CANVAS

Cultural Plan for the City of Orlando and Orange County

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Letters of Introduction

Dear Orange County:

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to CANVAS, Orange County's comprehensive cultural plan that charts an exciting course for our community's creative future.

CANVAS embodies our shared vision for a future where arts and culture are available and accessible to all residents across the county. Through extensive community engagement involving over 1,500 voices from across our county, this plan reflects what you, our residents, have told us matters most, ensuring that the arts belong to everyone. Orange County is positioned as a creative epicenter, and we are proud to invest in the remarkable cultural assets within our community.

The collaboration between Orange County and the City of Orlando that produced this plan exemplifies the spirit of partnership that makes our region strong. Together with our municipalities, cultural organizations, artists, and community members, we have the opportunity to transform Orange County into a destination known not only for our unique attractions but also for our thriving arts and cultural life.

The goals outlined in this plan are ambitious but achievable. By supporting our artists and creative workforce, expanding public art and creative placemaking, building resilience in the cultural sector, and leveraging our status as a global tourism destination, we aim to create opportunities for meaningful cultural experiences. These experiences will celebrate our diverse communities and foster genuine human connections.

Orange County's journey is marked by growth, innovation, and opportunity. CANVAS is dedicated to ensuring that creativity and culture will play a central role in the next chapter of this journey. Together, we will create a community where arts and culture not only survive but thrive, allowing every resident to engage in and benefit from the transformative power of creative expression.

On behalf of the 1.5 million people who call Orange County home, thank you for your interest in our cultural plan.

Sincerely,

Jerry L. Demings
Orange County Mayor

In Orlando, we recognize that the arts don't just enrich our lives - they shape who we are as a community. Since I became Mayor almost 23 years ago, one of our city's priorities has been to create meaningful arts and cultural amenities for our residents and visitors.

We do this because we know that arts and culture are not a luxury. They're an essential part of building a strong, connected, and vibrant city. Plus, Orlando's creative sector generates hundreds of millions of dollars in economic impact and supports thousands of jobs. Even more importantly... the arts inspire us, educate, us and unite us.

That's why we partnered with Orange County to create the CANVAS Cultural Plan.

A collaborative planning effort between the City of Orlando, its Community Redevelopment Agency and Orange County, CANVAS began in the spring of 2024 and was led by a 27-member steering committee made up of individuals representing research focus areas including arts and culture, education, tourism and hospitality, business and economic development, philanthropy, community development, and municipal governments as well as faith and social services. The planning effort also engaged more than 1,500 residents, many from our City neighborhoods, for valuable input.

As a result, we've drafted the CANVAS Cultural Plan - a ten-year roadmap with goals, strategies, and actions for implementing future arts and cultural opportunities, prioritizing projects that engage the community, are accessible, diverse, and create genuine human connections.

I invite you to explore CANVAS and discover the big and small ways in which you can easily get involved, have fun, and above all -- get creative!

Sincerely,

Buddy Dyer
City of Orlando Mayor

Acknowledgements

City of Orlando

Orlando City Council
Mayor Buddy Dyer
Commissioner Jim Gray, District 1
Commissioner Tony Ortiz, District 2
Commissioner Robert Stuart, District 3
Commissioner Patty Sheehan, District 4
Commissioner Shaniqua Rose, District 5
Commissioner Bakari Burns, District 6

City of Orlando Executive Leadership and Project Team
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Deborah Girard, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Brooke Devon M. Rimmer-Bonnett, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Lillian Payne, Interim Director, Economic Development Department
Marcia Hope Goodwin, Chief Service Officer and Director, Office of Community Affairs and Office of the Mayor
Shannon Fitzgerald, Executive Director at the Mennello Museum of American Art and Public Art Program, City Venues Department
Sherry Gutch, Director of Placemaking, Economic Development Department
David Barilla, Executive Director, Downtown Development Board/Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Orlando (DDB/CRA)
Mary-Stewart Droege, Project Manager, (DDB/CRA)

Orange County

Board of County Commissioners
Mayor Jerry L. Demings
Commissioner Nicole Wison, District 1
Commissioner Christine Moore, District 2
Commissioner Mayra Uribe, District 3
Commissioner Maribel Gomez Cordero, District 4
Commissioner Kelly Martinez Semrad, District 5
Commissioner Michael Scott, District 6

Orange County Executive Leadership and Project Team
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Carter Gresham, Chief Planner, Orange County Planning Division
Allison Rice, Planner III, Orange County Planning Division
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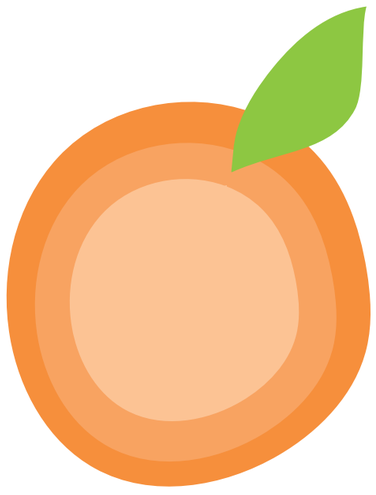
Samia Solh, Planner II, Orange County Planning Division



Steering Committee

Chris Bahr	Student	University of Central Florida
Thamara Bejarano	Executive Director	OpenScene
Dr. JahKiya Bell	Senior Advisor to the President	United Way
Karina Bharne	Executive Director	Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra
Chris Brown	Executive Director	Orlando Family Stage
Jacques Coulon	Mobility Innovation Manager	City of Orlando Transportation Dept.
Lisa Cuatt	City of Orlando Main Street Administrator	City of Orlando Main Streets
Flynn Dobbs	Public Art Coordinator	City of Orlando Venues Dept.
Ericka Dunlap	Business Owner	Westlakes Partnership
Jennifer Evins	CEO	United Arts of Central Florida
Dr. Wendy Givoglu	Provost	Valencia College
Ena Heller	Executive Director	Rollins Museum of Art
Danielle Hollander	Chief Marketing Officer	Visit Orlando
Jason Locker	Senior Administrator of Arts	Orange County Public Schools
Greg Mason	Director, Corporate Engagement	Orlando Economic Partnership
NY Nathiri	Executive Director	Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community
Keidra Daniels Navaroli	Curator, McKnight Doctoral Fellow	University of Central Florida
Sara Osborne	Senior Director, Community Benefit	Orlando Health
Dr. Mary Palmer	Resident	Community Philanthropist
Kathy Ramsberger	CEO	Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts
Jason Reynolds	Deputy Director, Planning, Environmental, and Development Services	Orange County
Thali Sugisawa	Director of Cultural Tourism	United Arts of Central Florida
Erin Sullivan	Chief Marketing and Public Relations Officer	Orange County Library Systems
Tracy Swanson	CEO	Foundation for a Healthy West Orange
Sandi Vidal	VP of Community Strategies and Initiatives	Central Florida Foundation
Erin Walsh	SVP, Membership and Industry Relations	Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association
Shawn Welcome	City of Orlando Poet Laureate	Independent Artist

Preamble

In the City of Orlando and Orange County, we believe that arts and culture flourish most vibrantly where hospitality, kindness, and genuine human connection are foundational values. Our community's cultural identity is shaped not only by our diverse creative expressions but by how we welcome, include, and care for one another.

The cultural landscape of the City of Orlando and Orange County reflects our unique blend of historical traditions, modern innovation, and the warm spirit of our communities. From downtown Orlando's performing arts venues to neighborhood cultural centers, from public art that animates our spaces to the grassroots creativity that emerges from our neighborhoods—our cultural vitality and variety are both an expression of who we are and an invitation to connect.

We recognize that culture is more than art on walls or performances on stages. It lives in our daily interactions, in how we welcome visitors and newcomers, in the stories we share across generations, and in the ways we come together to share our unique perspectives and discover our common ground. Our cultural expressions—whether through food, festivals, visual arts, music, dance, or literary traditions—simultaneously honor our varied backgrounds and create bridges between communities.

As we envision the future of arts and culture in the City of Orlando and Orange County, we commit to fostering cultural experiences that are accessible to all, that celebrate the full spectrum of our community's heritage and identity, and that contribute to a sense of belonging and shared purpose. We believe that a thriving cultural sector strengthens our economy, enhances our quality of life, and creates opportunities for meaningful connection.

This cultural plan represents our collective vision and roadmap for elevating Central Florida's arts and culture to truly reflect our diverse, world-class community—a community that values creativity, embraces innovation, and celebrates the power of arts and culture to transform lives and spaces through genuine human connection.

(Inspired by Scott Ziegler, CANVAS Community Participant)

Layer by layer, we are adding depth and dimension to the Orange County arts experience — bold strokes of innovation alongside fine details of tradition.

Executive Summary

The City of Orlando and Orange County Cultural Plan

Vision and Foundation

CANVAS represents a groundbreaking 10-year cultural master plan born from collaboration between the City of Orlando and Orange County. This comprehensive roadmap emerges from 18 months of intensive community engagement involving over 1,500 residents, artists, cultural organizations, and civic leaders across all six council districts and 13 municipalities within Orange County. It builds on previous and recent cultural and municipal plans and studies.

The plan's vision positions the City of Orlando and Orange County as places where arts and culture thrive through genuine human connection, hospitality, and inclusion. CANVAS recognizes that cultural identity stems not only from creative expression but from how communities embrace one another, creating experiences that welcome all while celebrating the full spectrum of local heritage and identity.

Three foundational principles guide this transformative initiative: **our arts belong to everyone**, ensuring equitable access across all neighborhoods; **we are a creative epicenter**, embracing the region's unique identity on the global stage; and **we invest in our own**, building upon existing cultural assets including artists, organizations, and venues throughout the City of Orlando and Orange County.

Engagement and Findings

The CANVAS planning process was informed by comprehensive stakeholder and public engagement. Through 58 in-depth interviews, 16 focused discussion groups, eight steering committee meetings, and a community survey reaching over 1,000 residents, the process captured community aspirations and opportunities. Residents from all City of Orlando districts and all Orange County municipalities participated in the planning process.

The engagement revealed the strength of the region's cultural foundation. The county boasts a significant creative economy employing over 67,500 people, and residents demonstrate strong cultural participation, with 90% attending events within Orange County and 95% participating in creative activities at least occasionally. Visual arts, literary arts, and music emerged as the most popular personal creative pursuits.

There is strong community support for arts and culture, with 88% of residents viewing creative learning as essential for families and communities, and 84% favoring increased government funding.

Affordable workspace emerged as the top priority for both professional and aspiring artists, followed by exhibition and performance opportunities. A focus on geographic equity of arts programming and arts resources across the county emerged as a priority. Cultural organizations reported funding limitations, space challenges, and administrative barriers, while also noting emerging opportunities for cross-sector collaboration in healthcare, education, and community development.

Strategic Framework: Six Aspirational Goals

CANVAS establishes six interconnected goals designed to elevate the county's cultural landscape over the next decade:

Goal 1: Position The City of Orlando and Orange County as a Global Creative Leader focuses on strategic investment in artistic innovation and groundbreaking business models. This includes supporting research and development funding for artistic experiments, pioneering entrepreneurial approaches to sustainability, and building the region's creative brand through exceptional cultural products and expanded tourism partnerships.

Goal 2: Ensure Arts Access for All Communities addresses geographic and demographic disparities by developing community cultural centers in underserved areas, creating arts venues within libraries and recreation centers, and expanding culture pass programs. This goal prioritizes community-initiated arts activities and supports teaching artists working in diverse community settings.

Goal 3: Catalyze Artists and the Creative Workforce strengthens infrastructure for individual artists through expanded funding, professional development, and networking opportunities. The plan supports artists' collective action, provides small business assistance adapted to creative sector needs, and creates marketplaces and civic leadership opportunities for artists throughout the county.

Goal 4: Strengthen Creative Placemaking and Public Art enhances urban experiences through strategic regulatory-related incentives, updated public art programs, and vibrant walkable cultural spaces. The plan recommends that city and county public art programs are modernized, with comprehensive planning, updated ordinances, and enhanced coordination between jurisdictions.

Goal 5: Build Cultural Sector Resilience focuses on building organizational capacity, affordable creative spaces, and sustainable funding. This includes establishing capacity-building funds, cultivating corporate donors, improving transportation access, and supporting cultural tourism initiatives that benefit both residents and visitors.

Goal 6: Elevate the Arts as a Strategic Civic Partner positions arts and culture as catalysts for transformation across community health, education, and social services. The plan aims to establish the county as a national leader in arts in healthcare while expanding partnerships with faith communities, veterans' services, and other civic sectors.

Downtown Orlando: Four Strategic Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Meet the Need for Cultural Activity Space recommends strategic development of arts-focused districts and activation of underutilized spaces. The plan recommends exploring designated cultural zones that integrate mixed-use development in existing nodes like the Central Business District and Parramore, while converting downtown plazas into cultural commons for flexible programming. Key initiatives include establishing a network of festival streets on Church Street and Magnolia Avenue, and developing comprehensive coordination at Loch Haven Cultural Park to maximize its potential as a flagship cultural campus.

