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The Power of Arts and Culture: the Heart of Community Health, Revitalization, and Inclusion

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Vanguard CDC, and LISC

On the cover: Illustration featuring the mural “Monument of Love: Mother & Child,” by El Mac, Kofie, and Aise Born, members of the United to Inspire Collective, at the Good Shepherd Manor, a Senior living community in the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles.

This page: The unveiling of the Arts & Culture District in Historic Anacostia by Mayor Muriel Bowser on February 23rd, 2023.

Credit: Jeremy Reaves



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Executive Summary

A growing body of public health research demonstrates that arts and culture activities positively impact the drivers of health, and health equity—which include economic development. For these reasons and more, LISC partners with four organizations that are incorporating arts strategies into its community-centered economic inclusion (CCEI) work (which was co-created by LISC and The Brookings Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking).

Three ways research shows that arts can impact health in community-centered inclusion work are included below, along with brief examples from LISC's CCEI partners.



ABOVE: The First Annual Future Fest Music Festival in Detroit's Black Bottom Park in June 2023.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Vanguard CDC

How Do The Arts Impact Health In Community Centered Economic Inclusion?



Arts events can heal and strengthen communities

Public artworks celebrate local cultures and address collective trauma



Creative economies can fight displacement and build belonging



Healing And Strengthening Communities Through Arts Events

Festivals, programs, and more help people connect with each other, bring joy and happiness, and address collective trauma. They create and strengthen bonds. These bonds then help build civic muscle to continue advocating for systems change.

One example includes [Vanguard CDC](#)'s rehabilitation of Black Bottom Park for use as a community arts gathering space—part of Vanguard's mission to maintain Black culture as the North End of Detroit changes.



Commissioning Artworks That Celebrate Local Cultures And Address Collective Trauma

Artworks like sculptures, murals, and more help us have aesthetic, and therefore meaningful, experiences in our neighborhoods. These help create emotional engagement, develop empathy, and make meaning. In particular, artworks that reflect the local cultures of a neighborhood—especially when those cultures have been the subject of policing, erasure, and discrimination—are important in healing traumatic experiences and creating pride.

Destination Crenshaw is enacting this aspect of the work in Los Angeles, where it is creating a 1.3-mile outdoor art park featuring sculptures, murals, and more by Black artists (and in the process, enacting inclusive economic development strategies).

Fighting Displacement And Building Belonging Through Creative Economies

Living wage arts and culture jobs, support for creative businesses, as well as affordable housing for creatives and cultural producers, are all critical to creating a local economy that supports all residents and protects against further economic and cultural displacement.

In Historic Anacostia of Washington, D.C., the 11th Street Bridge Park and the Anacostia Business Improvement District have created affordable housing investments, small business preservation programs, and more for creatives and cultural leaders.



We hope that this paper can encourage health organizations, anchor institutions, funders, other community development financial institutions, local government, and other actors to follow the lead of community-based organizations—and figure out new and more ways to support arts and culture towards thriving, healthy, opportunity-rich places.

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Introduction

While the connection between engaging in the arts and living healthy, meaningful lives is intuitive, a rapidly increasing body of research shows medical, sociological, and ethnographic evidence for it. This research, described in detail below, helps validate to funders and institutional entities and advance community revitalization work that is creative, joyful, and culturally responsive to its communities. While arts and cultural work can too often be seen as superfluous to the “nuts and bolts” thinking behind dominant paradigms in community development and public health sector practices, this research shows us that it is far from just the icing on the cake. We hope that highlighting this work can help other community development entities, and those who fund and support them, to incorporate the arts, and better understand how doing so can help comprehensively address health and economic equity.

A group of 20 communities are partnering with LISC to work on [community-centered economic inclusion](#) (CCEI), a framework co-created by LISC and The Brookings Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking, on place-based revitalization that builds community power, centers racial equity, and looks at systems-level change through cross-sector coalition building.¹ Several of these sites incorporate arts and culture strategies. This paper details three case studies about dynamic organizations and arts and cultural workers in the Crenshaw District of Los Angeles, the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, DC, and the North End of Detroit. The arts and culture efforts are, in many ways, the heart of their community revitalization efforts—work that has survived and thrived despite decades of discrimination and disinvestment. The three neighborhoods have other similarities—all are historically African American.

¹ Love, Hannah et al. *Community-Centered Economic Inclusion: A Strategic Action Playbook*. Brookings Institution, March 2021. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/community-centered-economic-inclusion-a-strategic-action-playbook/>

All have specific arts and cultural styles that developed there, such as Go-Go in Washington DC, soul and techno music in Detroit, and distinctive hip-hop and graffiti styles in LA. All also have recently begun feeling extreme real estate pressure as a result of new transit and infrastructure funding and plans.

While much can be done through local community action, given the historical decisions and ongoing structural conditions that create ongoing inequity in and amongst our cities and communities, we hope this work can continue to organize to make change at larger regional, state, and national jurisdictions.

The Community-Centered Economic Inclusion (CCEI) model is a place-based approach to economic development that helps underinvested communities build wealth and opportunity. The model was developed by the Brookings Institution and Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).





