partners in supporting cultural space, rather than primary developers or operators.

7.2.2 Align this role across planning, economic development, and cultural policy to ensure a coordinated approach.

7.2.3 Integrate cultural space goals into existing City and County priorities, including economic development, neighborhood planning, and small business support.

7.3 Develop Policy Tools and Incentives

7.3.1 Explore zoning and land-use strategies that support the inclusion of artist workspace and cultural production space in new and existing developments.

7.3.2 Consider incentives such as:

- adaptive reuse support
- development bonuses
- reduced-cost leases in publicly owned facilities

7.3.3 Encourage the inclusion of cultural space in mixed-use and redevelopment projects, particularly in areas experiencing growth and displacement pressure.

7.4 Build Partnerships with Developers and Institutions

7.4.1 Engage private developers, property owners, and major institutions to identify opportunities to incorporate cultural space into new and existing projects.

7.4.2 Explore partnerships with universities, hospitals, and large employers to support shared or co-located creative space.

7.4.3 Work with nonprofit organizations and cultural intermediaries to develop and manage artist workspace where appropriate.

7.5 Pilot Demonstration Projects

7.5.1 Identify one or two pilot sites to test different models of cultural space development, such as:

- shared studio or maker space
- rehearsal or performance facility
- multi-tenant creative hub

7.5.2 Structure pilots as partnerships, with clear roles for public, private, and nonprofit partners.

7.5.3 Use pilot projects to test feasibility, demand, and long-term sustainability.

7.6 Align Funding and Financing Strategies

7.6.1 Combine public investment, philanthropic support, and private capital to support pilot projects and space development.

7.6.2 Explore financing tools such as:

- capital grants
- low-interest loans
- public-private partnerships

7.6.3 Coordinate cultural space investment with broader housing, economic development, and infrastructure strategies where appropriate.

7.7 Integrate Cultural Space into Long-Term Planning

7.7.1 Incorporate cultural production space into comprehensive plans, neighborhood plans, and economic development strategies.

7.7.2 Establish ongoing coordination between planning, economic development, and cultural leadership to ensure sustained attention to cultural space needs.

7.7.3 Periodically assess supply and demand for cultural space and adjust strategies as Durham grows.

Timeline

Expanding artist workspace and cultural production infrastructure is a long-term effort aligned with Durham's growth and development cycles.

This recommendation will likely be implemented over an 8-10-year period, beginning with assessment and policy alignment, followed by pilot projects and partnership development, and ultimately scaling through integration into standard development practices across the city and county.

The City and County should pursue a **phased strategy** to expand artist workspace and cultural production infrastructure, beginning with pilot projects and partnerships and advancing over time toward a network of accessible creative spaces across Durham County.

This strategy should prioritize flexibility, affordability, and public access rather than a single, large-scale facility.

Strategic Approach

A phased approach may include:

- **Pilot Projects**
Short-term or temporary use of vacant or underutilized spaces for studios, rehearsal rooms, or pop-up exhibition and performance opportunities.
- **Networked Spaces**
Partnerships with nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, faith-based groups, and private property owners to create a distributed network of creative workspaces embedded in neighborhoods.
- **Future Flagship Opportunities**
Long-term exploration of purpose-built or adaptively reused facilities that support both visual and performing arts production and public engagement, including potential public-private partnerships.

Implementation Considerations

Artist workspace initiatives should:

- Be aligned with economic development, planning, and community development strategies
- Prioritize equitable access for artists across disciplines and backgrounds
- Leverage public assets, zoning tools, and partnership opportunities where appropriate
- Coordinate with grantmaking, arts learning, and leadership development efforts outlined in earlier recommendations

Timeline

Expanding artist workspace and cultural production infrastructure will be implemented over an 8–10-year period, aligned with Durham’s growth and development cycles.

- **Phase 1 (0–12 months):** Foundation and policy alignment
- **Phase 2 (Years 1–3):** Partnership development and pilot launch
- **Phase 3 (Years 3–5):** Pilot implementation and early expansion
- **Phase 4 (Years 5–10):** Scaling and integration into development and planning processes
- **Ongoing:** Coordination, funding alignment, and evaluation

This recommendation complements—but does not replace—existing cultural institutions, including the Durham Arts Council, by addressing space needs that extend beyond any single organization’s mission or capacity.

Outcome

This approach ensures that artists and cultural organizations have the space needed to create, produce, and contribute to Durham’s economic vitality and civic identity over time.

By expanding artist workspace and cultural production infrastructure, Durham supports creative work at its source—strengthening the local creative economy, anchoring artists in place, and ensuring that cultural life remains visible, accessible, and rooted in community as the city and county evolve.

This recommendation ensures that Durham’s artists have the space they need to create, contribute, and remain rooted in place.

Recommendation 8:

Cultivate Cultural Leadership and Sector Capacity

Purpose

To strengthen Durham’s cultural ecosystem over time, the City and County should support the development of cultural leaders, artists, and organizations through coordinated professional development, leadership pathways, and capacity-building resources.

This recommendation focuses on **the people who sustain and advance cultural work**—ensuring they have the skills, support, and opportunities needed to grow, lead, and contribute to Durham’s cultural and civic life.

This is not a single program, but a **coordinated approach** that aligns existing resources, partnerships, and investments to strengthen leadership and capacity across the cultural sector.

This recommendation addresses the people who sustain, steward, and advance Durham’s cultural life by building pathways into leadership, strengthening professional skills, and supporting succession and continuity across the sector.

Background and Rationale

Throughout the planning process, participants identified a critical gap in leadership development within Durham’s cultural sector. While the city is rich in artistic talent and community-driven cultural practice, there are limited structured pathways for developing arts managers, cultural administrators, board leaders, and cross-sector collaborators.

As Durham grows and its cultural ecosystem becomes more complex, leadership capacity must grow alongside it. Without intentional investment in people—particularly those from historically underrepresented communities—the sector risks burnout, instability, and loss of institutional knowledge.

Leadership cultivation is not limited to executive roles. It includes teaching artists, community organizers, curators, producers, administrators, volunteers, and civic partners who play essential roles in shaping cultural life.

Recommendation

The City and County should establish a coordinated approach to cultural leadership development that supports learning, mentorship, and professional advancement across the arts and cultural sector.

This approach should recognize leadership as a shared civic asset and align public, private, educational, and philanthropic partners around strengthening the people who carry Durham’s cultural work forward.