Recommendation 2: Enhance Connectivity for Cultural Access recommends exploration of the development of pathways between downtown's cultural assets through physical and programmatic connections. The plan recommends establishing an Urban Arts and Cultural Loop connecting transit stops with cultural facilities throughout downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, while transforming the Orlando Urban Trail into a cultural corridor extending from Loch Haven Cultural Park to the SoDo District. Strategic integration of public art throughout downtown infrastructure can create distinctive wayfinding experiences while expressing local culture and identity across the urban landscape.

Recommendation 3: Update Processes and Remove Barriers recommends updating regulatory frameworks to support cultural development and creative entrepreneurship. The plan recommends simplifying special events permitting with tiered requirements based on event size and impact, while developing coordinated approaches to support arts businesses through financial incentives and affordable workspace creation. Critical reforms include updating land use and zoning regulations to better accommodate cultural uses like live-work spaces and performance facilities, and parking recommendations.

Recommendation 4: Enhance City/County Coordination and Partnerships for Arts and Culture recommends strategies to strengthen collaborative governance to leverage the combined resources and expertise of both jurisdictions. The plan recommends forming a joint coordination task force with representatives from City of Orlando departments to improve communication and joint planning for cultural events and infrastructure.

Implementation and Governance

CANVAS implementation relies on strengthened governance structures and sustainable funding mechanisms. The plan recommends establishing a coordinating committee between the City and County, with United Arts of Central Florida as a key partner, to oversee implementation, identify opportunities, and coordinate policy responses. Leadership capacity building includes expanding Orange County Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs staffing and creating a dedicated City arts leadership position in the Mayor's Office to coordinate the various departments involved in municipal arts functions.

Funding and Investment Strategy

The plan outlines comprehensive funding strategies addressing both increased investment and revenue diversification. For Orange County, recommendations include enacting percent-for-art requirements for private development, expanding existing capital improvement project requirements, increasing general fund allocations, and creating a reserve fund for arts sector resilience.

City funding options include similar percent-for-art ordinances, continued CRA revenue allocations, and strategic general fund increases. The plan emphasizes that tourism dollars (Tourist Development Tax revenues) currently provide the largest public funding source, creating both opportunities and responsibilities for demonstrating cultural tourism value.

Total current public arts investments exceed $37 million annually when combining City and County allocations with United Arts private fundraising, positioning the region competitively with major cultural centers while providing a foundation for strategic growth.

Cultural Tourism and Economic Impact

With over 75 million annual visitors, the Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) represents significant potential for expanded cultural tourism beyond traditional theme park attractions. The plan builds upon Visit Orlando's and The Orlando Economic Partnership's *Unbelievably REAL* and *America's Most Surprising Arts Scene*, branding initiatives to capture visitors seeking authentic, enriching experiences.

The nonprofit arts sector already generates $264.9 million in economic activity annually, with 41% of attendees traveling from outside Orange County specifically for cultural activities. This demonstrates substantial untapped potential for arts-focused tourism that extends visitor stays and increases local spending.

Looking Forward

CANVAS provides a flexible, living framework designed to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining focus on core community values of hospitality, inclusion, and creative excellence. Annual implementation plans will specify concrete action steps, allowing City and County staff to respond to new funding opportunities and realities, policy changes, and emerging community needs while tracking measurable progress toward long-term goals.

The plan's success depends on continued collaboration between government, cultural organizations, educational institutions, businesses, and community members. Through shared commitment and coordinated action, CANVAS positions the City of Orlando and Orange County to become recognized not just for attractions and climate, but for a creative, accessible, and inclusive cultural landscape that transforms lives and communities through the power of human connection and artistic expression.

By 2035, it is anticipated that this comprehensive vision may establish the City of Orlando and Orange County as a premier destination for cultural experiences while ensuring that all residents—regardless of background, geography, or economic status—have access to the transformative power of arts and culture in their daily lives.

The Genesis of CANVAS: From Assessment to Action

Early Collaboration

In early 2020, during the depths of the Covid pandemic, the City of Orlando and Orange County joined together with a shared vision to plan for a stronger future through the power of arts and culture. This emerging partnership recognized that creative practices and expressions can dramatically strengthen communities even during challenging times—building economic vitality through jobs and spending, attracting visitors, and making places resilient, engaging, and welcoming for everyone.

The collaboration represented a significant step forward, as the City of Orlando and Orange County have historically approached arts leadership through different organizational structures and capacities. Orange County established its first cultural plan and Arts and Cultural Affairs Office in 2001, creating dedicated governmental leadership for cultural development. The Board of County Commissioners simultaneously established an annual allocation of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenues for arts funding, a comprehensive grantmaking program, and an Arts and Cultural Affairs Advisory Council to guide policy and funding decisions. This office continues to support the Advisory Council and administers various public art programs countywide.

The City of Orlando's arts and culture leadership operates through a collaborative, multi-entity approach. Programs are administered through several departments including the City Public Art Program housed in the City Venues Department, the Office of Community Affairs, and the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) of the City of Orlando, with support from the Downtown Development Board (DDB). The Economic Development Department's Director of Placemaking leads placemaking initiatives in downtown and city-wide, while other divisions and departments complement these efforts throughout the city. Orlando's arts programs encompass cultural institution support (including the Mennello Museum of American Art), creative placemaking, grants administration, public art programming, the poet laureate program, and discretionary funding. Unlike Orange County's centralized approach, the City coordinates these activities across multiple departments.

Following their initial collaboration, in December 2021, the City of Orlando, the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) of the City of Orlando, and Orange County executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to jointly develop and fund a comprehensive cultural plan. The plan was envisioned to encompass Orange County with its 3 towns and 10 municipalities—including the City of Orlando—and its 12 Main Street districts. Given recent downtown venue development and growth in arts offerings, this planning effort was anticipated to include specific recommendations for downtown Orlando and its main street environs.

Accordingly, a partnership approach was pursued to ensure that CANVAS addresses both countywide cultural development and the unique opportunities within Orlando's urban core to create a unified vision that strengthens the entire county's creative ecosystem.

The Arts Ecology Study

In early 2023, the Orange County Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs (in partnership with United Arts of Central Florida and with funding from the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation and the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation) finalized a year-long Arts Ecology Study of Orange County. This research helped to jumpstart joint cultural planning efforts as the study identified significant opportunities and challenges within the regional arts landscape. While Orange County had experienced remarkable cultural growth over the past decade, the arts sector had not kept pace with the county's population growth and increasing diversity. The DeVos Study highlighted several critical findings:

- Organizational Capacity: The study found that the region's largest nonprofit arts organizations are smaller and younger than those in eight comparable metropolitan areas, suggesting significant opportunities for growth and development.
- Resources: Disparities were revealed in organizational resources, with an unusually high concentration of funding among the largest institutions, while culturally specific organizations operated with significantly smaller budgets.
- Systematic Coordination: Opportunities were identified for enhanced coordination and strategic alignment across the diverse arts ecosystem.
- Capacity Building: Support is needed for organizations across the spectrum in areas including strategic planning, arts management, board development, marketing, and other essential operational capacities.
- Geographic Disparities: Concentration of arts and cultural resources in Downtown Orlando was identified as a challenge due to inconsistent public transportation availability, thereby affecting public access.

Action Steps

Encouraged by improved public health conditions and the DeVos Arts Ecology study findings, in the Fall of 2023, Orange County, with support from the City of Orlando and the Downtown CRA, developed a study scope and released a request for proposal (RFP) for a comprehensive Cultural Arts Master Plan.

Soon thereafter, Cultural Planning Group, a national cultural planning firm, was competitively selected to prepare the plan. An ambitious goal was set to have the Master Plan completed by the end of August 2025. The following discusses the selected planning approach including certain aspects of its multi-factorial research, which led to the ultimate plan development with its specific goals and strategies. The plan is as prescriptive as it is inspirational, and we hope that it will inspire our Orange County communities as they explore their own unique cultural arts development.

Introduction to CANVAS

A CANVAS of Creative Possibility

As the City of Orlando and Orange County continue to evolve in population, diversity, and built environment, this 10-year horizon cultural master plan—CANVAS—represents a collective vision to elevate the region's arts and culture to a level befitting its creative community. CANVAS provides an ambitious yet achievable roadmap for strengthening cultural life through 2035.

The City of Orlando and Orange County are home to rich cultures, creative traditions, and artistic expressions. From Orlando's historic neighborhoods to diverse communities throughout the county, the region's cultural assets hold extraordinary potential.

Our arts belong to everyone.

The City of Orlando and Orange County value inclusion, with our culture embodying hospitality and promoting a sense of belonging. For us, this means arts integrated into daily life, within walking distance in every neighborhood, and accessible in every community. Not all residents currently share equally in the region's cultural richness. CANVAS commits to fulfilling the promise of equal participation for all, strengthening community bonds through culture that celebrates the breadth of cultures and ancestries.

We are a creative epicenter.

We are embracing our unique creative identity on the global stage with Visit Orlando's and The Orlando Economic Partnership's current branding initiatives, *Unbelievably REAL* and *America's Most Surprising Arts Scene*. Our artists, creatives, and arts organizations hold unique potential to elevate the region nationally and internationally, extending our reputation beyond theme parks and drive-through tourist destinations. CANVAS directs resources toward innovation and experimentation that builds artistic recognition both locally and worldwide.

We invest in our own.

We are fortunate to have remarkably abundant cultural resources—nonprofits, venues, artists, creatives, and more. While we face real needs for funding, facilities, spaces, and work opportunities, fulfilling our creative potential requires investing in what we already have. CANVAS builds first on our existing assets, including our artist community, nonprofit arts organizations, and cultural venues and gathering places.

Our Collective Opportunity

The successful implementation of this plan requires coordinated efforts from the City of Orlando and Orange County, cultural organizations, educational institutions, businesses, philanthropists, and community members. By working together, we can transform the community into a true cultural destination for residents and visitors alike—a place where creativity thrives and benefits all.

As this planning process transitions to implementation, we invite everyone to participate in building our cultural future. The strategies and actions outlined in the following pages provide a flexible framework for growth and development over the next decade. Through shared commitment and collaborative action, we can ensure that the City of Orlando and Orange County becomes known not just for its attractions and sunshine, but for its creative, accessible, and inclusive cultural landscape.

Let's begin this journey together.

A History of Colorful Culture
In 1942 the Weavers of Orlando formed a guild still existing today, preserving the area's strong tradition of fiber arts.

Our Creative Origins: Art, Culture and Imagination

Our Cultural History

Our first people were the Ais, the Timucua, and later the Seminole, who wove a cultural canvas of tradition loomed in land and legacy. Since the founding of Orange County in 1845 and the arrival of the railroad in the 1880s, industry, artistry, and tourism have remained the foundation for life here. Early challenges proved to promote resiliency as the area evolved into a regional center. A 1920s land boom, bringing Art Deco architecture to downtown Orlando, and the explosive growth to the county fifty years later with the 1971 opening of Walt Disney World, transformed our small agricultural center into a global tourism destination. But our character was, and continues to be, derived from the cultural contributions of our diverse communities.

CANVAS acknowledges the Historical Society of Central Florida and the Orange County Regional History Center's support in presenting historical information and photographs. These photos appear courtesy of the Orange County Regional History Center: Horse in citrus grove; 1880s Railroad arrival; 1887 Eatonville; 1927 Orlando Municipal Auditorium/Bob Carr Theater.

Cultural Timeline Highlights

Pre-1500s
Mayaca and Jororo people (Ais-affiliated tribes) create distinctive pottery and ceremonial art in the region

1880s
Railroad arrival spurs cultural development of the citrus industry

1887
Eatonville incorporates as one of the first self-governing all-Black towns in America

1920s-1950s
Florida Highwaymen artists develop their distinctive landscape painting style

1926
City of Orlando founds the Orlando Little Theatre

1927
The Orlando Municipal Auditorium/Bob Carr Theater opens, its interior adapted from the Roman Coliseum

1957
Opening of downtown Orlando Lake Eola Park

1960
Orlando Museum of Art (initially as the Loch Haven Art Center) opens

1971
Walt Disney World transforms the region's cultural landscape

1973
Loch Haven Park opens, establishing a cultural hub

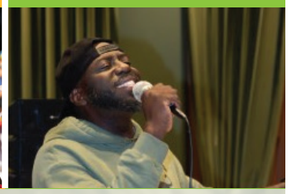
1989
United Arts is founded and City of Orlando Public Art Plan was created

2000-2002
Downtown Orlando Arts District and Orange County Arts & Cultural Affairs Office Launch

2014
Opening of the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts

2016
FusionFest formed to celebrate the county's cultural diversity

2023
Orlando wins prestigious Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge grant



Native American Influence

- The Ais and Timucua people created distinctive pottery, ceremonial objects, and rock art throughout the region. While their direct cultural legacy was disrupted by European arrival and colonization, archaeological sites preserve their artistic contributions.

- The Seminole people, who moved into the area in the 18th century, contributed vibrant textile traditions that continue today, particularly their distinctive patchwork designs and beadwork. These artistic traditions represent cultural resilience and adaptation.

Cultural Contributions of Historic Communities

Global Ancestry Community Contributions

- Eatonville, incorporated in 1887 just north of Orlando, holds the distinction of being one of the first self-governing all-Black municipalities in the United States. It represents a landmark of cultural independence and community building. Zora Neale Hurston, the celebrated author and anthropologist who grew up in Eatonville, immortalized the community in her writings. The annual ZORA! Festival celebrates her legacy and African American arts and humanities.