TOP: The 2023 Jazz Hop in the Anacostia Arts & Culture District. Credit: Jeremy Reaves

BOTTOM: Vault of Midnight's booth at the 2023 "Let's Grow Together" event engaging with community leader, Quincy Jones. Credit: Courtesy of Vanguard CDC

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Background: Holistic Approaches To Health

Funders and policymaking institutions are increasingly following the lead of many community-based organizations that work holistically to make connections across disciplines and sectors. Several frameworks articulate this, helping to make connections between economic equity, health equity, the arts, and more, including *the social determinants of health (SDOH)* and, more recently, the *vital conditions framework*. The CDC defines SDOH as “the conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.”² The *vital conditions framework* articulates seven areas of well-being that all come together to form a holistic, healthy environment and community.³ Both conceptualizations, and others that look comprehensively across sectors, are key to holistically supporting people and communities most impacted by centuries of disinvestment and discrimination. Research has shown that finances, employment access, and educational attainment have much larger impacts on health outcomes than medical or genetic factors.⁴

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Why is Addressing Social Determinants of Health Important?* January 17, 2024. Retrieved July 24, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/about/priorities/why-is-addressing-sdoh-important.html>

3 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Equitable long-term recovery and resilience framework*, n.d. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/equitable-long-term-recovery-and-resilience/framework>

4 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Equitable Long-Term Recovery and Resilience Framework*. n.d. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/equitable-long-term-recovery-and-resilience/framework>

“ Social determinants of health have been shown to have a greater influence on health than either genetic factors or access to healthcare services alone, which is enormous.”

KJESTINE WOODS, LISC

Understanding community conditions holistically also helps show how institutionalized racism and discrimination in public funding and urban development compound the health inequities and risks associated with racism itself.⁵ Institutions have historically and continue to cite investments that promote health in wealthier, whiter neighborhoods while disinvesting in poorer communities of color.⁶ Several examples include siting of highways through many Black communities and the lack of investment in public transit access, resulting in higher rates of asthma and other diseases.⁷

Given the connection between infrastructure policy decisions and health, comprehensive efforts to address disinvestment and discrimination must include infrastructure as well as equitable public health access—building and preserving affordable housing, generating community-owned businesses, assets, and wealth, ensuring a climate-safe, ecologically rich environment, and advocating for transit options and quality education in every community. Through this more holistic perspective on wellness and repairing injustices, it is easy to see why arts and culture strategies are so critical.

“ Arts and creativity support human development. We all know that for the first five years of our lives, we learn to navigate the world primarily through arts. We commit our language to memory through songs like the ABCs. This need to be engaged in the arts and creativity to ground ourselves in culture extends well beyond our classroom and into the rest of our lives.”

HEATHER E. HESLUP, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC ART, DESTINATION CRENSHAW

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Racism and health disparities*, n.d. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/racism-disparities/index.html>

6 Brookings Institution. *Building Inclusive and Healthy Neighborhoods, Block by Block*. May 2024. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/building-inclusive-and-healthy-neighborhoods-block-by-block/>

7 Fullilove, Mindy T. *Root shock: How tearing up city neighborhoods hurts America, and what we can do about it*. NYU Press. 2004. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://nyupress.org/9781613320198/root-shock/> and <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6225879/> and Urban Institute. *Urban blight and public health*. April 2014. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89491/urban_blight_and_public_health.pdf



TOP: Harlan Bridge Park Harvest Festival, Anacostia. Credit: Courtesy of 11th Street Bridge Park

BOTTOM: Left to Right: Karen Mack, founder of LA Commons, Deborah Bryant, DC board member and Board Treasurer, Rom Finely, Advisory Committee and local community gardener, Elijah Simmons, local artist.

Credit: Courtesy of Destination Crenshaw

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How the Arts Impact Health

Many arts-integrated strategies positively impact and respond to conditions and determinants that research shows are critical to driving health. For example, engaging directly in arts and culture has been shown to enhance immune response, reduce depression and antisocial behavior, improve longevity, and increase overall well-being for many different age groups and demographics.⁸ Beyond direct physical impacts, the arts have also been shown to support social, cultural, and policy change, bolster social cohesion, and more.⁹

Several researchers have looked specifically at what forms of art positively impact health equity in different populations. As Tasha Golden writes: “Experiences such as dance classes, musical performances, museum visits, and a wide variety of cultural practices have been shown to address mental health concerns, foster social cohesion, reduce healing time, improve access to care, support mobility and movement, promote longevity, reduce stigma, and support collective action toward shared health goals.”¹⁰

The specific arts initiatives that LISC partners in the Crenshaw District of LA, the North End of Detroit, and Anacostia in Washington, DC, are not the subject of the research

8 University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine. *EPI/Arts Lab overview*. N.d. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://arts.ufl.edu/academics/center-for-arts-in-medicine/researchandpublications/epiarts-lab/overview/>

9 Bygren, Konlaan & Johanssen, 1996, as cited in Sonke, J., Golden, T., Francois, S., Hand, J., Chandra, A., Clemmons, L., Fakunle, D., Jackson, M.R., Magsamen, S., Rubin, V., Sams, K., Springs, S. (2019). *Creating Healthy Communities through Cross-Sector Collaboration [White paper]*. University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine / ArtPlace America. Retrieved July 25 2024 from https://arts.ufl.edu/site/assets/files/174533/uf_chc_whitepaper_2019.pdf

10 Golden, Tasha et al. *Arts and Culture: A Necessary Component to Address Unmet Social Needs and Advance Individual and Community Well-Being*. *The Journal of Health Promotion and Practice*, 2023. Retrieved July 25, 2024 from https://www.artsandmindlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ArtsandCulture_Goldenetal2023.pdf

cited throughout this paper. However, given the recent medical and sociological evidence backing up widely understood shared experiences, we extrapolate that there are potential positive health equity outcomes as a result of these programs.