Key Focus Areas

Cultural leadership initiatives should:

- Support **professional development** for artists, arts administrators, and cultural workers
- Create **mentorship and peer-learning opportunities** across career stages
- Strengthen **board leadership and governance capacity** for cultural organizations
- Expand pathways into arts and cultural careers for young people and emerging professionals
- Encourage cross-sector leadership development involving education, business, humanities, and sciences

Implementation Considerations

Leadership cultivation cohorts should be integrated with arts learning, grantmaking, and partnership strategies outlined in earlier recommendations. Programs may include fellowships, leadership cohorts, workshops, coaching, and partnerships with local colleges, universities, and business leaders.

This recommendation also supports training members of the public to serve as grant panelists and cultural adjudicators—broadening participation in decision-making and strengthening public understanding of cultural investment.

Outcome

By cultivating cultural leadership and sector capacity, Durham invests in the people who sustain its creative ecosystem—ensuring continuity, equity, and resilience. This recommendation supports long-term system health, strengthens institutions, and prepares the next generation of cultural leaders to guide Durham’s cultural future.

This recommendation ensures that Durham’s cultural future is guided by prepared, diverse, and connected leaders.

Proposed Implementation Steps

8.1 Assess Needs and Map Existing Resources

8.1.1 Inventory current leadership development, training, and capacity-building opportunities available to artists and cultural organizations.

8.1.2 Identify gaps in:

- organizational management and financial sustainability
- leadership development and succession planning
- board governance and oversight
- career pathways for emerging cultural workers

8.1.3 Engage artists, organizations, and partners to prioritize needs across disciplines and communities.

8.2 Define a Coordinated Capacity-Building Framework

8.2.1 Establish a clear framework for cultural leadership and capacity-building aligned with Durham’s cultural, economic, and community development goals.

8.2.2 Identify priority areas for support, such as:

- leadership development (executive and emerging leaders)
- technical assistance (finance, fundraising, operations)
- governance and board development
- creative entrepreneurship and career pathways

8.3 Partner with Existing Organizations and Institutions

8.3.1 Collaborate with:

- universities and colleges
- nonprofit support organizations – Durham Arts Council
- business and leadership development groups



8.3.2 Leverage existing expertise rather than creating new standalone programs.

8.3.3 Align with workforce development and small business support efforts where appropriate.

8.4 Launch Pilot Leadership and Capacity Programs

8.4.1 Develop and implement 1–2 pilot initiatives, such as:

- cultural leadership cohorts
- technical assistance programs for small and mid-sized organizations
- mentorship programs for emerging leaders

8.4.2 Prioritize participation from:

- culturally specific organizations
- emerging and mid-career leaders
- under-resourced groups

8.5 Integrate Capacity-Building into Funding and Partnerships

8.5.1 Align capacity-building support with:

- grant programs (Recommendation 3)
- arts–business partnerships (Recommendation 5)
- incubator initiatives (Recommendation 9)

8.5.2 Encourage funders to support both programs and organizational infrastructure

Recommendation 9:

Launch a Durham Arts & Culture Incubator

Purpose

To accelerate implementation of the Cultural Roadmap and support innovation across the cultural sector, the City and County should establish a Durham Arts & Culture Incubator to serve as a **platform for experimentation, coordination, and sector advancement**, supporting artists, cultural organizations, and cross-sector partners as they test new ideas, build capacity, and respond to emerging community needs.

The Incubator is not a standalone institution or permanent program, but a time-bound, coordinated initiative designed to test, refine, and scale ideas aligned with the Cultural Roadmap.

Background and Rationale

While Recommendations 1–8 establish the foundation for governance, funding, learning, space, and leadership, the planning process also revealed a need for a flexible mechanism that allows Durham to **move ideas from concept to practice** without waiting for long-term structural change.

Participants expressed interest in:

- Testing new program models
- Supporting interdisciplinary collaboration
- Creating clearer pathways from grants and training to sustainable practice
- Encouraging partnerships that span arts, humanities, sciences, education, and business

An incubator model allows the City and County to support innovation while managing risk—piloting ideas before scaling and adapting strategies based on real-world learning.

The City and County should establish a Durham Arts & Culture Incubator as a **time-bound, learning-oriented initiative** that supports pilot projects, leadership development, and cross-sector collaboration aligned with the Cultural Roadmap.

The Incubator should be structured to complement—not replace—existing cultural organizations and programs, serving as a connector and accelerator rather than a standalone institution.

Core Functions

The Arts & Culture Incubator may support:

- **Pilot Programs and Demonstration Projects**
Short-term initiatives that test new approaches to arts learning, cultural production, community engagement, and creative entrepreneurship.
- **Leadership and Organizational Development**
Cohorts, fellowships, or technical assistance for artists and cultural organizations navigating growth or transition.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration**
Projects that bring together arts, humanities, sciences, education, business, and civic partners to address shared goals.
- **Pathways to Sustainability**
Support that helps participants move from experimentation to stable funding, partnerships, or earned revenue models.

Implementation Considerations

The Incubator should be launched following the establishment of management capacity, investment frameworks, and aligned grantmaking programs. It should operate with clear goals, defined timelines, and evaluation measures that emphasize learning and adaptability.

Public funding should be paired with philanthropic, corporate, and institutional partnerships, positioning the Incubator as a shared investment in Durham's cultural future.

Proposed Implementation Steps

9.1 Define Scope, Structure, and Leadership

9.1.1 Establish the Incubator as a time-bound initiative (3–5 year pilot phase) aligned with the Cultural Roadmap.

9.1.2 Assign leadership and coordination to the framework within local government (or designated implementation lead).

9.1.3 Define:

- goals
- priority focus areas
- eligibility and participation criteria

9.2 Identify Priority Focus Areas

9.2.1 Align Incubator activities with existing Roadmap priorities, such as:

- arts learning and creative access
- artist workspace and cultural production
- leadership development
- arts–business partnerships

9.2.2 Limit initial focus to 2–3 priority areas to maintain clarity and manage scope.

9.3 Design the Incubator Program Model

9.3.1 Develop a simple program structure that may include:

- pilot project support (grants or contracts)
- cohort-based participation
- technical assistance and mentorship

9.3.2 Establish clear expectations for:

- timeline (6–12 month project cycles)
- deliverables
- evaluation

9.4 Launch Pilot Cohort(s)

9.4.1 Select an initial cohort of artists, organizations, or partnerships to participate in the Incubator.

9.4.2 Provide:

- modest funding
- technical support
- connection to partners



9.4.3 Prioritize:

- cross-sector collaboration
- projects with potential for replication or scaling