- The Wells'Built Museum of African American History and Culture in the historic Parramore district (formerly the Wells'Built Hotel) stands as a testament to Black entrepreneurship during segregation, when Dr. William Monroe Wells built a hotel for African Americans who weren't allowed to stay in whites-only establishments. On February 4, 2000, it was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

- Puerto Rican migration since the 1940s has significantly shaped Orange County's cultural landscape, bringing musical traditions like salsa, merengue, and reggaeton that now feature prominently in the region's cultural programming.

- The Hispanic influence is visible in Orlando's vibrant mural art scene, celebrating Latino heritage and contemporary Latino artists contributing to the visual identity of neighborhoods like Mills 50 and the Milk District.

- Annual events like FusionFest and the Puerto Rican Parade showcase the diversity within Latino communities and their artistic contributions to the region.

Artistic Milestones and Unique Cultural Expressions

Early Art to Present Day

- The region's early settler art was primarily functional, with quilting traditions, woodworking, and folk crafts reflecting the agricultural lifestyle. Some traditions continue through organizations like the Weavers of Orlando, established in 1942.

- The 1920s-30s saw the rise of the Florida Highwaymen, a group of African American landscape artists who sold their vibrant paintings along roadsides when galleries were closed to them. Their work captured Florida's natural beauty and represents an important chapter in American folk art.

- The Rollins Museum of Art (formerly the Cornell Fine Arts Museum) opened in 1941 as one of Florida's earliest art museums.

Theme Park and Entertainment Influence

- Walt Disney World's 1971 opening transformed not just the economy but the artistic landscape, bringing immersive environmental storytelling and themed design to unprecedented scale. This introduced "Imagineering" as a distinctive art form blending architecture, landscape design, visual art, and interactive elements.

- Universal Studios followed in 1990, furthering entertainment design innovation, including advances in animatronics, projection mapping, and virtual reality experiences.

- The Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) recognizes the artistic achievements of themed entertainment design through their annual Thea Awards.

Language and Multilingual Arts

- The county's linguistic diversity is reflected in literary events like the annual Hispanic Heritage Month Book Fair and poetry readings.

- Organizations like Descolonizarte Teatro create Spanish-language theatrical works that reflect the experiences of Latino communities in Central Florida.

- The Orange County Library System offers programming in multiple languages, including Spanish and Haitian Creole, supporting literary arts across linguistic communities.

High-Tech Arts Innovation

- Full Sail University, established in 1979, is a major educational hub for emerging digital arts, film production, and gaming design.

- The University of Central Florida's Center for Emerging Media and Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy (FIEA) have fostered innovation in digital storytelling, interactive experiences, and simulation technology.

- The Orlando Science Center's digital planetarium and interactive exhibits represent the intersection of science education and artistic presentation, while the Melrose Center at the Orlando Public Library provides community access to digital creation tools.

"Old Florida" Stories and Heritage

- Citrus heritage remains visible in local festivals, agricultural tourism, and historic markers throughout the county. The Orange Blossom Trail was once lined with citrus groves and roadside attractions.

- Lake Eola Park and its iconic fountain (installed in 1957) has been central to Orlando's identity for generations, hosting cultural events since the early 20th century.

- The Winter Park Scenic Boat Tour, operating since 1938, represents one of Florida's earliest tourism experiences, combining natural beauty with cultural heritage.

The Existing CANVAS

Introduction

This section provides an overview of the current arts and cultural ecosystem that informed the plan's quantitative and qualitative research. The analysis examines the current landscape across two interconnected dimensions that together create the foundation for cultural planning in the region.

The first dimension explores the geographic and demographic characteristics of the planning areas, including the City of Orlando, downtown Orlando (encompassing the Downtown Development Board and Community Redevelopment Agency areas), and the City of Orlando Main Streets districts. This review extends throughout Orange County and its municipalities, towns, and unincorporated areas, while also examining tourism patterns and future growth projections including population and economic trends.

The second dimension examines the region's arts and cultural ecosystem in detail, including the nonprofit arts and culture sector, the for-profit creative economy, cultural tourism infrastructure, the public art landscape, and the governance and funding structures that support arts and culture throughout the region.

City of Orlando

As the county seat and largest municipality, the City of Orlando sits within the Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area, which ranks as the second-fastest growing MSA in the nation. Known as the City Beautiful for its semi-tropical environment and thoughtfully designed urban landscape, Orlando encompasses approximately 1137.6 square miles with a population of 320,753 residents (ACS 2023), projected to reach nearly 500,000 by 2050.

Recognized for its business-friendly environment, Orlando serves both its residents and the millions of annual visitors by offering exceptional economic, cultural, and educational opportunities. The city is distinguished by its outstanding cross-generational parks and recreation system, as well as comprehensive programs addressing livability, aging, and health. While many recognize the Orlando region for its world-renowned theme parks—including Universal Orlando Resort and Walt Disney World, which attracts over 75 million visitors annually in Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties—the city's identity extends far beyond tourism.

As Orange County grows from 1.5 million to nearly 2 million residents by 2050, CANVAS ensures our cultural infrastructure grows with us-creating the venues, programs, and opportunities that make communities thrive.

Orlando serves as the region's center of government, commerce, and culture, anchored by major downtown cultural and entertainment venues including the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, Kia Center, and Camping World Stadium, along with the private Inter & Co. Stadium which host international sporting and entertainment events. The city also offers more intimate cultural venues such as the Loch Haven Cultural Park complex, Leu Gardens, and Bill Frederick Park. Connecting Orlando's 126 distinct neighborhoods to these live, work, and play opportunities is an increasingly integrated multi-modal transportation system encompassing transit, rail, and trails—all contributing to an exceptional quality of life.

Downtown Development Board and Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Orlando (DDB/CRA)

The Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Orlando (CRA), also less formally referred to as the Downtown Orlando CRA, was established in 1980, and pursues redevelopment and revitalization activities within a 1,664-acre area. Implementing planned revitalization strategies under Florida Statutes Chapter 163, the CRA focuses on expanding housing and cultural opportunities, addressing long-term transportation needs, and encouraging retail development. These activities are guided by the Downtown Orlando Community Redevelopment Area Plan (DTOutlook), a regulatory document detailing the agency's multi-year strategies, programs, and projects.

The CRA collaborates closely with the Downtown Development Board (DDB), which oversees a smaller 1,000-acre geography within the CRA footprint. Created in 1970, by a special act of the Florida Legislature, the DDB's mission is to strengthen downtown Orlando's role as the economic, governmental, and cultural center of Central Florida. The DDB focuses on promoting planning, implementation, and administration of the city's core area redevelopment programs.

In the fourth quarter of 2023, the CRA area was home to 21,350 residents, nearly 95,180 employees, and 4,990 businesses. As the county's cultural hub, it houses major venues like the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts and Kia Center, alongside signature spaces including Lake Eola Park, the developing Canopy Urban Park, CityArts, and Creative Village's Luminary Green—all providing diverse venues for cultural festivals and community events.

City of Orlando Main Streets Program

Orlando's Main Streets Program has emerged as one of the city's most successful cultural and economic development initiatives, creating distinctive commercial neighborhood identities within defined geographic boundaries. Following the Main Street America™ approach, the program focuses on historic preservation, economic development, and community identity through four key pillars: design, organization, promotion, and economic vitality.

The Orlando Main Street Districts, operating as separate nonprofits with dedicated leadership, include:

Audubon Park Garden District
City District
College Park
Curry Ford West
Gateway Orlando
Ivanhoe Village
Mills 50 District
Parramore District
SoDo District
The Milk District
Thornton Park District
West Lakes District

The success of Orlando's Main Streets Program has positioned it as a model for arts and cultural development through creative placemaking for other municipalities throughout Orange County. The program demonstrates how strategic investment in community identity, historic preservation, and arts integration can create vibrant cultural neighborhood destinations that serve both residents and visitors. (For additional information, see the Orlando Main Street program in the opportunity and downtown plan sections of this plan.)

Orange County

Orange County encompasses approximately 1,000 square miles in Central Florida, serving as home to 1.5 million residents with projections reaching 2 million by 2050. The county includes both incorporated municipalities and extensive unincorporated areas, creating a diverse governance landscape that requires coordinated cultural planning. Alongside the City of Orlando, Orange County includes incorporated municipalities, each with distinct character and cultural assets:

- **Apopka**: Developing amphitheater and cultural facilities.
- **Eatonville**: The first US town to be organized, governed and incorporated by African Americans.
- **Maitland**: Home to art museums and cultural institutions.
- **Winter Garden**: Featuring successful downtown revitalization centered around the Garden Theatre.
- **Winter Park**: Known for its museums, galleries, and cultural tourism.
- **Ocoee, Windermere, Belle Isle, Oakland, Edgewood, Bay Lake, Lake Buena Vista**: Each contributing unique cultural assets and community character.

Regional Visitorship

Visitorship statistics by Visit Orlando are compiled at the Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) level comprised of Orange, Seminole, and Osceola Counties. The area is a major tourism destination, welcoming more than 75 million visitors annually, primarily drawn to world-renowned theme parks including Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Orlando Resort, and SeaWorld Orlando.

Currently, significant portions of Orange County remain unincorporated. This geographic and governmental complexity underscores the importance of the collaborative planning approach embodied in CANVAS—creating a unified cultural vision while respecting the distinct character and needs of each community within Orange County.

County Future Growth

Orange County is experiencing significant population growth. The County's population growth, with nearly 1,000 new residents each week, is transforming the region's demographic landscape. This growth pattern brings both opportunities and challenges for cultural development as the county becomes increasingly diverse and dynamic.

Orange County's population is projected to grow from 1.5 million to nearly 2 million residents by 2050, with the Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area ranking as the second-fastest growing MSA in the nation. This expansion is primarily driven by migration, with 46% coming from domestic relocation and 41% from international migration (ACS 2023).

The region is becoming increasingly diverse, with the Hispanic/Latin population projected to comprise over 41% of Orange County's population by 2050, while Black/African Americans will remain about 20% of the population. Currently, 25% of residents were born outside the US, and nearly 40% speak a language other than English at home.

Age demographics reveal a relatively young population, with Orange County's median age at 36.9 and City of Orlando's at 35.3 (ACS 2023). However, the county's 65+ population grew by 71 % between 2010 and 2022, representing the fastest-growing age segment. By 2050, approximately 18% of residents will be over age 65.

Economically, Orange County is relatively prosperous with a median income of $79,053, though 12% of residents live in poverty. The City of Orlando, a highly urbanized area with a concentration of social services and public transit, has a median income of $69,414 and a poverty rate of 15%. As it concerns education, 91.9% of Orlando residents have a high school diploma or higher, while 41.2% have a bachelor's degree or higher.

The growing and diversifying population will likely increase demand for arts and cultural programming that is affordable, accessible, and culturally relevant. As highlighted throughout this plan, the Orlando MSA's substantial visitor population creates both opportunities and challenges in balancing offerings that serve both residents and visitors.

This plan provides the opportunity to adopt a framework responding to this future growth and ensure arts and cultural programming, facilities and venues, and personal participation activities remain accessible to all communities while reflecting the rich cultural variety of the region.

The Arts and Cultural Ecosystem

Nonprofit Arts and Culture Sector

The City of Orlando and Orange County boasts a vibrant and evolving arts and cultural ecosystem distinguished by its diverse creative expressions, significant public investment, and unique position within one of the world's premier tourism destinations. The cultural landscape is characterized by anchor institutions like the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, Orlando Museum of Art, and the cultural hub at Loch Haven Park, complemented by cultural asset offerings in Winter Park, Winter Garden, and many other communities.

The seven-county region of Central Florida has experienced significant cultural growth over the past decade. There has been increased public investment, reflecting the value policymakers place on the role of arts and culture in the community as well as their importance to the tourism economy. This evolution is reflected in the development of major venues, increased numbers of arts organizations, and an individual artist community that has expanded and diversified. Despite this, according to the Arts Ecology Study (2023) the region's largest nonprofit arts organizations are smaller and younger than in eight comparison cities. Additionally, there is considerable inequity in the resources of cultural organizations of all sizes. There is an unusually high concentration of resources for the largest organizations, while culturally specific organizations have significantly smaller budgets, and a lack of long-term dedicated funding.

The arts and culture sector benefits from the leadership of the Orange County Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, City of Orlando Office of Community Affairs, the City Economic Development Department's Creative Placemaking Director and DDB/CRA, as well as United Arts of Central Florida and the Downtown Arts District (DAD). Building on and leveraging existing collaborations between City and County government and the larger and well-funded United Arts nonprofit, in particular, will benefit from successful implementation of this plan for the arts sector and residents.

For-Profit Creative Sector

While this plan has a government/nonprofit focus, it is important to highlight the unique contributions of the for-profit creative sector, higher education, and the overall creative economy of the county.

A creative economy generates value through imaginative qualities rather than traditional resources. Creative industries—including arts and crafts, advertising, design, entertainment, architecture, books, media and software—drive individual and community development through economic transformation, job creation, innovation and cultural inclusion.

The City of Orlando and Orange County's creative workforce is substantial, supported by major entertainment companies and theme parks that employ significant numbers of artists, designers, and performers, plus respected educational institutions with strong arts programs including Rollins College, Full Sail University, University of Central Florida, Valencia College and Orlando Vo-Tech.