Below, three categories of arts strategies (events, artworks, and creative economy initiatives) are described, along with the community health benefits research has shown they can provide.

To read more about the main organizations discussed here, please visit their websites at:

[Destination Crenshaw](#) in Los Angeles, CA

[Anacostia Business Improvement District](#) in Washington DC

[11th Street Bridge Park](#) in Washington, DC

[Vanguard Community Development Corporation](#) in Detroit, MI



ABOVE: The 2022 Anacostia River Festival. Credit: Jeremy Reaves



Healing and Strengthening Communities Through Arts Events

How do arts events heal and strengthen communities in CCEI work?

When created by and for local communities, they can:

- Create spaces for joy and celebration
- Connect us to ourselves and others
- Build capacity to advocate for change
- Help heal trauma



Connection to self and others is key to holistic well-being. Festivals, performances, and other one-time or sequential events help people within communities feel more connected to themselves, and strengthen bonds with each other. Arts experiences bring joy and happiness—and while they have long been shown to help individuals heal from trauma in medical contexts, research is also now showcasing the role arts have in addressing collective traumas of racism and other forms of systematized oppression in community contexts.¹¹ In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy released an advisory about the public health crisis of loneliness and isolation.¹² Arts events can also create opportunities for communities to strengthen existing and create new bonds.¹³ These are, in turn, critical for communities building the capacity to advocate for change, or ‘civic muscle,’ as it is described in the *vital conditions* framework.

As part of its focus on maintaining Black culture in the North End of Detroit, which is a key element to healing and connection, Vanguard CDC supports many festivals and

11 Engh, Rachel, Ben Martin, Susannah Laramee Kidd, and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus. *WE-making: How arts & culture unite people to work toward community well-being*. Easton, PA: Metris Arts Consulting, 2021 and Manohar, Sujal BS, BA and Tasha Golden, PhD. *The role of community arts in trauma recovery*. *Psychology Today*, January 31 2024. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-art-effect/202401/the-role-of-community-arts-in-trauma-recovery>

12 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *New Surgeon General advisory raises alarm about devastating impact of epidemic loneliness, isolation in United States*. May 3, 2023. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>

13 Engh, Martin, Kidd, and Nicodemus, *WE-Making*, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Arts-based reading list*, n.d. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://www.hhs.gov/black-history-month/arts-based-reading-list/index.html#:~:text=The%20creative%20arts%20can%20serve,in%20decreasing%20race%2Dbased%20anxiety.>



ABOVE: Community members at the groundbreaking celebration of the East Grand Boulevard Streetscape project in Detroit. Credit: Vanguard CDC

events, even serving as technical advisors to artists new to city approval processes. It is also in the process of fundraising to fully redevelop [Black Bottom Park](#), and often allows artists and creative event companies to use the park at no charge when they offer free community events, workshops, and seminars. One example of such a collaboration is with [Exhibit 3000](#) / [Submerge Records](#), a Black-owned organization that created the [Techno Museum](#), which celebrates Detroit and the North End as the birthplace of Techno museum; another is hosting and sponsoring [FutureFest](#), an Afrofuturist Music and Arts Festival. The vision is to create the park as a center for African American culture in the North End—ensuring physical presence and cultural specificity is retained however much the neighborhood may change.

Seeing their value to the community, Vanguard also supports local creative businesses by allowing them to use their space at low cost or no charge for community events. Lynette Roberson, Community Advocate and Founder of NetteWorks Artistry Entertainment, who has a background in mental health, began to host open mics called [Lyrics and Libations](#) and other events specifically for the LGBTQIA+ community after realizing that many queer Black residents did not have a place to share their experiences or express themselves creatively.

“Our main focus is to preserve and elevate African American culture in the North End. This is a community that’s gentrifying and changing right before our very eyes. And it’s a community that has a very deep cultural history in the arts. So we do lots of things, but always with the intention of preserving and elevating the African American culture.”

PAMELA MARTIN TURNER, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF VANGUARD CDC



ABOVE: 2023 Spoken Word to Go-Go, Busboy and Poets Anacostia.

Credit: Jeremy Reaves

Understanding their power to bring people together and spark joy, community development organizations in Anacostia regularly incorporate arts events and programs into their work. Each year, the 11th Street Bridge Park produces the [Anacostia River Festival](#), an annual family-friendly, arts-integrated community event. The Anacostia BID also produces the annual [Spoken Word to Go-Go](#), a competition supporting spoken word artists to the backdrop of Go-Go music. Go-Go is a style founded in the Washington DC region and is known as the ‘official music of DC;’ it is particularly meaningful and ubiquitous in Black communities who are experiencing widespread cultural displacement.¹⁴ LISC DC’s [Resilient Together](#) initiative distributed funds during the COVID-19 pandemic and supported Anacostia legend [We Act Radio](#) in hosting a virtual event featuring live performances from local musicians and community members sharing their stories of survival through the pandemic. These events can help build social cohesion and promote mental well-being.