9.5 Support Cross-Sector Collaboration

9.5.1 Facilitate connections between:

- artists and cultural organizations
- educators
- business partners
- civic agencies

9.5.2 Encourage projects that align cultural work with:

- workforce development
- education
- community engagement

9.6 Evaluate, Document, and Share Learning

9.6.1 Establish simple evaluation criteria focused on:

- effectiveness
- scalability
- community impact

9.6.2 Document lessons learned from pilot projects

9.6.3 Share results with:

- City/County leadership
- funders
- community partners

9.7 Create Pathways to Sustainability

9.7.1 Support successful projects in transitioning to:

- ongoing funding
- partnerships
- integration into existing programs

9.7.2 Align Incubator outcomes with:

- grantmaking programs (Recommendation 3)
- partnership platform (Recommendation 5)
- leadership development (Recommendation 8)

9.8 Align Funding and Partnerships

9.8.1 Combine:

- public funding (seed support)
- philanthropy (innovation funding)
- corporate partnerships (project support)

9.8.2 Position the Incubator as a shared investment platform rather than a single funding source.

Timeline (Aligned with the broader plan)

- Phase 1 (0–12 months): Design, alignment, and program development
- Phase 2 (Years 1–3): Pilot cohorts and initial project testing
- Phase 3 (Years 3–5): Expansion, refinement, and integration
- Ongoing: Learning, adaptation, and scaling

Potential Collaborators

Arts & Culture Incubator — Comparable Models

Sammons Center for the Arts — Dallas, TX

- Shared rehearsal and performance space
- Ownership: City-owned | Operator: Nonprofit
- Funding: Earned, philanthropy, public
- Public asset and nonprofit operator
- Website: www.sammonsartcenter.org

Cedars Union — Dallas, TX

- Studios, tools, and artist cohorts
- Ownership/Operator: Nonprofit
- Funding: Philanthropy and memberships
- Space and training model
- www.cedarsunion.org

Stormwater Studios — Columbia, SC

- Affordable studios and residencies
- Ownership: Private | Operator: Nonprofit
- Funding: Rent and philanthropy
- Artist retention model
- www.stormwaterstudios.org

BlackRock Center for the Arts — Maryland

- Multi-use cultural facility
- Ownership: Publicly supported | Operator: Nonprofit
- Funding: Public, earned, philanthropy
- Community cultural hub
- www.blackrockcenter.org

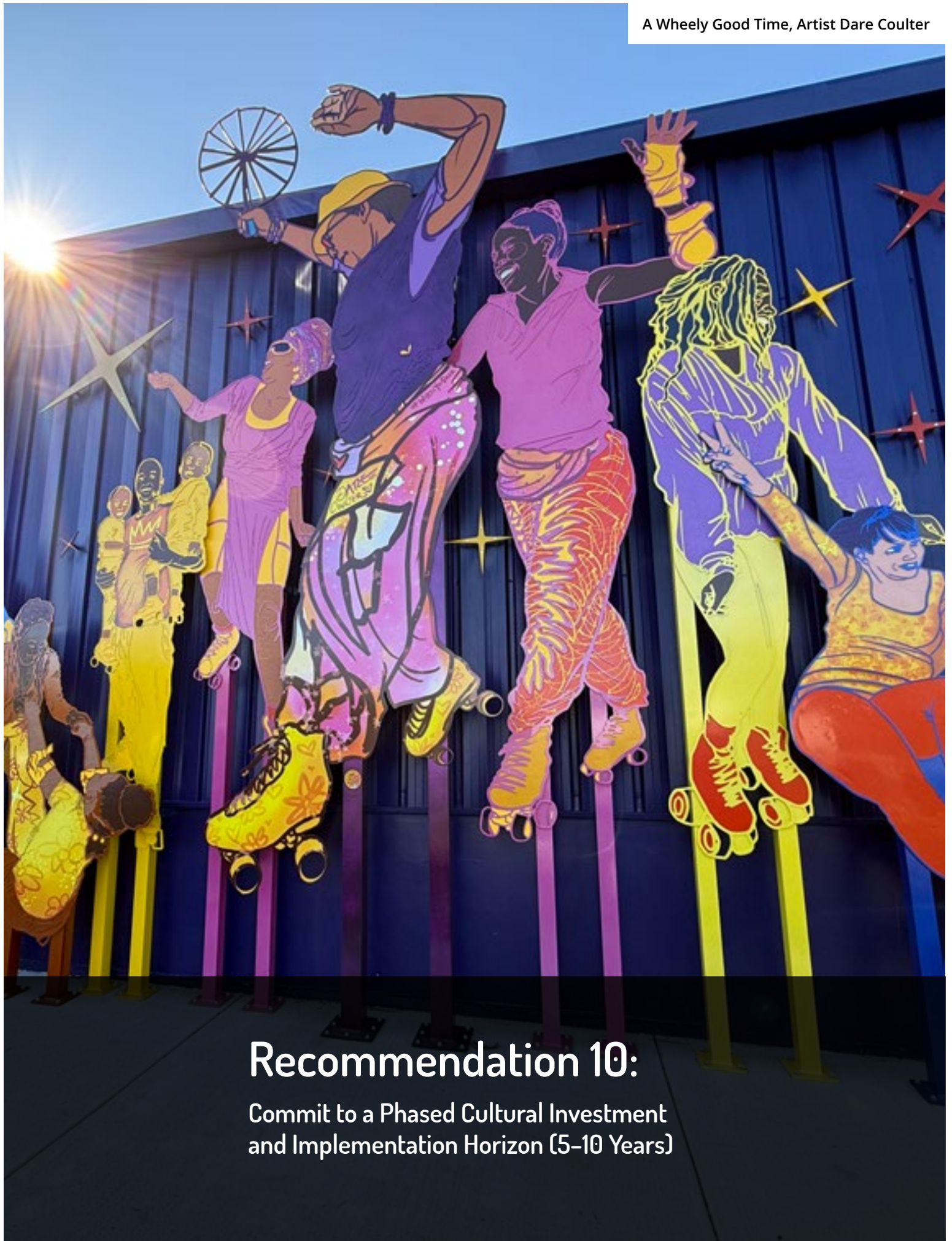
Open Works (Baltimore) / **Arts Incubator** (KC)

- Creative production and fabrication space
- Ownership/Operator: Nonprofit
- Funding: Philanthropy and earned revenue
- Creative economy infrastructure
- www.openworksbmore.org | www.artskcgo.com

Outcome

By launching a Durham Arts & Culture Incubator, the City and County can create a dynamic mechanism for innovation—allowing cultural ideas to be tested, refined, and scaled in alignment with community priorities. This recommendation strengthens Durham’s ability to respond to change, cultivate leadership, and translate vision into action.