With over 75 million annual visitors, Orange County has an unprecedented opportunity to showcase authentic cultural experiences that extend stays, increase spending, and establish our region as a destination for more than attractions—for genuine artistic discovery.

Creative West's Creative Vitality™ Suite (CVI) is a tool that measures the relative concentration of creative activity in a specific geographic area, compared to the national average. It uses data for creative industries, occupations, and cultural nonprofit revenues to provide a score reflecting a region's creative economic health.

Orange County has a robust creative economy with over 67,500 jobs in the creative sector (2023 data), representing approximately 8.5% of all employment in the county; the county's (CVI) value of 1.31 is indicates a stronger creative economy than many other comparable regions.

The City of Orlando accounts for 62% of creative jobs in the county and 75% of creative industry earnings, and represents 22.4% of the county's population, indicating a significant concentration of creative activity in the urban core.

Orange County CVI 1.31

Above National Average of 1.0

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1.28	1.30	1.24	1.29	1.31

City of Orlando CVI 1.72

Above National Average of 1.0

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1.83	1.78	1.66	1.69	1.72

Creative Sector Characteristics

Strong Earnings Growth
County creative industry earnings have grown significantly from approximately $1.5B in 2020 to over $2B in 2023, showing strong recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cultural Nonprofit Revenues
The county generates approximately $146.5M in cultural nonprofit revenues, with the City of Orlando accounting for $118.2M (79%).

Top County Creative Occupations
1. Software developers
2. Actors
3. Writers and authors
4. Musicians and singers
5. Marketing managers

Creative Workforce
67,500+
Creative jobs in Orange County
8.5% of all county employment

Orlando's Share
62%
of County's Creative Jobs
75% of creative industry earnings

Leading Creative Industries (2023 Earnings)

1. Architectural services
2. Media streaming distribution
3. Advertising agencies
4. Independent artists, writers, performers
5. Interior design services

Cultural Tourism

The Orlando MSA consistently ranks as one of America's top tourism destinations. In 2023, the Orlando MSA welcomed over 75 million visitors, making it one of the most visited metro areas in the U.S. While Walt Disney World Resort (Orange/Osceola counties), Universal Orlando Resort (City of Orlando and Orange County) and SeaWorld Orlando (Orlando) are the primary drivers of domestic and international tourism, and the Orange County Convention Center is the second largest convention facility in the U.S., the nonprofit arts and culture industry contributes greatly to the region's economy. While all forms of transportation have a role in this success, including the recent $2.3 billion I-4 Ultimate Highway improvements, the Orlando International Airport (MCO) is reporting a large increase in travelers. In 2024, MCO brought in 57,211,628 passengers, ranking first in the State of Florida and ninth in the United States. According to Airport Council International (ACI World), even back in 2021, MCO was ranked as the 7th busiest airport in the world.

Americans for the Arts' most recent Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 Study (AEP6) reported that the nonprofit arts sector generated $264.9 million in economic activity in Orange County during 2022, with 41% nonlocal visitors traveling from outside of Orange County for arts and cultural activities. Close to 83% of these nonlocal attendees reported that the primary purpose of their visit was specifically to attend the performance event, exhibit, venue, or facility where they were surveyed. Of the nonlocal attendees, 11.1% reported overnight lodging expense resulting from their arts and cultural attendance. On average these attendees with lodging expenses spent more in Orange County than other nonlocal attendees on their visit - $215.90 per person compared to $57.30 per person.

As described in the Arts and Leadership section of this plan, tourism dollars—the Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenues—are the largest source of public funding for the arts. While this is true for many Florida counties, this linkage is especially important in Orange County because of the magnitude of its tourism economy and TDT receipts.

In summary, major cities worldwide are accelerating their work in cultural tourism to compete for visitors seeking authentic, enriching experiences. Cultural tourism attracts higher-spending visitors who stay longer and spend more in local businesses as they venture out beyond traditional tourist zones. In today's experience economies, The City of Orlando and Orange County can only benefit by investing strategically in its arts and cultural identity for competitive

Orlando's recent Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge victory demonstrates the capacity for world-class artistic innovation. CANVAS builds on this momentum to establish Orange County as a recognized creative capital.

advantage. The recently launched Cultural Tourism Initiative of United Arts of Central Florida is a bold and well-branded effort that will benefit the County and City as a catalyst for reimagining the region as an arts and culture destination and will fundamentally shift perceptions of the cultural landscape of the region.

The Public Art Landscape

Both the City of Orlando and Orange County have established longstanding public art programs, each positioned to reflect their organization's and their community's unique needs as well as demonstrating a commitment to enhancing public spaces through creativity. These programs have successfully integrated artwork into parks, plazas, streetscapes, and government facilities demonstrating that art is not a luxury but an essential element in livable communities. The County and City programs currently showcase a variety of forms and styles—from large-scale murals and sculptures to temporary interactive installations and functional artwork integrated into infrastructure.

The City of Orlando, already a recipient of numerous art and culture awards, was recently selected as one of only eight cities nationwide to receive the prestigious 2023 Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge Grant. The successful proposal is an ambitious multi-year "Art Pollination" themed project, which focuses on community food access challenges as explored through social practice. This grant represents a significant milestone for the City's public art landscape and cultural recognition. As one of the most prestigious awards in the global public art sector, it elevates the region's profile on an international stage, demonstrating that the City and County can produce world-class artistic initiatives that compete with major cultural capitals worldwide. Importantly, it strengthens the case for expanded public art funding, programming outlined in this plan, providing concrete evidence of the region's artistic excellence and capacity for international recognition. There is also a need to modernize public art program structures for both the City of Orlando and Orange County, along with implementing comprehensive inventory management systems.

The planning process also identified interest in improving public art across Orange County. Municipalities express a desire for more public art and resources suitable for smaller municipalities to create their own programs. Orlando's Main Street organizations would welcome arts programming and space activations that help connect neighborhoods. The importance of making the arts accessible throughout the county and reflecting the unique identity of local communities was clearly articulated during the engagement.

Arts Leadership and Funding

Introduction

An important part of the arts and cultural ecosystem is its leadership and funding. At the City of Orlando there are multiple entities involved in leadership, including the Office of Community Affairs, the Venues Department-Public Art Program, Downtown Development Board/Community Redevelopment Agency (DDB/CRA), as supported by the Economic Development city-wide Director of Placemaking. At Orange County there is only one entity, the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs. The City, CRA and County typically partner independently with United Arts of Central Florida to establish pass-through funding and implement programs, while the CRA also annually partners with the Downtown Arts District (DAD), a nonprofit that supports arts and culture activities from their downtown location, CityArts.

Accordingly, this structure is a source of strength and cooperation and demonstrates the successful practice of regional cooperation. It has been effective in overseeing cultural development in the region and provides an excellent foundation for continued cultural development. The CANVAS Cultural Plan benefitted from participation of each entity in the planning.

The following is a discussion of these groups, their leadership and respective funding.

Orange County Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs

The office of Arts and Cultural Affairs was founded in 2001 after a community planning process authorized by the Board of County Commissioners. The County also authorized an annual allocation of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenues and creation of an arts grantmaking program. At that time, the Commissioners established the Arts and Cultural Affairs Advisory Council to guide arts and cultural policy and funding decisions, along with a grants specific committee and a public art review board.

The functions of the Office have expanded and diversified since its founding. Currently, in addition to the Administrator's specified job duties, the position plays the role of "representing the arts community to County government and vice versa," and being a visible arts leader in the community. With a staff of four, the Office oversees the grants programs, most of which are administered by United Arts under a contract for services. The Office also manages the public art program, including four County-owned galleries and commissioned artworks and produces a cultural facilities map. A new staff position was recently created to address monitoring and evaluation, and to tell the story of the impact of County arts funding. Additionally, the Office provides financial support for FusionFest, an annual multi-cultural community festival originally produced by the County, and also financially supports an arts calendar administered by United Arts.

Total County arts investments in FY2025 are approximately $31.4 million, funded through Tourist Development Tax revenues, general funds, and capital improvement project budgets.*

ARC capital grants in the arts	$15,000,000
Grants (admin by United Arts)	$14,538,665
United Arts admin fee	$650,000
United Arts marketing	$300,000
Arts & Cultural Affairs Operations	$429,528
Fusion Fest	$250,000
Public art	$216,000
Total	**$31,384,193**

**Note: figures are as of January 2025; some figures are rounded.*

City of Orlando

The City of Orlando has a different arts management approach than Orange County. First formally conceptualized in the 1980's, it has evolved over the decades, with a focus on nonprofit arts engagement including the United Arts of Central Florida, starting in 1989, followed by the Downtown Arts District (CityArts) in 2002.

The City of Orlando Public Art Program, now housed in the Venues Department, generally oversees the citywide public art program, albeit with limited staff and resources. The program was created to acquire, exhibit, and support visual arts and regional artists (see City Code Chapter 2, Article XXIII, Public Art Ordinance). Currently, the collection contains more than 900 pieces including paintings, sculptures, tapestries, and mixed media, which are displayed within City Hall, public buildings, and throughout the City's parks, senior, and neighborhood centers, as well as venues.

The program's three formal galleries include:

- The Terrace Gallery at City Hall, a 2,000 square foot space, featuring national and international arts and collections, along with renowned Florida artists;
- The Mayor's 3rd Floor Gallery dedicated to Central Florida artists; and,
- The Leu Gardens Garden House Gallery, which frequently displays botanical themed art as well as permanent works owned by the city.

As described in the Public Art Ordinance, the program includes a Public Art Advisory Board (PAAB), which, with the Public Art Coordinator, assists and makes recommendations to the Mayor and City Commissioners for public art commissions for new City building facilities via the Percent for Art Program. Public Art staff oversee the permanent collection, acquisitions and deaccessioning, exhibitions, and programming from a seperate operations budget.

As addressed in the Public Art Ordinance, the program has historically employed the City Growth Management Plan (GMP) Cultural Arts Element for public arts program guidance. This approach was implemented in 1990, when the 1989 City of Orlando Public Art Master Plan was incorporated into the new Cultural Arts Element. It was the first time since the 1926 City Plan to have a section devoted exclusively to public art. The purpose of the Plan is to include specific sites and criteria for the selection of works of art, special landscape treatments, and architectural enhancements. The 2025 GMP Refresh Cultural Arts Element, under Objective CA 1.3, addresses the new cultural arts master plan (CANVAS) and its recommendations, which will be implemented throughout the planning period, as appropriate.

Another important part of the Public Art Ordinance is (Sec.2.171), which addresses "Funds for Architectural Enhancement and Works of Art." Under this section, capital projects are to include a contribution to a Public Art Fund. This funding is to acquire and maintain works of art, architectural enhancement, or special landscaping treatment equal to 1 % of the total estimated cost of the civic construction project. This requirement is also included in the Cultural Arts Element under Objective CA-6.1. The CIP amount varies year to year and is not included in the funding summary below.

In addition, private development projects to be located within the city's Downtown Activity Center future land use designation, per the GMP Policy CA 1.2, shall be required to pay a contribution to a trust fund established for public art and cultural facilities as a condition to any density or intensity bonus being awarded. This requirement is also detailed in the Land Development Code Sec. 58.1105-Special Regulations for Bonuses addressing the downtown AC-3A zoning district. Projects receiving a density or intensity bonus or both in this zoning district must provide public art that fairly and proportionally mitigates, with conditions, the project's impact on the public realm. Payment in lieu of installation is also addressed.

Other entities involved in siting and funding public art as well as supporting diverse cultural activities are the Downtown Development Board and Community Redevelopment Agency (DDB/CRA). DDB and CRA funding varies year to year depending on annually planned activities. CRA activities are consistent with the regulatory DTOutlook's plan and its amendments. Recognizing the need for better arts and culture planning, the DTOutlook details that the CRA should support the creation of a downtown arts and cultural plan to ensure that future arts efforts are coordinated and provide a balanced array of artistic offerings. As well, the master plan should continue the promotion and activation of the Cultural Corridor. Complementing the CRA activities are the DDB initiatives, in particular, its sponsored events including United Arts' DTO Live!, which regularly activates downtown public spaces with outstanding entertainment.

The Economic Development Department Director of Placemaking directs and supports many of the DDB/CRA art related activities in addition to city-wide endeavors. The Office of Community Affairs separately provides funding and support for various community-driven arts and culture initiatives, led by the Director and the City's Chief Service Officer. Accordingly, the city's arts funding includes:

- Support for cultural institutions (eg: CityArts)
- Economic Development Department Creative Placemaking
- Grants administration
- Public art programs
- Poet Laureate program
- Events programming
- Additional unassigned funding, as identified

Although the City in previous years had a director of cultural affairs position, it does not currently have a dedicated full-time leadership position for the arts.

Total City arts investments in FY2025 are approximately $6.7 million.

CRA (various arts initiatives)	$2,326,677
DDB/festival support/DTO Live!	$1,923,334
Orlando Science Center	$518,364
United Arts (regranting)	$494,099
Mennello Museum of American Art	$650,000
Friends 501c3 organization	$661,961
Downtown Arts District (DAD)	$161,632
Public art	$150,000
CityArts facility	$92,500
Poet Laureate	$8,000
Total	**$6,730,014**

It should be noted that other City divisions and departments also independently engage in arts and culture, from programs to installations, such as Families, Parks and Recreation Department.