“You deserve joy because you’re a human being—not because you’ve secured enough financially. It needs to be a holistic approach, we can create joy in these spaces while still addressing other social needs. It can’t be just that you have housing now you’re good, there should also be opportunities to experience joy.”

JESSICA G. SMITH LENNAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, 11TH STREET BRIDGE PARK

While construction is ongoing, Destination Crenshaw is demonstrating their longer-term work of elevating Black culture, creating job pipelines for Black artists, and environmental healing by holding a series of exhibitions and associated events. They have had two exhibitions in their office (that they share with Councilmember Harris-Dawson, so it is a public space): [Moments and Memories](#) and [Sankofa: Our Legacy](#). Each has featured over 10 local Black artists, and they have also hired many Black creatives to make them happen behind the scenes, from photographers to installers and more. These events bring community members together, provide moments to experience cultural pride and joy, and help build creative and economic capacity.

¹⁴ «Overview of Go-Go.» *Teach the Beat*. n.d. Accessed July 25, 2024. <https://www.thebeatisgogo.com/about-go-go>. And Wartofsky, Alona. *How Two Distinct Go-Go Movements Are Changing DC Culture*. *Washington City Paper*, October 17, 2019. Accessed July 25, 2024. <https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/178050/how-two-distinct-gogo-movements-are-changing-dc-culture/?fbclid=IwAR3blYQaqB4Kb-I5PWYyBG4PjubGCdwjBoKX5rk1Ea6I8xBNW Dur5CmlbRfk>.



Commissioning Artworks that Celebrate Local Cultures and Address Collective Trauma

How do public artworks celebrate local cultures and address collective trauma in CCEI work?

When created by and for local communities, they can:

- Create meaningful experiences in our neighborhoods
- Reflect and enhance local pride
- Build shared stories based on neighborhood history



“ These fields [community development] have never really grappled with the dehumanizing harm to cultural roots that comes with...racialized forced cultural assimilation, cultural denigration, and cultural erasure—conditions and dynamics that affect things that the public health field seems to be increasingly recognizing as significant, such as sense of belonging and collective efficacy.”

MARIA ROSARIO JACKSON, PHD | *Health Promotion Practice, May 2021 Vol. 22*

Commissioning and producing artwork helps residents engage with both their built environment and their neighbors in culturally resonant ways. This is meaningful everywhere, including and perhaps especially in the context of neighborhoods and communities that have endured so much discrimination and cultural displacement. Artworks and arts programming provide aesthetic experiences, which, unlike “mundane” or everyday experiences, are shown to be more meaningful and purposeful.¹⁵ They help create emotional engagement and develop empathy. Engaging in art can help us make meaning, transcending and processing our emotions in the process.¹⁶ Specifically in neighborhoods where myriad infrastructure and policy decisions have disrespected and erased Black culture, artworks help to publicly showcase and celebrate it.¹⁷

Destination Crenshaw is building a \$100 Million 1.3 mile-long arts and culture experience to do just that. It will comprise seven permanent works of public art by prominent Black artists, five new public parks, 100,000 new trees, banners, panels, and more that tell the story of Black Los Angeles. World-famous Black artists such as Kehinde Wiley, Charles Dickson, Alison Saar, Gerard Basil Stripling, Patrick Henry Johnson, and others have already been commissioned to create new works along the corridor. Destination Crenshaw is also commissioning a community mural program to rehabilitate existing beloved murals and create new ones by local Black artists. Two murals have recently been completed. One is a piece called “[Monument of Love: Mother & Child](#)” by [El Mac](#), [Kofie](#), and [Aise Born](#) (members of the United to Inspire Collective), located on Good Shepherd Manor, a senior living community in the Crenshaw district and the tallest building in South Los Angeles. The second is a piece called “Hey Young World,” by [Anthony “ToonsOne” Martin](#) on the wall of [Dog Lovers pet groomers—a Black-owned business operating in the Crenshaw district for 45 years](#). Additionally, the “[Crenshaw Wall](#),” a nearly 800-foot-long iconic mural by RTN Crew (Rock the Nation, at the time, one of the city’s only all-black mural crews) is in need

15 Groot, Barbara et al. *The Value of Active Arts Engagement on Health and Well-Being of Older Adults: A Nation-Wide Participatory Study* *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 Aug; 18(15) retrieved July 25 from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8345976/>.

16 Sonke, J., et al, *Creating Healthy Communities through Cross-Sector Collaboration, and The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, How Art Can Build Trust and Lessen Health Disparities in Public Health, Podcast transcript, n.d., Retrieved July 26 at https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/podcasts/ListenUp_HowArtCanBuildTrust_Transcript.pdf*

17 Fullilove, Mindy, Root Shock, and Sonke, J., Golden, et al, *Creating Healthy Communities through Cross-Sector Collaboration*

of repair, and Destination Crenshaw won city council approval to commission RTN to update the mural in a similar style but with new artwork.¹⁸ Destination Crenshaw describes itself as a reparative development project that will place “a cultural stamp of Blackness” on Crenshaw Boulevard—and community-led, creative projects like these promote community wellness.¹⁹

“ For Destination Crenshaw, health is community flourishing—which is the ability to feel good and live well in your society. We believe it is healthier to live in a beautiful, inspiring environment.