This recommendation provides a bridge from planning to experimentation, allowing Durham’s cultural system to evolve through learning and action.



Recommendation 10:

Commit to a Phased Cultural Investment
and Implementation Horizon (5–10 Years)

Purpose

To ensure the Durham Cultural Roadmap delivers sustained public value, the City and County should adopt a phased investment and implementation horizon that supports near-term action while planning intentionally for long-term growth.

Implementation of the ten recommendations will be supported through a combination of City and County investment, philanthropic partnership, corporate participation, and state/federal resources—ensuring that no single entity bears the full cost of the Cultural Roadmap.

This recommendation establishes not only a timeline and investment logic, but also the **discipline, sequencing, and accountability framework** that connects all recommendations and ensures sustained implementation over time. It further aligns expectations across public agencies, private partners, and the community.

Background and Rationale

Throughout the planning process, participants emphasized the importance of moving beyond short-term program cycles toward a more stable, predictable approach to cultural investment. Durham's cultural ecosystem is shaped by long timelines: relationships, facilities, leadership pipelines, and community trust develop over years, not months.

At the same time, the City and County operate within fiscal, political, and administrative constraints that require careful sequencing and accountability. A phased implementation horizon balances urgency with realism, allowing Durham to act now while building toward larger goals.

This strategy aligns existing investments across departments and introduces targeted new resources to increase impact.

The City and County should adopt the Cultural Roadmap as a **5–10-year strategic framework**, implemented through phased investments that reflect readiness, capacity, and available resources.

This approach allows Durham to:

- Deliver early wins
- Build systems before scaling programs
- Adjust strategies based on learning and evaluation
- Leverage public investment to attract private and philanthropic support

Phased Investment Approach

A phased approach may include:

- **Year One: Foundation-Building**
Establish management capacity, investment frameworks, aligned grantmaking, and governance clarity.
- **Years Two–Three: Activation and Expansion**
Launch the Arts & Culture Incubator, expand arts learning, pilot workspace strategies, deepen partnerships, and cultivate leadership pipelines.
- **Years Four–Ten: Growth and Sustainability**
Scale successful programs, advance long-term facilities and workspace solutions, strengthen regional partnerships, and embed arts and culture into broader civic systems.

This phased model allows the Roadmap to function as a **living strategy**, responsive to community needs and changing conditions.

Implementation Considerations

Public investment should be paired with philanthropic, corporate, and institutional contributions wherever possible. While public funding establishes legitimacy and stability, partnerships expand capacity and shared ownership of outcomes.

The Roadmap should be reviewed periodically to assess progress, recalibrate priorities, and reaffirm commitments—ensuring transparency, accountability, and public trust.

Outcome

By committing to a phased cultural investment horizon, Durham positions arts and culture as long-term civic infrastructure rather than short-term programming. This recommendation provides clarity to decision-makers, confidence to partners, and assurance to the community that cultural investment is intentional, sustained, and aligned with Durham's future.

This recommendation establishes the timeline and discipline needed to turn the Cultural Roadmap into lasting public impact.

Durham Cultural Roadmap: Recommendations Summary & Closing

Recommendations — At a Glance

1. Build Arts and Culture Management Capacity – Establish dedicated professional capacity to coordinate strategy, steward public investment, and ensure accountability across City and County efforts.
2. Establish a Clear Cultural Investment Framework – Adopt shared principles and definitions that clarify how public cultural resources are allocated, evaluated, and aligned with community goals.
3. Launch and Align Cultural Grantmaking Programs – Deploy coordinated grant programs that move resources into the community in equitable, transparent, and timely ways.
4. Align Cultural Governance and Funding Structures – Reduce fragmentation by clarifying roles, aligning advisory bodies, and coordinating funding systems across the City and County.
5. Create a Structured Arts–Business Partnership Platform – Engage the private sector as long-term partners in cultural vitality, workforce development, and regional identity.
6. Expand Arts Learning and Creative Access Countywide – Ensure equitable access to arts learning and creative opportunities in neighborhoods and community-based settings across Durham County.
7. Expand Artist Workspace and Cultural Production Infrastructure – Support creative production by increasing access to affordable, flexible workspace for visual and performing artists.
8. Cultivate Cultural Leadership and Sector Capacity – Strengthen the people who sustain Durham’s cultural ecosystem through leadership development, professional learning, and public participation.
9. Launch a Durham Arts & Culture Incubator (Year Two+) – Create a platform for experimentation, cross-sector collaboration, and innovation aligned with the Cultural Roadmap.
10. Commit to a Phased Cultural Investment and Implementation Horizon (5–10 Years) – Adopt a long-term, sequenced approach to cultural investment that balances urgency, accountability, and sustainability.

Closing: An Unmistakably Durham Future

Durham is ready for a coordinated cultural strategy—one that supports infrastructure, strengthens partnerships, and invests in the people who sustain cultural life. The Durham Cultural Roadmap responds directly to that readiness, translating community insight into a clear, actionable framework for public leadership.

The ten recommendations outlined in this Roadmap are intentionally sequenced and interconnected. Together, they form an architectural structure—one that honors Durham’s cultural heritage, supports present-day creativity, and prepares the city and county for future growth.

Durham’s cultural strength has never depended on imitation or polish. It has emerged from grit, experimentation, and community trust, from cultural spaces that double as civic spaces and from artists and institutions that respond to change with creativity rather than retreat.

By approaching cultural investment as stewardship rather than intervention, Durham positions itself to grow without losing its voice—ensuring a future that is not only successful, but unmistakably Durham.

One more thing...

The Unmistakably Durham Idea

Embedding Culture into Growth as Civic Infrastructure

Durham's cultural strength has never been accidental. It has been built through persistence, creativity, and civic participation—through cultural spaces that double as civic spaces, and through artists, historians, and community leaders who have shaped identity alongside growth. As Durham enters a new phase of development, the opportunity before the City and County is not simply to support culture, but to **embed it intentionally into the systems shaping Durham's future**.

The Cultural Roadmap makes clear that arts and culture are not ornamental amenities. They function as **civic infrastructure**, supporting belonging, public trust, and shared identity in times of change. The recommendations in this Roadmap establish the capacity, frameworks, partnerships, and leadership necessary to steward that infrastructure over time.