United Arts of Central Florida

United Arts of Central Florida is a nonprofit organization founded in 1989 with a mission to enrich the community through investing in arts, science, and history. It supports cultural organizations in Lake, Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties. In addition to its own programs and initiatives, the agency collaborates with the City of Orlando and Orange County on a range of arts services. Relative to this cultural plan, United Arts' major programs and initiatives include grants programs, artist development programs, cultural tourism initiatives and campaigns, creative placemaking programs, advocacy, research, and cross-sector programs, and a marketing calendar.

The City and County each contract with United Arts to distribute public dollars through arts grantmaking, and to support the organization's efforts in raising private funds—the Collaborative Campaign for the Arts—for grantmaking and other initiatives.

United Arts' budget has been growing. Total FY2024 revenues were approximately $7.5 million, an increase of about $650,000 over FY2023. This includes $6.8 million raised through its Collaborative Campaign for the Arts, which was an increase of about $700,000 over the previous year. It is important to note that these revenue figures do not include significant amounts from Orange County provided to United Arts as regranting dollars. United Arts administers the County's arts grants programs although these amounts are a pass-through and do not appear as income on the organization's financial statements. County grant funds totaled $7.7 million in FY2024, up from $3 million in FY2023. This amount increased again in FY2025 to $14.5 million. Additionally, the City of Orlando provides approximately $500,000 for regranting.

Downtown Arts District (DAD) and CityArts

Established in 2002, the Downtown Orlando Arts District addresses the entire Downtown Orlando Community Redevelopment Plan Area, which also includes portions of the Cultural Corridor. As a nonprofit, with 23 years of experience, its successful mission has been to lead, stimulate, and guide the development of a vibrant, innovative arts and cultural district that enhances economic development in downtown Orlando. Some of its more popular activities include Third Thursdays, Orlando Story Club, and Art after Dark.

DAD is also the parent entity to CityArts, a well known cultural institution situated within the historic Rogers Kiene building. An Orlando landmark, the building is the City's oldest historic structure, erected in 1886. CityArts is a popular locale for diverse artistic expression from performing to visual arts, and continues to embody downtown's artistic spirit as a vibrant hub of cultural enrichment and creativity.

Arts Funding

The accounting of funding by the City, County, and United Arts reveals important observations about collective arts funding in the county. First, the scale of total public investments in the arts is substantial. In the current year, FY2025, total arts grants from the City of Orlando and Orange County, administered by United Arts, are approximately $15 million. Exact comparisons are difficult but while this is less than cultural capitals like New York and San Francisco, it is more on a per capita basis than Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Diego. In Orange County, these grants are supplemented by the ARC capital grants, which total $15 million annually through FY29.

Second, public investments are leveraged with United Arts private fundraising. United Arts' Collaborative Campaign incentivizes private donors to contribute with matching public dollars. Combining public and private dollars, total FY2025 arts grants funded by the three agencies increases to more than $37 million. There is some criticism of the Collaborative Campaign as disadvantaging individual arts organizations from raising larger amounts on their own, outside the campaign, but to date, campaign participation has increased and not diminished.

Third, public investments in the arts are largely funded by tourism dollars, including most of Orange County's arts grants made through United Arts. Orange County charges a 6% tax on hotel stays and other short-term rentals of less than six months. The Tourist Development Council and Board of County Commissioners have allocated 5% of the first four cents (two-thirds) of this tax for the arts, plus an additional amount per the County's tourism plan. This linkage closely ties the arts to tourism and the legal requirements of the state's TDT statute, which limit arts expenditures to tourism promotion and not pure arts support. This places responsibility on the arts to show support for cultural tourism, generating TDT revenues, while also providing an opportunity to strengthen the destination by increasing visitation through arts participation and longer or repeat visits. In practice, TDT funds are used broadly and liberally to fund the arts, since they are active contributors to the appeal of the destination. In addition, the Orlando Economic Partnership, the region's economic development agency, has set a specific goal to promote the Orlando region as a "creative capital," including its arts community.

Planning Process

Overview

The CANVAS cultural planning process was a collaborative, 18-month effort initiated by the City of Orlando and Orange County to develop a comprehensive roadmap for elevating arts and culture throughout the county. The process was designed to be inclusive, data-driven, and responsive to the diverse needs and aspirations of the region's communities.

The Planning Goals

- A county cultural plan to serve all residents
- Shared countywide vision with specific focus for downtown City of Orlando
- Aspirational and achievable 10-year roadmap
- Policy level goals and cross-jurisdictional strategies
- Cultural arts development and access across county
- Creative sector as an economic driver

The Timeline

Beginning in April 2024, the planning process extended through June 2025.

The Steering Committee

The CANVAS cultural planning process was guided by a 27-member Steering Committee that provided crucial oversight and direction throughout the planning timeline from August 2024 through completion. This group of community leaders regularly met to ensure the plan reflected the authentic needs, aspirations, and creative vision of the City of Orlando and Orange County's communities.

The Steering Committee's composition represents the full spectrum of the City and County's cultural, business, and civic communities including:

Arts and Culture Sector
Representatives from large cultural institutions, grassroots arts organizations, individual artists, and creative workers across disciplines including visual arts, performing arts, literary arts, and media arts.

Education
Leaders and students from K-12 public education, higher education institutions including UCF and Rollins College, and arts education.

Tourism and Hospitality
Industry professionals who recognize the vital connection between cultural vitality and destination appeal, bringing expertise in visitor experience and cultural tourism development.

Business and Economic Development
Private sector leaders and economic development professionals who understand arts and culture as drivers of innovation, talent attraction, and retention.

Philanthropy
Foundation leaders and individual donors who provide critical financial support for cultural initiatives and understand the landscape of arts funding.

Community Development
Community advocates and Main Street organization leaders, who ensure the plan addresses access across communities.

Municipal Government
Representatives from various government entities who bring understanding of local governance, policy development, and implementation realities.

Faith, Health, and Social Services
Leaders from faith-based institutions, healthcare systems, and community organizations who leverage arts-based interventions to promote healing, social cohesion, and holistic wellbeing with the populations they serve.

The Steering Committee served multiple essential functions in the CANVAS planning process:

Strategic Guidance
Provided oversight and direction for the overall planning approach, helping to refine research methodology and ensure community needs were addressed.

Community Connection
Served as ambassadors who helped connect the planning team with their respective networks and communities.

Plan Development
Offered insights and feedback during key phases of plan development, from initial research findings through draft recommendations.

Implementation Readiness
Helped identify realistic pathways for implementing plan strategies within their respective sectors and organizations.

Planning Process Methodology

A mixed method, triangulated approach to data collection and analysis was utilized. This recognizes that no single method of community and stakeholder input or data collection is, by itself, a fully reliable gauge of a plan vision. Each method of data collection—whether it be surveys, Zoom meetings and discussion groups, or in-person meetings and interviews—has strengths and limitations. Triangulation of the findings seeks to identify common themes.

The research design was built on three complementary pillars:

- Qualitative Community Engagement - In-depth conversations and interactive sessions with residents, artists, cultural organizations, and community leaders;
- Quantitative Research - Data collection and analysis to understand the cultural landscape, creative economy, and community needs; and
- Supplementary Research - Review of existing plans, best practices, and case studies to inform strategy development.

Qualitative Research

The engagement and research conducted is the foundation for the vision, mission, and goals of this plan. Through diverse engagement methods—interviews, discussion groups, workshops, and surveys—the CANVAS planning process gathered insights from over 1,500 community members representing different neighborhoods and communities, cultural backgrounds, ages, and perspectives throughout the City of Orlando and Orange County.

This engagement builds trust and buy-in from stakeholders, creating a sense of shared ownership that is essential for successful implementation. When community members see their input reflected in the final plan, they hopefully will become advocates and partners in bringing it to life. This is particularly important in the City of Orlando's and Orange County's communities, where different cultural perspectives are honored and included in this plan. The quantitative and qualitative data collected through market analysis, creative economy assessments, surveys, and stakeholder input establishes baseline conditions, identifies gaps and opportunities, and, most importantly, provides evidence for decision-making.

Additionally, the engagement process itself strengthened community connections and capacity. The CANVAS planning process brought together leaders from various sectors—arts, business, education, government—fostering new relationships and collaborative possibilities that will outlast the planning period.

What is the current state of arts, culture, and creativity in the City of Orlando and Orange County?

What are the priorities for this plan?

What arts, cultural, and creative initiatives do you want to see in your community?

How can this plan address and support current initiatives?

What new initiatives should be recommended?

What are some solutions-oriented suggestions for consideration?

What is your overall vision for your community and for the County's arts and cultural life? (What is different tomorrow than it is today?)

By the Numbers

The process reached over 1,500 community members including:

- Residents from all City of Orlando districts and all municipalities in Orange County

Approximately 58 in-depth interviews were conducted, including:

- Arts and cultural organization leaders
- Business and tourism leaders
- Chief Administrative Officers (city managers)
- Diverse neighborhood community leaders
- Orange County Commission
- Orlando City Council
- Individual artists and creative workers
- Main Street executive directors
- Philanthropic and educational representatives

Sixteen (16) focused discussion groups and workshops reaching more than 250 participants, including, but not limited to:

- Architects and urban designers
- Arts and cultural organization leaders
- Business and tourism stakeholders
- County-wide communities and multi-lingual specific communities
- Creative business and entrepreneurship groups
- Cultural organizations and culturally specific community groups
- Education, library, and healthcare sectors
- Faith communities (Mayor Buddy Dyer's Council of Clergy, Mayor Jerry Demings's Council of Interfaith Leaders)
- Main Street executive directors
- Multi-discipline individual and teaching artists; creative workers
- Neighborhood associations
- Philanthropic leaders and community
- Sector-specific artists and creatives
- Visual arts, performing arts, and literary arts communities

City and County Leadership and Staff

- City and County (Families), Parks and Recreation Departments
- City and County Mayors
- City and County Planning Division and Department and other supporting offices, divisions, and departments
- City and County Transportation Department
- City of Orlando Commissioners
- City of Orlando Office of Community Affairs
- Downtown Development Board/Community Redevelopment Agency (DDB/CRA)
- Orange County Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs
- Orange County Commissioners
- City of Orlando Special Events Office

Eight (8) Steering Committee meetings

Quantitative and Supplemental Research

The quantitative and supplemental research included a community survey (questions/open comment), a creative economy analysis, a public art program review, and community benchmarking as well as supplementary analyses. This research collectively, along with earlier described qualitative stakeholder and community input, constitutes the foundation for the plan, with full reports provided in the appendix of the final plan.

Community Survey

An online survey available in English, Spanish, and Creole gathered input from over 1,000 residents on their cultural participation patterns, priorities, and aspirations for arts and culture in their communities. The survey was distributed through multiple channels to reach a diverse cross-section of the community.

Creative Economy Analysis

Using Creative West's Creative Vitality Suite (CVI), a comprehensive profile of Orange County's and the City of Orlando's creative industries and occupations was generated, examining:

- Creative job growth and industry trends;
- Geographic distribution of creative activity;
- Economic impact of the arts and cultural sector; and
- Comparative analysis with peer regions.

Public Art Programs

A review of both the City of Orlando and County programs was conducted including:

- Program structure and staffing;
- Existing public art inventory review;
- Ownership and maintenance responsibilities;
- Geographic distribution and accessibility; and
- Public art ordinances and funding.

Document Review
The planning team reviewed more than 35 existing plans, policies, and studies, including the 2002 Orange County Cultural Plan, The 2023 Arts Ecology Study, and the following:

- Orange County Comprehensive Plan;
- City of Orlando Growth Management Plan (GMP);
- Transportation Plans;
- Liveable Orlando: An Age-Friendly Action Plan (2022-2025)
- Sustainability and Resiliency-related Plans;
- Neighborhood Plans and Main Street District planned activities;
- Tourism and Economic Development Plans;
- Downtown Orlando Community Redevelopment Area Plan (DTOutlook); and,
- (Families), Parks and Recreation related master plans

Benchmarking
Six counties, defined by Orange County staff, were compared for analyzing arts and culture governance, funding mechanisms, public art programs, cultural tourism strategies, and municipal relationships. They included: Charlotte/ Mecklenburg County, NC; Clark County, NV (Las Vegas); Hillsborough County, FL (Tampa); Miami-Dade County, FL; Palm Beach County, FL; Travis County, TX (Austin).