HEATHER E. HESLUP, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC ART, DESTINATION CRENSHAW

Many artworks reflecting local culture, style, colors, and more have been commissioned in Historic Anacostia as well, showcasing neighborhood and cultural pride. One example is [Jay Coleman](#)’s mural on Good Hope Road SE, which was commissioned by the Anacostia BID. Coleman is a D.C.-based, internationally renowned muralist and sculptor. The mural celebrates youth, Go-Go music, and Black culture, bringing joy, resonance, and positivity to the wall of and public space around a behavior health and methadone clinic.

18 Vankin, Deborah. *Destination Crenshaw wins approval to reimagine historic Crenshaw Wall in South L.A.* L.A.Times, Sept 13, 2023. Retrieved July 26 at <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2023-09-13/destination-crenshaw-wins-approval-to-reimagine-historic-crenshaw-wall-in-south-la>

19 Sonke, J., et al, *Creating Healthy Communities through Cross-Sector Collaboration*



ABOVE: Rendering of 50th Street Park that will open in South Los Angeles in 2025. Credit: Courtesy of Destination Crenshaw

Likewise, in Detroit, many artworks have been commissioned reflecting Black North End culture, style, colors, and more. Vanguard commissioned [Carlos Nielbock](#), a well-respected metal artist and member of the [Oakland Avenue Artist Coalition](#), to create a new sign welcoming visitors to the North End (prior to its installation, there was nothing visually distinguishable about entering the neighborhood). Through their work with the Knight Foundation, Vanguard helped the [BLKOUT Walls Mural Festival](#) with their approvals processes and became a hub for the first and second years of this Black-run festival, started by a Black Detroit muralist, Sidney James. BLKOUT is an example of how arts and equitable economic development come together—James and her collaborators started it because of their experiences at other mural festivals around the world where artists were often not paid and where Black muralists were underrepresented. A North End local, Nia Ortiz, painted the mural on the front of the Vanguard’s office building, and four other murals were installed in the neighborhood, including several viewable from Black Bottom park. These efforts help visually showcase Black art and culture throughout the neighborhood, engendering inspiration, beauty, and pride.

Beyond public art, supporting ways that artists impact narrative change—how a community self-identifies and how others see it from the outside—can impact



“Aesthetic experiences are fundamental to human meaning-making and identity formation. They can shift perspectives and generate shared meanings that motivate and transform individual and collective behaviors.”

JILL SONKE

Sonke, J., et al, Creating Healthy Communities through Cross-Sector Collaboration

ABOVE: The mural “Hey Young World” by Anthony “ToonsOne” Martin, 2024, on the wall of Dog Lovers Pet Groomers, a Black-owned business operating in the Crenshaw district for 45 years. Photo courtesy of Destination Crenshaw

self-confidence and the ability to be effective.²⁰ Many of the artworks described here do just that—help to change public perception and improve morale for many community members and those living outside the neighborhood. In the literary arts, *Resilient Together* supported the black-owned neighborhood bookstore Mahogany Books to form a cohort of Black writers from Anacostia and all over DC. Their essays were featured on [BlackBooksMatter.com](https://blackbooksmatter.com) and “created a space for African Americans to tell their stories in their own words as a means of cultivating community, and capture new readers as Mahogany Books continues to expand its business.”²¹

Research shows that artwork like these are critical for self-expression, healing, and feeling appreciated and seen. They also help local leaders advocate for supporting and asserting their communities’ value in the face of dehumanization.²²

20 American Artscape. «Arts and Health: The Role of the Arts Sector in Promoting Resilience and Well-Being.» *National Endowment for the Arts*, 2023. Retrieved July 28 2024 from <https://www.arts.gov/stories/magazine/2023/2/arts-and-health-role-arts-sector-promoting-resilience-and-well-being>

21 LISC. *LISC Announces the Winners of the Resilient Together Awards: Go to 6 Artist/Business Partnerships in Ward 8*. Local Initiatives Support Corporation, January 12, 2021. Retrieved July 28, 2024 from <https://www.lisc.org/dc/regional-stories/lisc-announces-the-winners-of-resilient-together-awards-go-to-6-artistbusiness-partnerships-in-ward-8/>.

22 Epstein, Rabbi Nancy et al. *Leveraging Arts for Justice, Equity, and Public Health: The Skywatchers Program and Its Implications for Community-Based Health Promotion Practice and Research*. May 4, 2021. *Journal of Health Promotion Practice*, Volume 22, Issue 1_suppl. Retrieved Jul 28, 2024. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1524839921996066>

ENSURING THE ARTS DON'T CONTRIBUTE TO INEQUITY

While the arts discussed here endeavor to create belonging and sustainability for economically vulnerable communities in the face of forced displacement, not all art production positively impacts all community members, and in some cases, art production can even increase risk of displacement (sometimes referred to as artwashing).²³ Community groups, funders, policymakers and others seeking to integrate arts into their work need to pay careful attention to who is making the art, the process of how it is made, what it is showcasing, why it is being commissioned, and what value it creates for whom in order to ensure that the impact is the intended one.²⁴

23 Pritchard, Stephen. *Art Washing, Social Capital, and Anti-Gentrification*. *Colouring in Culture*, June 13, 2017. Retrieved on July 28, 2024 at <https://www.colouringinculture.org/blog/uncategorized/artwashingsocialcapitalantigentrification>

24 Greene, April. *Anti-Displacement Strategies*. *ArtPlace America*, August 29, 2018. Retrieved July 28 at <https://www.artplaceamerica.org/blog/anti-displacement-strategies>



Fighting Displacement and Building Belonging Through Creative Economies

How do creative economies fight displacement and build belonging in CCEI work?