At the same time, the planning process surfaced a larger leadership question, one that extends beyond programs, grants, or annual budget cycles:

How can Durham ensure that as it builds, it also remembers; as it grows, it also reflects; and as it innovates, it also invests in cultural voice?

Cities experiencing rapid growth are increasingly recognizing that cultural investment cannot rely solely on discretionary funding or short-term programs. Without durable policy tools, culture is often addressed after major decisions are made—after land is entitled, capital is committed, and public space is defined. In response, many jurisdictions have adopted **policy-based mechanisms** that embed cultural investment into capital planning and development processes.

One such approach is a flexible **Percent for Art policy**, which allocates a modest portion of eligible construction costs toward cultural investment. Importantly, contemporary models have evolved beyond permanent public art alone. In many cities, these policies support a wide range of cultural uses: temporary and permanent works, performing arts commissions, artist residencies, community-based projects, cultural programming, and culturally specific expressions rooted in neighborhood context.

What distinguishes effective approaches is not the percentage itself, but **intentionality, flexibility, and governance**. Successful models begin with public capital projects, allow

multiple delivery options rather than a single mandated outcome, and align cultural investment with equity, placemaking, and community goals while respecting development realities and timelines.

This Big Idea aligns with the County's interest in long-term, systems-based investment by proposing a policy tool that embeds cultural value into capital growth, rather than relying on annual appropriations or short-term programming.

At the same time, it responds to **City priorities around identity, public space, and creative expression** by ensuring that growth contributes to shared civic life.

By linking cultural investment to capital planning and growth, this approach responds directly to County priorities around sustainability, predictability, and public return on investment—while allowing the City to shape development outcomes with intention rather than reaction.

For Durham, the question is not whether to replicate another city's policy, but whether leadership wishes to **actively shape how growth reflects community identity** or allow cultural outcomes to be determined incidentally.

This Roadmap does not prescribe immediate adoption of a specific policy. It issues a challenge to leadership: to study proven, flexible approaches; assess local readiness; and consider pilot strategies that allow learning before long-term commitments are made.

The decisions made in the coming years will shape Durham's physical landscape for generations. The opportunity before the City and County is to ensure that the city being built continues to tell Durham's story, clearly, honestly, and in the voices of the people who live here.

If Durham chooses to embed culture into growth by design, rather than by accident, it affirms that its future will be not only successful—but *unmistakably Durham*.

Executive Summary: Closing Statement

The Durham Cultural Roadmap provides a clear, community-informed path forward for strengthening the city and county's cultural ecosystem. Through ten interconnected recommendations, the Roadmap establishes the systems, partnerships, and investments necessary to support arts and culture as essential civic infrastructure.

Together, these recommendations reflect Durham's values: honoring heritage, advancing equity, and embracing creativity as a driver of community wellbeing and economic vitality. By committing to phased implementation, shared accountability, and cross-sector collaboration, the City and County signal their intent to steward cultural life with care and purpose.

The Roadmap invites public, private, and philanthropic partners to join in this effort—ensuring that Durham's future growth remains rooted in participation, trust, and creative expression. In doing so, Durham affirms a cultural future that is resilient, inclusive, and unmistakably its own.



Margie J. Reese, Principal,

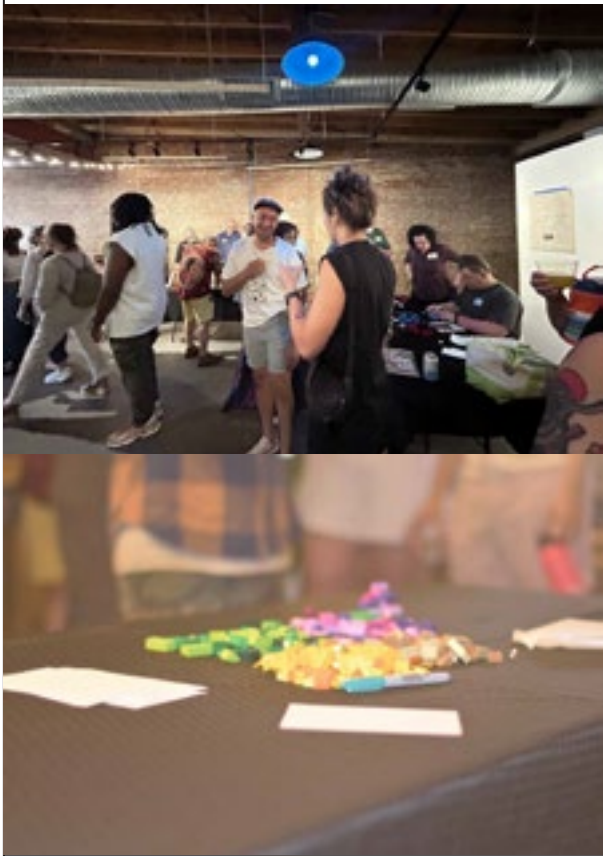
MJR Partners



ENGAGEMENT REPORT: I

MONÉT NOELLE MARSHALL + R STEIN WEXLER

DURHAM ARTISTS HAPPY HOUR



Perfect Lovers 2823 N Roxboro St, Durham
Wed, July 23 5:30-7:30 pm

Number of attendees: 55+

Attendees arrived and enjoyed food and beverages while they connected with one another and responded to questions posted on the wall. Questions related to sentiment, facilities, funding structures, and existing arts and culture spaces and activities in Durham.

The engagement was structured around two main exercises. At 6 pm we introduced ourselves and the Durham Arts and Culture Roadmap planning process. Attendees were then invited to choose which question around the room they wanted to discuss in more depth which they did in groups of roughly 10. This was followed by a share-out. The second exercise involved using three- and two-dimensional materials to develop arts and culture facilities and the activities which would take place within them. Attendees were then invited to label what they created and to view what others had made. The evening closed out with a short discussion about the Arts and Culture Roadmap and how to support its funding and implementation once it's created.

Instagram post interactions: 206
Instagram post views: 5,387

Instagram reel interactions: 90
Instagram reel views: 977

Images
Top: c. Alyssa Cuffie 2025
Bottom: c. Derrick Davis 2025

ENGAGEMENT REPORT: II

MONÉT NOELLE MARSHALL + R STEIN WEXLER

ICE CREAM FOR ART



Lakewood Shopping Center @ QueDogs
Wed, August 20 5:00-7:00 pm

Number of attendees: 50+

In collaboration with Antonio Alanís, we hosted an event targeting neighborhood families and the diversity of patrons at the Lakewood shopping center. Invitations were disseminated via social media, flyers, and yard signs. Ice Cream for Art provided live music, by Abakua and Lance Scott and Friends; and free ice cream, provided by East Durham Sweet Shoppe, to attendees. Scrap Exchange provided art-making supplies and donated a gift card so would could create engagement materials.