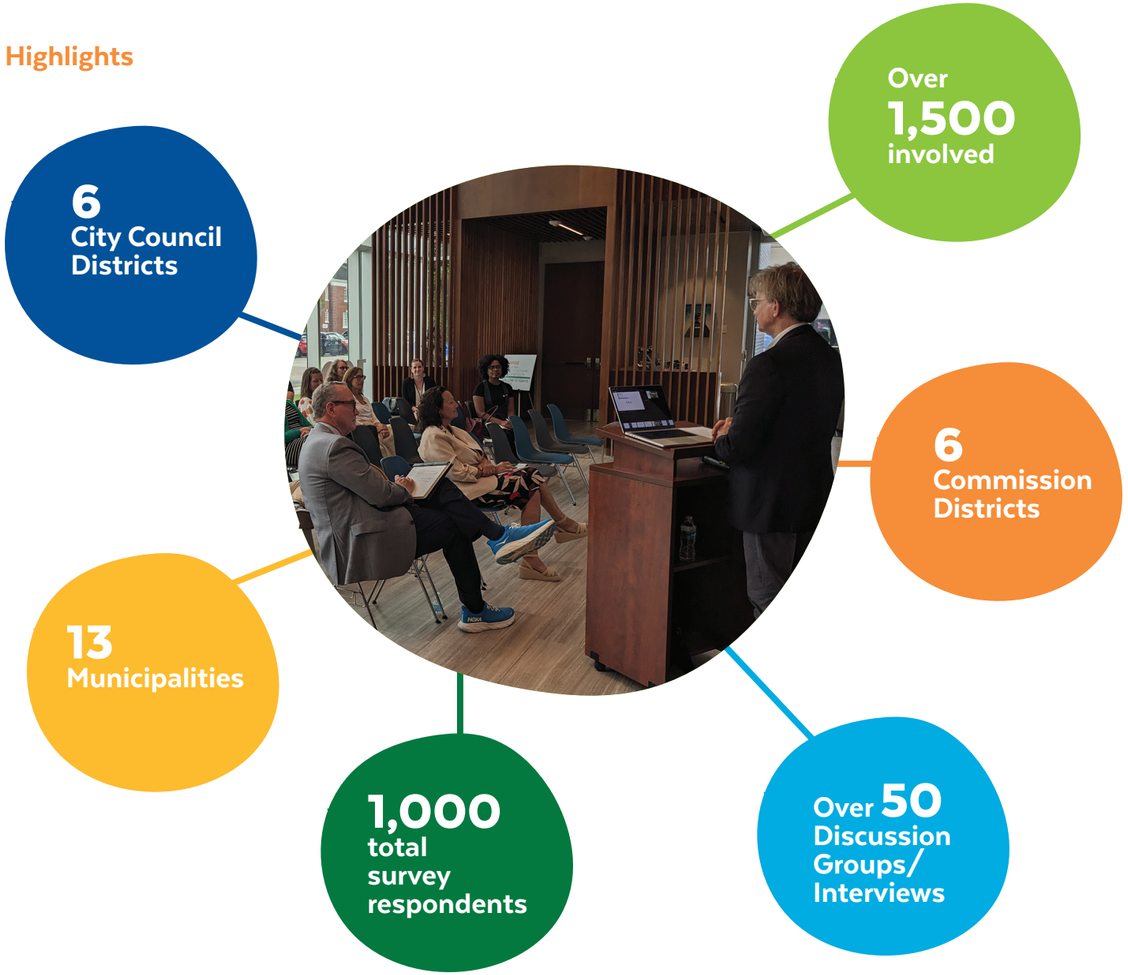
Findings

Introduction

The comprehensive research approach was designed to capture both the aspirations and challenges facing the region's cultural ecosystem. The findings reveal a community that deeply values arts and culture, actively participates in creative activities, and strongly supports increased investment in cultural programming. At the same time, the research identified significant opportunities to expand access, strengthen infrastructure, and better connect the diverse cultural assets that already exist throughout the county.

The following section presents key highlights from this research, organized around the major themes that emerged consistently across multiple data sources. These findings demonstrate both the strong foundation that exists for cultural development and the strategic opportunities for growth and improvement that will guide implementation of this plan over the next decade.

Highlights



Residents Value the Arts.

- 88% view arts/creative learning as essential for families.
- 51% rate current offerings as excellent or good.
- 53% feel their culture is well represented in the arts and culture activities in their local area.

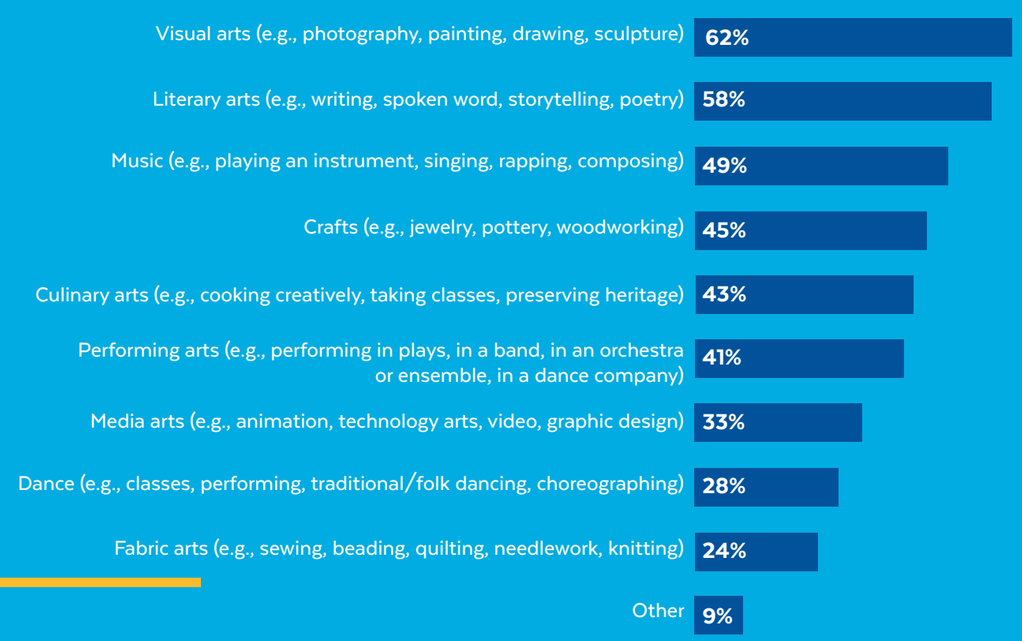
Art and Cultural Experiences Throughout the County are a Priority.

- 73% attend events in the City of Orlando most often, followed by Winter Park at 11%.
- Access to offerings is a priority.
- Where people participate depends primarily on ease of access, area amenities/safety/vibrancy, and feelings of community connection.
- Schedules and inconvenient locations are the third highest barrier to participation, behind lack of awareness and cost
- 83% of respondents want more information about arts and cultural events/happenings.

People PARTICIPATE in The City of Orlando and Orange County.

- 90% attend events within Orange County, 70% in the community in which they live and 20% in another community in Orange County.
- The most popular personal creative activities are centered around visual arts (62%), literary arts (58%), and music (49%).

Personal Participation



Resident Priorities.

70%	Helping local arts and creative businesses grow and do well
67%	Providing dedicated funding for the arts
53%	Developing more creative spaces/venues
49%	Supporting local artists so they stay in the county
40%	Enhancing and diversifying arts/creative events across county

Community Voices of Canvas

"Investing in the arts is an investment in the future of our young people and community."

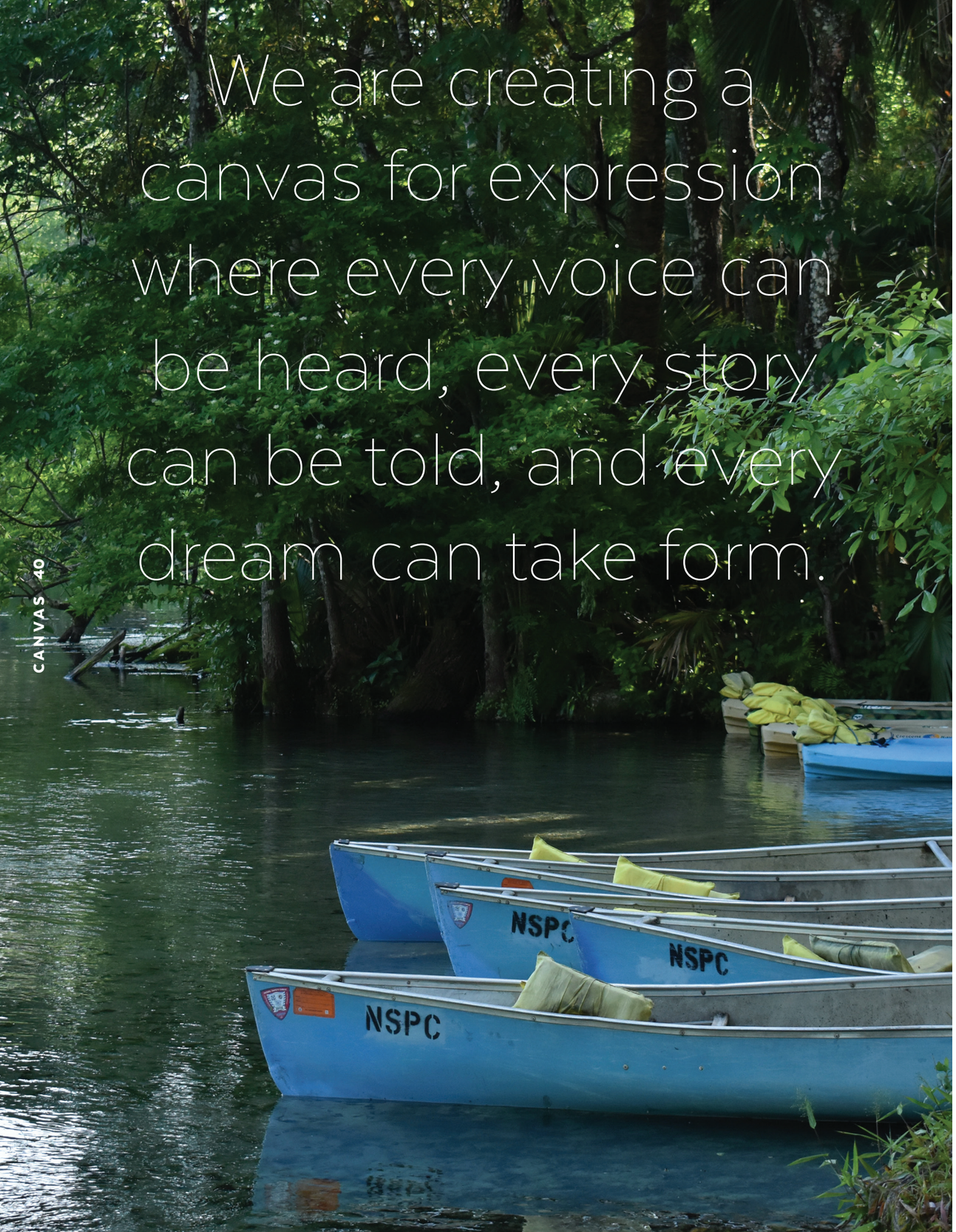
"The arts define a community and give it soul."

"Orlando is ready to be a powerful global identity that engages people all over the world."

"We want more opportunities amplifying creative voices and providing opportunities throughout the county."

"Orange County should be affordable for artists and provide the opportunity for creatives to stay."

"Position us as a global cultural destination and redefine our identity as a forward-thinking city where creativity and culture thrive."



Opportunities and Challenges Highlights

The extensive research and community engagement conducted for CANVAS identified numerous opportunities and challenges that shape the city and county cultural landscape. These findings were evaluated based on community support, feasibility, and potential effectiveness, with the most promising opportunities integrated into the plan's goals and strategies. The following section highlights key opportunities that emerged from the planning process, followed by an examination of the primary challenges that must be addressed to achieve the plan vision.

Opportunities

The planning process revealed significant opportunities across multiple areas, from leveraging strong community support for the arts to capitalizing on the county's and city's unique position as both a tourism destination and growing metropolitan area. The population growth, increasing diversity of residents, and concentration of creative talent provide a foundation for expanding and enhancing cultural offerings throughout the county. Specific opportunities include:

Community Values and Participation: The essential ingredients for cultural development success already exist as demonstrated by the survey and engagement results. This includes widespread community support, active participation, and strong local engagement. However, the geographic concentration of activities and resources points to untapped potential throughout the City of Orlando and Orange county. The plan leverages this participation while addressing geographic inequities to ensure all communities have access to arts and cultural opportunities.

The following survey findings confirm that residents are ready for expanded cultural opportunities and willing to support them financially, creating support for strategic investment that builds upon current strengths while extending cultural access to underserved areas. The challenge is not generating interest in arts and culture but rather ensuring access and diverse programming that reflects the full spectrum of all communities.

- Strong Community Support: 88% of survey respondents view arts and creative learning as essential to their families and communities, with 84% favoring increased local government funding for arts and culture. This demonstrates broad-based recognition of the value of creative expression across the county.
- Active Participation: 73% of residents participate in arts and cultural activities frequently or occasionally (more than 6 times a year), with visual arts (62%), literary arts (58%), and music (49%) being the most popular creative activities. The highest-attended events include performing arts events (57%), visual arts fairs/festivals (46%), food/wine/craft beer events (45%), and music/arts events at non-traditional venues (44%).
- Geographic Concentration: 73% of cultural events attended are in the City of Orlando, followed by Winter Park (11%), revealing significant clustering of cultural activities in specific areas. Popular cultural hubs include Loch Haven Park, downtown Orlando (including Lake Eola Park), Winter Park, and the Mills/Milk District.
- Community Connections: Many residents participate in arts activities close to home (70% attend in their own communities) and many are motivated by social opportunities close to home, community pride, and wanting to support local artists and organizations.

Placemaking and Creative Corridors

CANVAS engagement sparked far-reaching discussions about the public realm, exploring how both public and private spaces—including sidewalks, plazas, parks, and formal or informal gathering spaces—could be thoughtfully shaped and activated through creative placemaking. Community feedback consistently emphasized that these spaces should be imbued with qualities of comfort, interest, and attractiveness. Above all, they should embody the tradition of hospitality, meeting the needs of all users regardless of age, gender, race, physical abilities or psychosocial factors.