When created by and for local communities, they can:

- Provide meaningful, engaging living wage jobs
- Support the development of creative businesses
- Create myriad housing, studio, and creative business spaces affordable to a wide range of creatives



Many of the entities leading work in the three neighborhoods described here are working to help those residents who have survived throughout the hard times in the neighborhood be able to stay—and thrive—as increased investment comes. These efforts speak directly to what the vital conditions framework calls “humane housing” and “meaningful work + wealth”—that one’s housing, jobs, access to financial security and wealth, and more—impact their health.

For example, Washington DC, like many cities around the world, has been experiencing a real estate boom—and neighborhoods like Anacostia, where land and real estate prices were kept artificially low through racist policy and practices for decades—now stand to be most vulnerable as those prices rise. The 11th Street Bridge Park is an initiative to create a new park over the Anacostia River, connecting the rest of the city with Anacostia. Unlike other urban green redevelopment projects, 11th Street Bridge Park leadership—alongside the city—slowed down their construction drastically to implement equitable development in advance of the potential real estate investment that would come once the park’s construction begins. This [Equitable Development Plan](#)’s initiatives, [which so far comprise about \\$85 Million in investments](#), include affordable housing (a homebuyer’s club, land trust, and more), a comprehensive job training program, affordable office and community space, urban farming, and community gardens, and political education. These comprehensive efforts address the social determinants holistically.

Though it is often ignored, integrating artists and cultural workers into economic development work—which is a key feature of the social determinants and vital conditions. The Anacostia BID supports local creative businesses in myriad ways, including through a small business preservation program and more. LISC DC has also supported other arts organizations ([We Act Radio](#) and [Project Create](#)) to buy and manage property, ensuring they and their programs can stay in the neighborhood—and benefit from rising real estate prices—as long as they’d like.

“We believe in paying our artists because artists are entrepreneurs. They are their own businesses and should be treated as so. We consistently provide opportunities for our artists to galvanize the creative economy.”

ASHLEY TEMPLETON, MARKETING & ART AND CULTURE PROGRAM MANAGER,
ANACOSTIA BID

Destination Crenshaw is also implementing an ambitious series of community economic development and workforce programs. These areas of their work began after they commissioned a [Creative Economy Report](#) specifically focused on Black creatives in the neighborhood. They learned through that report that one of the biggest barriers for Black artists is a lack of information about opportunities—and then the lack of technical knowledge about how to create proposals and more. To



TOP: 2024 Art to Go-Go Shuttle Reveal in Historic Anacostia. Credit: Jeremy Reaves

BOTTOM: 2022 Jazz Hop in the Anacostia Arts & Culture District. Credit: Jeremy Reaves

address these barriers, the DC (for Destination Crenshaw) Arts Corps is aiming to be the largest Black arts jobs program by building creative economy pathways for more information, skills, and opportunities. They are also focused on [specific pre-apprenticeship programs as training for union construction labor](#) along the corridor (their goal is for 70% of the labor creating the corridor to be from the neighborhood), as well as art conservators to help maintain the work moving forward. They are supporting Black-owned small businesses along the program [in various ways](#). These programs will help ensure that as the neighborhood changes, artists and other workers will continue to belong and live full, healthy lives in the neighborhood.

“How will we maintain these artworks? The skills to do so have to be taught and preserved within this community for not just the neighborhood but for the cultural tourism that will be coming.”

RYAN HUNT, WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST,
DESTINATION CRENSHAW

Many of the entities leading work in the North End of Detroit are also working to help those residents who have survived throughout the hard times in the neighborhood be able to stay—and thrive—as increased investment comes. Vanguard definitely sees more development as imminent, given the proximity of the North End to Midtown, a neighborhood that has recently been built out due to its own proximity to downtown (The North End is north of Midtown, which is itself north of Downtown). In the North End, currently, 35% of people live below the poverty line, earning around \$19,000 per year. Many families have been in the neighborhood for generations. Given their connections to the neighborhood and their economic vulnerability to displacement, Vanguard and its partners created an equitable development framework to try to stem the tide of potential displacement—creating belonging, which is shown to promote health—while still taking advantage of developers’ new interest in the neighborhood.

As part of this vision and the focus on uplifting African American art, Vanguard supports artists with space needs. In addition to the in-kind support provided to the many artists and businesses discussed above, Vanguard offers two artists, [Sydney James](#) and [Ijanja Cortez](#), (a painter and textile artist) below-market-rate pop-up space in their warehouse building, as well as below-market-rate studio space to [Phil Simpson](#). This developed organically after Vanguard heard the artists were displaced from their former spaces. Vanguard hopes to provide more affordable artist studios in future developments.