The entire program was offered bilingual English/Spanish and we invited folks to respond to these questions, developed in collaboration with MJR Partners: Where do you/your family experience culture? Who makes it? How would you/your family like to experience culture in the future? What creative things do you do as a family?

Antonio helped us identify a Durham-area Latine musical group by posting an open call via social media. The following groups submitted to be considered or were recommended: Sabrosura, Emmsy, Omar Ruiz-Lopez, Grupo Imperial, Fase Exclusiva, Charanga Carolina, La Nueva 22, and Abakua Latin Music.

Instagram post interactions: 100
Instagram post views: 4,072

Instagram reel interactions: 140
Instagram reel views: 3,715

Images: c R Stein Wexler

ENGAGEMENT REPORT: III

MONÉT NOELLE MARSHALL + R STEIN WEXLER

ART FOR ALL



Emanuel Food Pantry, 2504 N Roxboro St
2-4 pm Wednesday, September 9

Families reached: 70+

Art for All engaged patrons of the weekly food pantry hosted at Iglesia Presbiteriana Emanuel.

The food pantry serves on average 700 families per week. There are a drive-through and a walk-up pick-up. In consultation with our hosts, we decided to set up at the walk-up so that we could have more time to talk with patrons. The walk-up serves on average 100 families per week, and 80% of the families are Spanish-speaking. Therefore we collaborated with two Spanish-speaking artists, Antonio Alanís and Luis MacKinney.

After families picked up their food, they came to our tables where we informed them of the Cultural Roadmap process and gave them a pre-stamped and addressed postcard. The front of the postcard asked the question, in English and Spanish: "What is your dream for the future of arts and culture in Durham?" On the other side they were invited to write or draw their response to the question. The postcard also had a QR code to the Cultural Roadmap survey. To recognize participants' effort we offered \$25 giftcards and art supplies to take home.

Our hosts have expressed their excitement about working with us and the collaboration was seamless. We did not photograph patrons faces in order to preserve privacy. We did not publicize this engagement as we intended to only reach the patrons of the food pantry.

Images: c R Stein Wexler

ENGAGEMENT REPORT: IV

MONÉT NOELLE MARSHALL + R STEIN WEXLER

ARTIST OFFICE HOURS



Southwest Regional Library
11am - 1pm Tuesday, September 16

Durham County Main Library
11am - 1pm Wednesday, September 17

Individuals reached: 53

The Artist Office Hours engagements took place at Durham County Libraries. We set up in the lobbies of both branches and invited library patrons to ask us a question, and in response we would ask them a question.

The question we asked patrons was: What art and culture would you like to see in Durham? What's missing? We worked with the libraries to determine days and times when they had the most foot traffic and scheduled our Office Hours accordingly. At Southwest Regional Library we had a consistent and steady flow of visitors. At the Main Library, it was slower. However, at both locations we had many patrons share quite a lot of information and time with us. The people we reached were mostly women and either retired or parents to young children. Many expressed interest in childrens' programming, murals, and free outdoor art experiences. To thank patrons for their participation we offered notebooks, colored pencils, and stickers. One patron at the Main library then used these gifts to draw our portraits.

Artist Office Hours were publicized on the library calendars and we put out posters and sandwich boards at each library. Our printed material was in English and in Spanish, for Spanish language accessibility, Antonio Alanís joined us at the Main Library.

Images: above c Antonio Alanis, below c R Stein Wexler



ENGAGEMENT REPORT: V

MONÉT NOELLE MARSHALL + R STEIN WEXLER

DURHAM ARTERIES: RESEARCH PHASE



Durham Transit Center and GoDurham Bus routes 4, 5, and 10
October 16, 10 am - 1 pm and 3:30 pm - 5:30 pm

Individuals reached: over 150

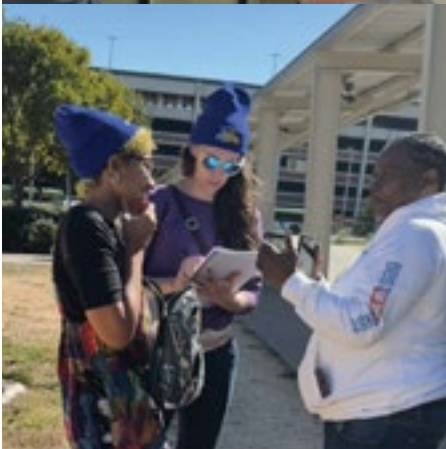
In the morning of October 16, Chris Vitiello (poetry), Meg Stein (visual art), and Professor X (music playlists) supported by artist facilitators Danette Wilkins Marte and Denise Padilla rode city bus routes 4, 5, and 10 asking riders what their dreams are for art and culture in Durham. The artists created work inspired by the conversation and gave the original drawing, poem, or playlist, to the participant. Artists also took photographs of their work for our archival purposes. Riders were provided with giftcards to acknowledge their participation and were given an invitation to the exhibit opening on November 21 which also included a QR code to the Creative Durham survey. The postcard was bilingual and both facilitators are conversant in Spanish.

In the afternoon, we offered artistic opportunities at Durham Transit Center. Photographer Jamaica Gilmer, assisted by Nori McDuffie, made formal portraits of people who were waiting at or passing through the station. R. Stein Wexler, assisted by Meg Stein, led participants in a collective large-scale mapping embroidery project locating where they find art and culture across the city. Monét Noelle Marshall and Danette Wilkins facilitated the afternoon ensuring photography participants had signed a waiver and that all participants received a giftcard and invitation to the November 21 opening event.

We worked closely with Brenda Jones, GoDurham Sr. Director Customer Engagement/Marketing, and Patricia England, GoDurham Marketing Specialist. We consulted with Jones on which routes to ride and what times would be best for each activity. She also informed bus drivers of the activity on their routes. England assisted with promoting the activity to the ridership.

Due to the nature of this event, we didn't conduct much social media promotion. However, our first post to promote the opening of the forthcoming exhibit of the work created on October 16 has had over 3,000 views.