Participating architects and designers underscored the importance of framing these spaces with aesthetic, thoughtfully designed buildings that integrate art into their design, enhancing the public realm and creating "third places" where community life can flourish. These gathering spaces serve as vital connectors between home and work, fostering human connection.

City of Orlando Main Street Program

The planning process explored the twelve City of Orlando Main Street Districts, which are part of the national Main Street America program. The local program is designed to develop distinct commercial neighborhood identities, which celebrate local arts and culture, while promoting

business development through marketing and community engagement. The local program also includes Orlando-specific technical assistance, education, and support for art festivals, murals, and 3-D art installations. Integrating in historic preservation as part of the Main Street programming, as prioritized in the City Main Street program, identifies potential opportunities for older, established communities in Orange County, such as Eatonville and Pine Hills, which could potentially benefit from the Main Street model.

Parks: City of Orlando Loch Haven Cultural Park, Lake Lucerne Park, Orange County Fort Christmas Historic Park, and Other Facilities

The City's and County's vast parks and recreational systems were identified as key opportunities, that, if strategically activated, could effectively promote neighborhood accessible arts and cultural opportunities. For instance, not dissimilar from Orange County's approach, the City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Department has recreational and parks programming that meets the specific needs of their service neighborhoods. The City Parks system currently hosts numerous performing arts activities, with frequently used performance stages at multiple parks, including the Lake Eola Amphitheatre, the pavilion at Lorna Doone Park, the Della Phillips Pavilion at The Grove, as well as a mobile stage that travels to parks throughout the City to host performances at events. The City also has a tradition of hosting art installations within its Parks system, such as the See Art collection at Lake Eola Park, the Labyrinth at the Colonialtown Square and the Luminaries, with more installations planned at various parks.

Loch Haven Cultural Park: The 45-acre Loch Haven Cultural Park, the northern anchor of the Cultural Corridor, serves as Central Florida's premier cultural park. Situated between three magnificant lakes including Lake Formosa, the park is accessible by North Mills Avenue (17-92) and Princeton Street. Neighboring Advent Health to the east, it is connected to older established neighborhoods to the north and south along the Orlando Urban Trail. The park is home to a number of amenities, including the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, Orlando Science Center, Orlando Family Stage, Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando Fire Museum, Mennello Museum of American Art, and Orlando Ballet. The area is also included in the Ivanhoe Village Main Street District.

A beautiful and heavily canopied park, featuring the Mayor Tree, a 200+ year old live oak, the area is connected by sinuous footpaths to informal picnic areas, sculpture gardens, and murals as well as spaces for outdoor art fairs.

Loch Haven Cultural Park has evolved over time with buildings of varying eras and condition, and faces issues that limit its full potential as a public amenity. The park presents as an opportunity, meriting a formal planning process to optimize form and function that will showcase arts and culture. This area is also addressed in the downtown recommendations section, focusing on improving micro-mobility connectivity to Orlando neighborhoods.

Fort Christmas Historic Park: The rural eastern part of Orange County presents unique opportunities for heritage-based cultural programming that connects residents to the region's agricultural and pioneer history. Fort Christmas Historic Park, with its collection of historic buildings and educational programs, could serve as an anchor for expanded cultural activities that bridge historical interpretation with contemporary artistic expression. There is potential to develop this site as a gathering place for arts events, seasonal festivals, and community celebrations that serve the underrepresented eastern communities of the county while meeting infrastructure and programming needs.

In addition to parks, several Orange County communities as well as the University of Central Florida were identified as arts and culture opportunities, with potential to serve as models for other communities throughout the county.

Winter Park: Winter Park has established itself as a premier cultural destination with the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum, Rollins College Museum of Art, Winter Park Playhouse, and the renowned Winter Park Sidewalk Art Festival. The city's walkable downtown, retail environment, and strong tourism draw provide a unique platform for cultural programming that serves both residents and visitors. There is potential to expand this success through increased collaboration between cultural institutions, support for local artists and creative businesses, and programming that bridges the established arts scene with broader engagement.

Ocoee: The city's significant investment in the Fifty West redevelopment district creates opportunities to integrate arts and culture as economic development tools. There is potential to build upon the existing music festival success to develop year-round cultural programming that supports both resident quality of life and the city's economic development goals.

Maitland: Maitland's unique position as a rail-accessible community with existing cultural institutions—including the Holocaust Museum and Art and History Museums—presents opportunities to develop a walkable cultural district that could serve as a model for transit-oriented cultural development. While current rail ridership is limited, there is potential to create compelling cultural destinations and programming that could attract visitors via public transit while serving the local community's cultural needs.

University of Central Florida (UCF) Main and Satellite Campus Cultural Hubs: The Alafaya Trail area main university campus, with its population of approximately 61,818 (2024) young professionals and students, represents a significant opportunity to engage emerging adults in cultural programming while leveraging the University's academic and creative resources. The campus and community could build more popular "town-gown" partnerships that benefit both students and residents. There are also many arts and cultural opportunities for its satellite campuses, including the Downtown Orlando UCF/Valencia campus in Creative Village, a dynamic innovation district, to showcase a rotating circuit of arts and culture activations, by both students and professionals. Outreach to other institutions could be included, such as Valencia College, Orange County Public Schools (OCPS), Orlando Vo-Tech, and performing arts magnet high schools.

Cultural Tourism and Cross-Sector Collaborations

Cultural Tourism Potential: With over 75 million annual tourists, the City of Orlando and Orange County represent a significant untapped market for arts and cultural experiences that extend far beyond theme parks. United Arts has recently launched a comprehensive cultural tourism initiative with a 30-member stakeholder committee and two full-time staff focused on both leisure tourism and convention/meeting planners. This strategic effort positions the county to capture visitors seeking authentic, enriching experiences that complement traditional attractions.

Cross-Sector Collaboration: Emerging partnerships between arts and healthcare, faith communities, education, and social services demonstrate the expanding impact potential of arts and culture beyond traditional venues. The faith community particularly noted significant opportunities for resource sharing, with many religious facilities possessing underutilized spaces ideal for arts activities, performances, and community gatherings. These collaborations—from Orlando Ballet's work with Victims Service Center to interfaith cultural events—show promise for creating new models of community engagement that leverage existing infrastructure while expanding access to underserved populations. Other groups that should be included in resource sharing in arts and culture building are nonprofits that target certain geographies with a focus on economic development and best practices, such as the Orlando Economic Partnership (OEP) and the Downtown Orlando Partnership (DOP), which recognize economic development, quality of life, and creative placemaking through community-driven recognition, such as the coveted James B. Greene and Golden Brick awards. There is opportunity to pursue notable, cross-sector recognition beyond traditional arts and culture awards, targeting regional, national, and international honors that acknowledge interdisciplinary impact and community impact.

Creative Industry Growth: The unique position as home to major theme parks and entertainment companies creates an ecosystem of creative talent that remains largely untapped by the broader arts community. This concentration includes many professional artists, designers, performers, technicians, and creative professionals. The presence of respected educational institutions with strong arts programs adds another layer to this creative ecosystem, continuously developing emerging talent. The opportunities for cross-pollination between commercial and nonprofit creative sectors are substantial yet underexplored. Theme park artists often seek outlets for personal creative expression beyond their commercial work, while nonprofit organizations could benefit from the technical expertise, production values, and audience development strategies refined in commercial entertainment settings. Professional development programs, mentorship initiatives, and collaborative projects could bridge these sectors, creating pathways for commercial artists to contribute to community-based cultural initiatives while nonprofit organizations gain access to advanced technical skills and industry best practices. This creative industry integration also presents opportunities for innovation in audience engagement, leveraging the entertainment industry's sophisticated understanding of visitor experience and storytelling to enhance traditional arts programming. As noted in the opportunity section, Creative Village (CVD), a

newer innovation district in the heart of downtown Orlando, and which includes a shared UCF/Valencia campus, is home to a creative technology hub anchored by the Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy (FIEA). The academy is UCF's globally ranked Master of Science program in Interactive Entertainment. Also at CVD is Valencia College's 50,000 sq. ft. Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management Program, teaching key elements of culinary creativity and craftsmanship.

Challenges

The research identified substantial challenges that have hindered the full realization of the city's and county's cultural potential. These range from structural issues in governance and funding to functional barriers affecting access and participation. Addressing these challenges is essential for implementing the vision outlined in CANVAS and ensuring that arts and culture truly serve all communities throughout Orange County. Specific challenges include:

Arts and Cultural Organizations

Space Issues: Cultural organizations struggle with a lack of affordable performance, rehearsal, education, and office spaces. Existing major venues are often too expensive for smaller organizations.

County and City Arts Leadership and Administration: The current partnership between the county, city, United Arts, and other entities has evolved organically over time, creating opportunities to clarify roles and enhance coordination for greater collective impact.

Funding Limitations: Arts organizations face challenges with overreliance on the same corporate donors, recent state funding cuts and limited individual donor bases. Crisis-oriented rather than aspirational fundraising approaches and a focus on new projects rather than operational sustainability further complicate financial stability.

Safety and Political Climate Concerns: Some organizations have expressed perceived concerns about community tensions, with a few reporting additional security considerations and uncertainty about programming choices that may affect their operations and planning decisions.

Public Art

While both the City of Orlando and the County Public Art Programs follow national best practices, their ongoing efforts and collections are at risk due to a lack of structure, funding, and staffing.

- The public art landscape in The City of Orlando and Orange County faces issues with governance structures which may affect properly positioning public art within city priorities.

- The City of Orlando's public art program, currently housed under Orlando Venues, would benefit from enhanced staffing and clearer organizational structure. The Public Art Ordinance should be updated and a comprehensive public art plan to guide future development is recommended. The Public Art Board's authority and member qualifications could be clarified to strengthen decision making processes. With current maintenance funding at $20,000 annually and no dedicated fund for in-lieu fees collected from developments, sustainable funding mechanisms should be established that better support the program's growth and maintenance needs.

- The Orange County Public Art Program is operating with a public art plan created in 1989 and has limited staff. While the percent for art ordinance has resulted in some high-quality installations, it is not applied consistently or as intended in the ordinance.

Artist and Creative Sector

Workspace and Housing Affordability: Affordable work/living spaces emerged as the top priority for both professional and aspiring artists, followed by exhibition/performance opportunities. The rising cost of housing in creative districts is compelling artists to leave their community where they actually desire to live and work , contributing to a potential "artistic brain drain" similar to other growing metropolitan areas.

Professional Development Needs: Beyond affordable space, artists also prioritized exhibition/performance opportunities (ranked #2), networking with other artists (#3), and professional development assistance (#4) as crucial needs, indicating demand for a more robust support system for creative careers.

Access and Inclusion

Awareness Gaps: 48% of respondents cite lack of awareness as their primary barrier to participation, with this issue particularly pronounced among residents who have lived in the area for less than 10 years (57%) and those under age 45 (71% for ages 24 and younger, 61% for ages 25-34). This suggests significant opportunities to improve communications and outreach, especially to newer residents and younger audiences.

Cultural Representation: Only 53% of respondents feel their culture is well-represented in arts and cultural activities in their local area, indicating opportunities for greater cultural inclusion.

Accessibility and Geographic Disparities: Most participants in the planning process advocate for more equitable distribution of resources, programming, and venues throughout the county, particularly in eastern and rural areas. Long term transportation barriers have particularly impacted communities outside downtown Orlando, where 38% of respondents cited inconvenient locations as an issue compared to 33% of Orlando residents. Transit, while accessible, was recognized as a challenge due to long head-ways, constrained routes requiring frequent transfers, and restricted operating hours often preventing practical ridership for art and cultural events.

In the past, there was abundant free parking throughout downtown Orlando. This has changed over the last decade where most spots now are metered, restricting on-street parking to two to three hours. While there are many downtown public parking garages, all have fees, for even the shortest stays. Some participants indicated that they don't park at garages since they had no way of knowing if they were full or not. The app-accessible CRA supported Ride DTO program has been developed to address some of these perceived parking and transportation challenges through low-cost door-to-door service, but is limited to the CRA footprint, serving primarily downtown residents and workers. The parking landscape further contributes to arts accessibility challenges.

The Plan

How To Use This Plan as a Living Document

The goals, strategies, and actions outlined in CANVAS are grounded in the comprehensive research and analysis conducted throughout the planning process and presented in the findings section. The insights derived from this extensive research effort informed the development of the goals, strategies, and actions presented in this plan. This plan is designed to serve as a roadmap for arts and culture over the next 10 years.

Goals

The six goals represent the desired future state that CANVAS aims to achieve. They are broad, overarching statements that provide direction and focus for the strategies and actions.

Strategies

The strategies are the approaches or methods to achieve the goals. They are more specific and actionable than the goals, and they outline the general paths or means for accomplishing the desired outcomes.

Actions

The actions are specific initiatives, projects, or tasks that will be undertaken during implementation. They are the concrete steps or activities to be carried out by city and county departments, and community partners.

Annual Implementation Plans

Using this plan as a comprehensive framework, developing annual implementation plans will be the next step in the process, with City and County staff taking the lead. The annual implementation plans will specify the action steps required to accomplish the goals and strategies for a 12-month period. By using annual plans, City and County staff can effectively work toward achieving the plan goals.