They also support Black-owned creative businesses, among many other small businesses, through marketing, business directory, and other promotion and coalition building. Vanguard started the [North End Main Street](#), the only African American neighborhood to have a Main Street designation in Michigan, a status that comes with technical assistance (but no funding). As part of an equitable lens to that work,

Vanguard educates business owners that are new to the area about the history of the neighborhood and sets up meetings with them about how to include existing residents in their business activities or programs (even if many of those residents may not be able to afford their products or meals at market rate). [LISC's investment in the](#) neighborhood's Dodge Building helped transform the building into an industrial space for small production firms, such as a photography studio and furniture workshop. These efforts are all ensuring that creative workers, organizations, and businesses can continue to be supported—and, through economic livelihoods, address health as well.

“The forces that shape health include politics, power, place, the role of deep-seated historical forces, including racism and misogyny, violence and structural inequities in wages, limited affordable housing, and sub-par public educational systems that preserve and deepen social and economic divides...And, if we are to improve urban environments to the end of improving health, we must be able to bring along partners in these sectors who understand that improving these sectors will improve health...Creating a healthier world will require a retelling of the story of health. Art, in its role as a communicator of our better ideas, stands to play a unique role in that aspiration.”

SANDRO GALEA, MD PHD
The Arts and Public Health: Changing the Conversation on Health. The Journal of Health Promotion Practice, Volume 22 Issue 1 Supplement, May 4, 2021.

ABOVE: 2023 Spoken Word to Go-Go Championship at the National Giant Barbecue Battle.
Credit: Jeremy Reaves

4

Ideas for Future Action

LISC's CCEI partners in Detroit, LA, and DC show us that artists are entrepreneurs, culture bearers, trusted leaders, and ambassadors of their communities—and that the cultural capital they create is critical to invest in at a local scale to help heal, strengthen, and build healthy communities of belonging. As LISC has demonstrated with this work, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) have an important role to play in supporting a capital investment structure that includes grassroots arts initiatives, artists, and cultural workers.

We envision ways that various stakeholders—many of whom are already doing this work—can continue strengthening the health impacts of arts-integrated community-centered economic inclusion work, such as:

Health organizations and anchor institutions: Continue moving forward with holistic frameworks that include the non-medical, social drivers of health—including the arts. Fund research that helps lay the groundwork for seeing the value of this work in language that speaks to decision-makers. Consider funding artists-in-residence and local arts organizations to provide critical services, celebrate local cultures, and unearth creative solutions.

Funders: Within health and economic / community development funding strategies, consider supporting multi-year, unrestricted funding opportunities for the arts groups identified in this paper and others like them—and incorporating the other principles of trust-based philanthropy.²⁵ Consider creating a new investment structure that can support those working at the intersection of arts, health, and community-centered

²⁵ *The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project. Six Principles of Trust-Based Philanthropy. 2021. Retrieved July 28 at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/607452f8ad01dc4dd54fc41f/t/629e7f6e63704d64040cc554/1654554478550/6+Grantmaking+Practices+of+TBP_June+2022.pdf*

economic inclusion. Fund research by those cited here to continue examining and creating data to understand the health impacts of community-driven work.

Community development financial institutions: Support a pipeline and capital structure where grassroots arts initiatives and organizations are at the center. Act as conveners to help build bridges and networks of support with other funders, anchor institutions, and government agencies. Facilitate funds and dialogue at regional and national levels that center arts-based community work. Anchor ourselves in what matters most to communities (the well-being of our citizens, and opportunities for sustainable safety and resilience).

Local government: In close dialogue with local artists and community arts organizations, advance policies that enable more culturally relevant and responsive arts programs, artworks, and anti-displacement initiatives for arts communities (especially BIPOC arts communities). Create funding streams specifically for this work. Help stakeholders in various sectors—economic development, public health, the arts, and others—see how their work relates to each other.

We hope this paper can help build momentum, and we invite other CDFIs, health and other anchor institutions, funders, and policymakers to join this important effort.



ABOVE: Attendees at “Let’s Grow Together: Creating an Inclusive Economy in Detroit’s Milwaukee Junction and North End” event held in July 2023 to celebrate the release of the Milwaukee Junction District Framework Study: Implementation and Impact Report.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Vanguard CDC

Appendix

Methods

LISC commissioned Congruence Cultural Strategies to write three case studies about its CCEI partners that are intentionally using arts strategies as part of their work, and to connect these strategies with emerging research about the public health benefits of community-centered economic inclusion work. Congruence completed in-person or virtual site visits and then reviewed this paper with staff at each organization profiled. Once research was compiled and a draft was completed, Congruence consulted with Tasha Golden, PhD. All organizations profiled provided comments and reviewed the drafts. Note again that the research discussed here is comprehensive of many population groups and does not directly result from projects studied in Detroit, D.C., and L.A.

Research questions

- (1) What arts-integrated community-centered inclusion strategies are at play in each neighborhood?
 - (a) How do these strategies align with community-centered economic inclusion in general?
 - (b) What does the research tell us these strategies may contribute to from a public health standpoint?