Images: c Adae Media



APPENDIX B

Business, Corporate & Durham Chamber of Commerce Feedback

Philanthropy/Business/Economic Comments:

- Philanthropic Community could be more robust – need more resources and expanded donor base.
- Need to bring resources into the community.
- Need an inventory of who's funding the arts from the private sector
- Need for an economic impact study.
- We need to provide a case for the arts- Why is this important and how can businesses invest?
- A Fund Development Person is needed.
- There is a "huge" level of support from businesses for the arts, but more can be done to provide education about economic impact and prosperity of the arts.
- Need a cohesive message to present to potential funders.
- Durham has several examples of public/private partnerships including Durham Performing Arts Center, the ballpark and ATF as a successful example of public/private partnership and models to be replicated/utilized.
- It's a foodie town.
- Affordability is changing.
- How does the Downtown Durham Blueprint engage with art and with other plans.
- There are many “plans” for Durham in the works but not clear how they coordinate or complement each other.
- Golden Belt arts programming is an example of providing space that is more affordable but is still viewed as more expensive than previous opportunities in the same area.
- Too many non-profits and they might benefit from combining forces.
- Funding through nonprofits is more manageable than through city/county for businesses.

Need for:

- Satellite and community-based arts opportunities
- Marketing/promoting the arts (calendar)- mentioned the Durham Bulletin as an example; identifying the role of Durham Next
- The ATC is mentioned as a space to be activated in support of the arts - there is a gallery, performance space, and lawn area
- Affordable artist space is critical: performance, studio and live/work
- The County art collection could be utilized more prominently
- Libraries are a purveyor of art and culture and could play a more prominent role
- It's important to focus on the historic Black Wall Street

Ways to encourage investment in the arts:

Business, Corporate & Durham Chamber of Commerce Feedback

Page 1 of 4

- Expand naming rights and sponsorships across public art and events—beyond DPAC, to neighborhood-based art installations.
- Encourage local businesses to sponsor artist spaces or festivals (e.g., CenterFest, ArtWalk).
- Leverage corporate interest in diversity and inclusion by aligning contributions with equity-focused arts programs highlighted in Phase I of the Roadmap.
- Individual donors/planned giving: Estate, sustaining, and one-time planned contributions via DAC programs.
- Broaden foundation partnerships with thematic priorities (e.g., equity, creative spaces, marginalized artists).
- Scale-up fundraising events (e.g., citywide giving campaigns, virtual benefit events).
- Easy-access micro-grants or crowdfunding to respond to emergent artist and neighborhood needs.
- Donor networks & collective fundraising for exploration:
 - Giving circles to pool modest donations and direct them mission-wise
 - Neighborhood arts funding collaboratives—e.g., Third Friday host committees, CORE neighborhoods fund public murals.
 - Collaboration among small groups or arts-loving businesses to distribute micro-grants across the city.
 - Current example: Durham Art Guild’s sustainer model and event-driven funds like Swing into Spring engage community as patrons.
 - Activate giving circles: Work with Durham Foundation or DAC to start thematic circles (e.g., youth, equity, BIPOC arts).
- Boost corporate pipeline:
 - Pitch neighborhood-scale public art or local venue sponsorships.
 - Develop packages tied to Impact/ESG goals.
- Establish arts-business “friendraising” groups: Invite local employers with arts-inclined employees to volunteer, sponsor events, or mentor artists.
- Enhance digital crowdfunding and matching: Partner with crowdfunding platforms + matching donations from local businesses or philanthropists.
- Deepen foundation/grant engagement: Map interest areas among region/state/federal funders and tailor requests to equity, cultural heritage, creative spaces.
- Example: Broaden planned and legacy giving: Market DAC’s options through estate planners, local banks, and community workshop.

Recognized Arts Purveyors/Events:

- DPAC
- Carolina Theater
- Hayti Heritage Center
- Durham Arts Council
- Bimbé Cultural Arts Festival

Business, Corporate & Durham Chamber of Commerce Feedback

Page 2 of 4

- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival
- American Dance Festival
- NCCU Arts initiative
- North Star Cultural Center
- Durham Arts Guild
- Bull Durham Blues Festival
- 3rd Friday art walks
- Nasher Museum

Organizations identified as supporters of the arts:

- Triangle Community Foundation
- Durham Arts Council
 - DAC’s Arts Recovery Fund and Emerging Artist Grant Fund actively channel contributions to a broad set of artists.
- Duke University
- City and County
- DPAC Corporate Sponsors & Naming Rights
 - First Horizon Bank — In January 2025, became DPAC’s first-ever “Presenting Sponsor” under a multiyear agreement
 - Capitol Broadcasting — Holds naming rights for the outside plaza connecting DPAC to the Durham Bulls ballpark
 - Blue Cross & Blue Shield of NC — Purchased naming rights for DPAC’s atrium lobby early on
 - SunTrust Bank — Sponsors DPAC’s Broadway series
 - Duke University — Contributed \$7.5 million toward DPAC’s construction; remains a major institutional supporter
- Mary, Duke, Biddle Foundation - primary funder of the arts in the region direct to organizations.
- Durham Merchants Association Charitable Foundation
- The Forest at Duke
- NC Arts Council

Businesses & Philanthropic Organizations listed as significant funders and supporters; or for greater engagement in funding and support:

- Durham Chamber of Commerce & Foundation
 - Explore Business Committee for the Arts.
 - Work through Policy Committee to present a case for the arts and potential for partnership/sponsorship.
- Duke Energy
- Austin Lawrence Partners – Arthur Sameth/One City Center
- Research (RTP) could be a partner in supporting local arts

- Developers: Identify the firms who are receiving incentives from the City of Durham and Durham County and incentivize them to provide support to the arts and add it to the economic conversation (arts fund).
- Create relationships with American Tobacco Campus.
- Blue Cross/Blue Shield - Active in local arts funding, including sponsorships and grants via Durham Ballet Theatre and Durham Arts Council.
- Lenovo
- City & County Economic Development
 - They provide/have provided small business development support, incubator space, and a loan program; with a focus on industry and trades.
 - Also, workforce development and mentoring - Innovate Durham, start-ups are paired with relevant county departments for support - 1 year program.
 - There is an opportunity to discuss ways to include arts organizations and artists in programming.
- Durham Tech and their workforce development could be an opportunity.
- Durham Tech Foundation — While not purely arts-focused, their Broad grants include significant funding from Blue Cross & Blue Shield of NC and Robert & Mercedes Eichholz Foundation (e.g., “Viva the Arts” projects).
- Google is supportive of the arts, commissioned digital public art in downtown, working with Durham Arts Council and local artist. There is interest in ongoing rotating art. A lot of support is directed by employees interests. They support STEM but could consider STEAM with metrics. They have a makers space and a music space at the location downtown.
- McKinney is an ad agency with a Durham office; they were one of the first to office at American Tobacco Campus. They are supportive of community and have an employee matching program. Community support driven by employee interest. They support Polly Murray Center.
- NC Glaxo Smith Kline Foundation - They provide 3 million in grants throughout NC annually. They will be revisiting funding strategy in 2025- looking at priorities both geographically and thematically. Interested in discussing arts education/cross curriculum ties. They don't currently see applications from arts organization. Currently they fund El Centro Hispano.

DURHAM CULTURAL ROADMAP

Cultural Roadmap Planning Group
February 11, 2026 @ 6:00 pm



DURHAM CULTURAL ROADMAP

Phase I

Summary of Engagement & Findings Cultural Planning during Phase I

Engagement during Phase I

- Communications (1,350+)
- Online Surveys (987+)
- Focus Group Participants (33)
- Town Hall Meetings (1)
- Community Partners Team events (2)
- Public Input Sessions (125+)
- Interviews with Public & Private Sector Leaders (63)
- Venue User Survey (55)

Summary of Recommended Priorities

- Affordable Housing and Creative Spaces
- Meeting needs of Artists and Art Forms
- Public Sector aligning & Co-designing with Creatives
- Neighborhood-based Offerings & Venues
- Protecting Durham's distinct Culture within our Growing Community
- Increased Funding



MJR Partners

Background & Overview of Recommendations

- Engagement & Progress during Phase II
 - Initial Site Visits (3 Days with 16 organizations)
 - Public Art Tour Day with Field Expert
 - Online Surveys (50+)*
 - Meetings with CRPG (9)
 - Learning Session from Durham Arts Council
 - Joint Boards Workshop (2)
 - Work Session Structure & Models for Arts Agencies
 - Focus Group Participants (145+)*
 - Town Hall Meetings (2)
 - Creative Engagement Team Events (6+, 378+ people, with 15,010 social media engagement touch-points)*
 - Individual & Group Meetings with (200)*
 - Arts organizations, Corporate/Foundations, Artists, Advocates, Community Members, Government Staff, Elected Officials, Public Art Sector
 - Focus Groups with Durham Art Council & Board
 - Festival Organizers Listening Session (23+)

* Estimate to date

Led by Principal Consultant,
Margie Johnson Reese



Vision

Envision a **thriving arts and culture sector** in Durham. Celebrate the cultural practices, histories, institutions, and individuals that define Durham's art and culture sector. Work towards the preservation of Durham's cultural heritage, the **protection of cultural assets** and the equitable distribution of **resources to artists, cultural workers, and organizations** in the arts and culture sector for the benefit of all Durham residents. **Welcome new stories** and strive to embrace and extend Durham's cultural community to **all residents and visitors of Durham**.

Mission

Create a **cultural plan** through inclusive, accessible, and equitable county-wide engagement that will **maintain, grow, and sustain the arts and culture sector** in Durham for the next decade and beyond.



Recommendation 1

Build Arts & Culture Management Capacity

Establish dedicated professional capacity to coordinate strategy, steward public investment, and ensure accountability across City and County efforts.



Recommendation 2

Establish a Clear Cultural Investment Framework

Adopt shared principles and definitions that clarify how public cultural resources are allocated, evaluated, and aligned with community goals.



Recommendation 3

Launch and Align Cultural Grantmaking Programs

Deploy coordinated grant programs that move resources into the community in equitable, transparent, and timely ways.



Recommendation 4

Align Cultural Governance and Funding Structures

Reduce fragmentation by clarifying roles, aligning advisory bodies, and coordinating funding systems across City and County.



Recommendation 5

Create a Structured Arts-Business Partnership Platform

Engage the private sector as long-term partners in cultural vitality, workforce development, and regional identity.



Recommendation 6

Expand Arts Learning and Creative Access Countywide

Ensure equitable access to arts learning and creative opportunities in neighborhoods and community-based settings across Durham County.



Recommendation 7

Expand Artist Workspace and Cultural Production Infrastructure

Support creative production by increasing access to affordable, flexible workspace for visual and performing artists.



Recommendation 8

Cultivate Cultural Leadership and Sector Capacity

Strengthen the people who sustain Durham's cultural ecosystem through leadership development, professional learning, and public participation.



Recommendation 9

Launch a Durham Arts & Culture Incubator (Year Two+)

Create a platform for experimentation, cross-sector collaboration, and innovation aligned with the Cultural Roadmap.



Recommendation 10

Commit to a Phased Cultural Investment and Implementation Horizon (5-10 years)

Adopt a long-term, sequenced approach to cultural investment that balances urgency, accountability, and sustainability.



Comparative study: Arts investment

Peer cities per capita investment in the arts

We compared Durham to 15 peer cities across three groups — cities that invested in arts, cities that did not, and aspirational larger metros. Using only free federal data from 2001–2024, we measured arts job growth to show what sustained cultural investment produces over time.

Set	Label	Cities	Purpose
A	Investment Cities	Charlotte, Denver, Minneapolis, Portland, Providence, Raleigh	Treatment group — documented public cultural infrastructure investment, 1975–2005
B	Control Cities	Corpus Christi, Shreveport, Toledo, Virginia Beach, Wichita	Counterfactual baseline — similar population profiles, alternative economic strategies
X	Aspirational Cities	Atlanta, Columbus, Dallas, Nashville, Salt Lake City	Growth benchmarks — larger metros with sustained investment and significant expansion
D	Durham	Durham, NC	Subject city — positioned against all three cohorts

Key Findings

- Investment cities (Set A) sustain arts employment at nearly double the per-capita rate of control cities (Set B) — 420.4 vs. 214.9 jobs per 100K — a gap that has widened consistently since 2001.
- Durham’s trajectory closely mirrors the early-phase growth arc of cities in Set A at comparable population stages, suggesting that continued public investment could accelerate convergence toward investment-city performance levels.
- Aspirational cities (Set X) demonstrate the upper bound of sustained investment outcomes: 465.8 arts jobs per 100K and \$3.95 billion in aggregate annual arts wages across five metro counties.
- Control cities, despite population growth comparable to Set A during the study period, have not demonstrated proportional arts employment gains — reinforcing the association between deliberate cultural investment and sector growth.