About the Author

Danya Sherman | www.congruencestrategies.com

Danya Sherman (she/her) supports just and equitable systems change through organizational development and collective creative expression so that communities have the resources they need to determine their futures and thrive. Danya founded and Directed the High Line's public program department. She was a Senior Consultant on the Research Strategies team at ArtPlace America until its planned sunset in 2020. Her writing and journalism has been published in Shelterforce, Next City, and by Rutgers University Press. Danya holds a Master's in City Planning from MIT and a Bachelor of Arts from Wesleyan University (CT).

Congruence is a cooperatively run consulting practice based in New England and working locally, regionally, and nationally. We work with values-driven partners in

the philanthropic, nonprofit, and government sectors on strategy, research and facilitation. Congruence’s work is motivated by a fundamental investment in artistic and cultural contributions to civic life, building and maintenance of relationships based on trust and mutual respect, and promotion of spatial and cultural justice.

About the 11th Street Bridge Park

<https://buildingbridgesdc.org/11th-street-bridge-park/>

As the old 11th Street Bridge that connected D.C.’s Capitol Hill / Navy Yard and historic Anacostia / Fairlawn neighborhoods has been replaced, the District government and Building Bridges Across the River are transforming its aged infrastructure into the city’s first elevated park: a new venue for healthy recreation, environmental education, and the arts. The 11th Street Bridge Park will span the capital’s cityscape and include community generated programming including: outdoor performance spaces; playgrounds; urban agriculture; an Environmental Education Center with classrooms to teach students about river systems; public art that tells the rich history of the region; and kayak and canoe launches. Throughout our community-led process, it became clear that the Bridge Park had the potential to be more than a park. A key goal of the Bridge Park is to serve as an anchor for equitable and inclusive economic growth. The Bridge Park’s design strategies will increase connectivity between those living on both sides of the Anacostia River, but more must be done to ensure that residents and small businesses nearby will continually benefit from the success of this signature new civic space. To achieve this goal, the Bridge Park staff worked with community stakeholders to create an Equitable Development Plan that includes housing development, community garden support, small business support, arts engagement, and much more.

About the Anacostia BID

<https://anacostiabid.org/>

“It takes a village to raise a child” is an African proverb that means an entire community of people must interact with children for those children to grow in a safe and healthy environment. The Anacostia Business Improvement District (BID) leans into this saying through its Arts and Culture District. It has become the nucleus for vibrant artistic and cultural expression in the community. By leveraging the transformative power of the arts, the Anacostia BID not only fosters creativity and joy but also addresses significant health disparities. Through an array of cultural initiatives, public art installations, community events, and integrating art into infrastructure projects, the Arts and Culture District promotes mental and physical well-being, making arts and culture a vital tool in improving the overall quality of life for residents. This dynamic approach positions Anacostia as a beacon of hope and healing, where the arts play a crucial role in building a healthier and more joyful community. The Anacostia BID’s creation of partnerships with organizations such as Americans for the Arts, the Art Therapy Association, Project Creates, the Whitman-Walker Clinic, LISC and many others provides continued expertise, guidance, support, and initiatives that bring arts to the forefront in healthy outcomes for our communities.

About Destination Crenshaw

<https://destinationcrenshaw.la/>

Destination Crenshaw is a reparative development project and will be the largest Black public art project in the U.S. and quite possibly the world. Ultimately, the project will commission more than 100 works by Black artists who have strong ties to Los Angeles, creating a pipeline of work and jobs for emerging, seasoned and internationally renowned artists. But the project is so much more than art. Its mission is nothing less than to place a cultural stamp of Blackness on Crenshaw Boulevard – a stamp akin to those in Chinatown, Mariachi Plaza, Koreatown and other ethnic enclaves. In addition to art, new pocket parks will line the project site, providing spaces for gathering, rest and conversation as well as community healing, protest and celebration. With a commitment to environmental equity, we will reforest the boulevard, planting more than 800 trees and developing over 30,000 square feet of sustainable landscaping. The project is also designed to fuel construction careers, thanks to the inclusion of an unprecedented 70% local hiring requirement in our construction contract. And lastly, providing technical support to the small businesses along the corridor is, and will remain, central to our work. Small businesses are our community's lifeblood! When completed in 2024, Destination Crenshaw's innovative vision will be a testament to the past, present, and future of LA's Black community.

About Vanguard CDC

<https://www.vanguarddetroit.org/>

Vanguard's mission in Detroit's Historic North End is to cultivate a vibrant and healthy community where people live, work and play. Vanguard Community Development is a stalwart champion of the North End. Vanguard was founded in 1994 by Bishop Edgar Vann and Second Ebenezer Church. Since our founding by the Bishop and the church, Vanguard has evolved into a broad-based community development entity, offering services in housing development, community engagement and planning, and economic development.

About LISC

www.lisc.org

LISC is one of the country's largest community development organizations, helping forge vibrant, resilient communities across America. We work with residents and partners to close systemic gaps in health, wealth and opportunity and advance racial equity so that people and places can thrive.

Since our founding in 1979, LISC has invested \$32 billion to create more than 506,000 affordable homes and apartments, developed 82.5 million square feet of retail, community and educational space, and help tens of thousands of people find employment and improve their finances.

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Design: Cecily Anderson, anagramist.com



ABOVE: East Grant Boulevard Banners in Detroit's North End Neighborhood.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Vanguard CDC



ABOVE: 2022 Anacostia River Festival

Credit: Jeremy Reaves

LLSC

www.llsc.org