Adapting the Plan to Local Priorities

CANVAS Cultural Plan serves as a comprehensive roadmap for arts and cultural development for the City of Orlando and Orange County, offering a menu of strategic goals and implementation options rather than a rigid mandate. While CANVAS presents an interconnected vision with six primary goals, both the City and County retain full autonomy to select which strategies align with their unique priorities, budgets, and community needs. Some goals may be implemented jointly through continued collaboration, while others may be pursued independently based on each jurisdiction's capacity and focus areas. The plan recognizes that successful cultural development requires flexibility and local ownership, allowing both entities to adapt the recommendations to their specific circumstances while contributing to the broader vision of elevating arts and culture.

Plan Vision

VISION STATEMENT

The City of Orlando and Orange County are a place where arts and culture thrive through genuine human connection. Our cultural identity emerges from both creative expression and how we embrace one another with hospitality and inclusion.

Our distinctive cultural landscape spans downtown performance venues to neighborhood cultural hubs, weaving together historical traditions and bold innovations reflecting our community's spirit.

Culture flows through our daily lives—in welcoming gestures, intergenerational storytelling, and shared discoveries. Through diverse artistic expressions, we honor our unique heritages and forge powerful connections between communities.

We create cultural experiences that welcome all, celebrate our full spectrum of identities, and foster belonging. Our thriving cultural ecosystem strengthens our economy, enriches lives, and builds meaningful bonds.

Together, we elevate Central Florida arts and culture to new heights—embracing creativity, championing innovation, and harnessing the transformative power of human connection to shape a vibrant, exceptional community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Creative Excellence & Innovation

- Embrace our unique regional identity while cultivating artistic innovation and excellence
- Support artists at all career stages with spaces, development opportunities, and economic pathways
- Promote cross-sector collaboration between arts, technology, tourism, and business
- Build the county's reputation as a creative epicenter that extends beyond tourism

Cultural Access & Equity

- Ensure arts and cultural experiences are accessible to all residents regardless of geography, income, or background
- Distribute cultural resources equitably across all communities within the county
- Honor and celebrate the diverse cultural identities that make up The City of Orlando and Orange County
- Remove barriers to participation including cost, transportation, language, and awareness

Community Connection & Placemaking

- Integrate arts into everyday spaces and strengthen community identities
- Connect cultural assets through physical and programmatic corridors
- Enhance public spaces through creative design and public art
- Foster a sense of belonging and human connection through shared cultural experiences

Sustainable Growth & Impact

- Develop diversified, reliable funding streams for arts and culture
- Strengthen governance structures and cross-jurisdictional collaboration
- Measure and communicate the social and economic impacts of arts investment
- Build resilient organizations and infrastructure that can adapt to changing conditions

Plan Goals

At its core, CANVAS recognizes that the City of Orlando and Orange County's true strength lies in the intersection of artistic excellence, community connection, and strategic investment. The plan's goals reflect this understanding by focusing on both infrastructure development and human-centered approaches to cultural growth.

By supporting artists' collective action and networking, we acknowledge the power of creative collaboration to generate new opportunities and strengthen the county's artistic foundation.

By investing in artistic innovation and risk-taking, we aspire for The City of Orlando and Orange County to be a creative center that can gain national and international recognition.

By establishing The City of Orlando and Orange County as a national leader in arts and health, our vision lies in harnessing creative expression in healthcare settings.

We recognize the need for equitable access to cultural experiences by proposing the development of cultural centers throughout the county, ensuring that arts and culture become accessible neighborhood assets rather than concentrated downtown amenities.

Complementing this approach, the creation of distinctive cultural corridors will physically and programmatically connect communities, weaving creativity into the daily life of county residents.

Together, these goals and initiatives form an ambitious but achievable roadmap for our community.

GOAL 1
Position The City of Orlando and Orange County as a Global Creative Leader

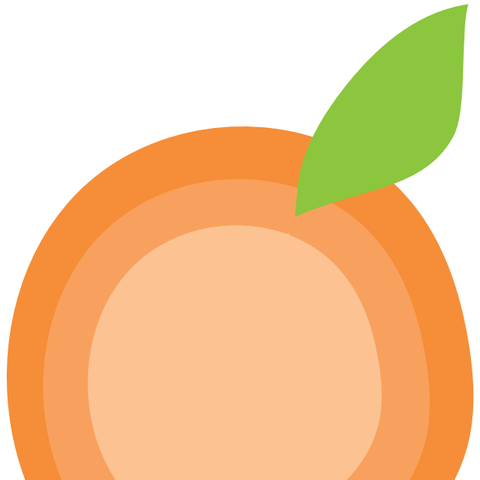
GOAL 2
Ensure Arts Access for All Communities

GOAL 3
Catalyze Artists and the Creative Workforce

GOAL 4
Strengthen Creative Placemaking and Public Art

GOAL 5
Build Cultural Sector Resilience

GOAL 6
Elevate the Arts as a Civic Partner



Goal 1: Position The City of Orlando and Orange County as a Global Creative Leader

Our creative community is high-achieving and under-recognized. Embracing our unique creative identity and investing in and promoting our creative work demonstrates our commitment to leadership, elevating the perception of our creative community and its place on the global stage. For us, creative excellence extends to artistic innovation as well as cultural inclusion and belonging.

1.1 **Support Innovation**: Strategically invest in artistic innovation and groundbreaking business models to cultivate a distinctive local creative ecosystem that attracts international recognition for artistic excellence and innovation.
- 1.1.1 Support targeted research and development funding for artistic experiments and leading-edge practices in audience development and customer relationships.
- 1.1.2 Pioneer artistic ventures and entrepreneurial approaches to arts sustainability.
- 1.1.3 Enhance collective audience development by becoming a Capacity-Building, Research, or Greenhouse Partner in leading edge communities of practice that are reimagining customer relationships (e.g., WolfBrown's Loyalty Labs).
- 1.1.4 Repurpose the Blockbuster and Special Events fund to support this innovation strategy. Formalize the existing practice of setting aside TDT revenues greater than estimated amounts into that fund and revise the criteria to prioritize innovation in addition to tourism draw. Focus on local artistic product.

1.2 **Rally Artistic Leadership**: Facilitate and connect artistic leaders periodically to ideate locally generated projects with the potential to advance the region's creative brand identity.
- 1.2.1 Identify a convener of the group leaders and invite participation.
- 1.2.2 Assist with ideating projects for innovation funding and specific goals for the convenings. (See 1.1 Support Innovation, above). Ideas and projects can be collaborations or simply coordinated.

1.3 **Elevate Cultural Identity**: Build the creative and cultural brand of the region through a combination of exceptional new creative products, expanded promotions, and opportunities for artists in the tourism sector.
- 1.3.1 Work regularly with tourism stakeholders to support Visit Orlando's and The Orlando Economic Partnership's *Unbelievably REAL* and *America's Most Surprising Arts Scene* cultural tourism initiative brand (see 5.8 Build Arts and Cultural Organizations' Capacity for Tourism, below) including artistic opportunities to transform convention spaces through installations, performances, and interactive elements that create memorable, Instagram-worthy moments that in turn can elevate the region's profile as a cultural destination.
- 1.3.2 Build on United Arts' existing marketing assets, platforms, programs, and campaigns to improve in-market (residents') awareness of cultural opportunities. Promote the Local Wanderer program (see 2.3 Expand the Culture Pass Program, below).
- 1.3.3 Coordinate arts focused marketing related activities of the City and the County.
- 1.3.4 Examine and coordinate City of Orlando funding relative to Orange County's financial support of external arts marketing programs.
- 1.3.5 Seek to host major arts-related conferences, such as for artistic disciplines, creative networks, and leading-edge cultural product producers.

Goal 2: Ensure Arts Access for All Communities

We believe our arts belong to everyone, and that arts and culture lift up all communities. They reflect our diversity and provide a sense of belonging. While we are blessed with many cultural organizations and venues, there are still areas of the county with less assets facing specific barriers of cost, awareness, transportation, language, and more. Cultural opportunities tend to be concentrated in the City of Orlando and areas with higher levels of education and income. New opportunities and investments are needed to provide true access for and by all.

2.1 **Develop Community Cultural Centers**: Expand access to arts venues and programs in areas of the county where they are lacking, including rural and urban areas, by developing new and/or adaptively reused facilities, drawing on the success of facilities such as the Orange County Multi-Cultural Center.
- 2.1.1 Develop a facilities plan for community cultural centers.
- 2.1.2 Prioritize community cultural center projects for ARC grant TDT funding.

88% of survey respondents view arts and creative learning as essential to their families and communities. CANVAS transforms this community desire into concrete action, ensuring arts and culture enhance daily life throughout Orange County.

2.2 Develop Arts Venues in Libraries and Recreation Centers: Develop a plan to include arts spaces and venues within existing and new libraries and recreation centers. Needs include small performing spaces, makers' spaces, arts classrooms, gallery spaces, and studios.

2.2.1 Collaborate with Orange County Libraries in planning the inclusion of arts venues in library planning and renovation/expansion.

2.2.2 Collaborate with Orange County Parks and Recreation and County Community and Family Services in planning the inclusion of arts venues in parks planning and renovation/expansion. Work with The City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Department to identify City-focused opportunities.

2.2.3 Prioritize arts venues in libraries, recreation centers, and parks for ARC grant TDT funding.

2.3 Expand the Culture Pass Program: Research and develop a program providing free admission, tuition, and access to arts and cultural organizations, programs, events, and classes.

2.3.1 Build on the existing Local Wanderer program of the Orange County Library System and United Arts' Arts Card. Work with stakeholders and the community to identify, understand, and fill gaps in access, such as cost, awareness, language, and transportation.

2.4 Support Expansion of Lifelong Arts Learning: Provide increased arts learning and participation opportunities for people at all stages of life and levels of achievement.

2.4.1 Assure that student, informal, and amateur arts learning and participation are eligible for support.

2.4.2 Support sharing and celebrations of student, informal, and amateur arts.

2.4.3 Engage with Orange County Public Schools to expand Orange County Public Schools Arts in Education Fund, administered by United Arts.

2.5 Support Teaching Artists: Increase convening to support expanded work opportunities, funding, and technical assistance for teaching artists to work in community settings – schools, community and recreation centers, parks, hospitals, social service organizations, etc.

2.5.1 Develop a teaching artists peer network to identify and respond to needs in the field.

Cross-reference 3.1 Strengthen the Infrastructure for Individual Artists.

Cross-reference 3.2 Catalyze Artists' Collective Action.

2.6 Assist Municipalities to Develop Their Arts: Identify municipalities in Orange County with an interest in arts development and develop a cohort that meets periodically to provide information, referrals, and mutual support.

2.6.1 Develop shared resources, such as toolkit for public art or for grant-making.

2.6.2 Develop a cohort of Main Street organizations to function alongside—or as part of—the municipal cohort.

2.7 Support Community-initiated Arts Activities: Expand funding and promotion of community-initiated arts and cultural projects and programs. Target resources to areas and communities with less access.

2.7.1 Support technical assistance to groups seeking to develop a project.

2.7.2 Collaborate with the Orange County Libraries, County Community and Family Services and Parks and Recreation to identity opportunities to provide community-initiated programming. A similar approach should be explored by the City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation as part of their strategic planning.

2.7.3 Explore a partnership with Orange County Neighborhood Services to utilize or adapt Neighborhood Grants for this purpose.

2.7.4 Develop a community-initiated public art program as part the updated public art plans recommended for the County (4.11) and City (4.7).

Goal 3: Catalyze Artists and the Creative Workforce

Our artists and creatives form the foundation of the creative sector. We are numerous and diverse, ranging from fine artists to concert performing artists, to digital creators, designers, educators, cultural practitioners, arts managers, and many more. Our community is a vast and underutilized resource seeking increased opportunity to work, collaborate, and lead.

3.1 Strengthen the Infrastructure for Individual Artists: Expand funding and professional development services for individual artists, to acknowledge artists' essential role in the arts ecosystem and better enable them to pursue their work, build their skills, forge their careers, and contribute to the community. Consider partnerships with outside agencies to implement these actions.

3.1.1 Provide professional practices (business or career) training geared to artists and creatives or, where practical, provide access to existing training and services. Inventory needs and available resources should inform and target services.

3.1.2 Building on existing funding categories for artists, expand funding targeted to individual artists of all disciplines, including project funding and capacity-building categories.

3.1.3 Work with community organizations to identify work opportunities to engage and hire area artists, building on initiatives such as DTO Live!

3.1.4 Develop an artists' mentorship program pairing master with emerging artists.

3.1.5 Develop an apprenticeship program for artists and creatives to learn and work in a professional setting, such as a studio, arts organization, or creative business.

3.2 Catalyze Artists' Collective Action: Enhance existing artists networks and support their ideas for collective actions such as artistic collaborations, developing artist marketplaces, incubator programs, and meeting other artist needs.

3.2.1 Develop a funding category designed for artists networks, collaboratives, or cooperatives to realize collective action projects.

3.2.2 Expand the existing directory of available artists, arts organizations, and other resources to serve as a hub connecting them with work opportunities in the community. Promote the directory to libraries, recreation and community centers, social service nonprofits, cities, tourism stakeholders (e.g., conventions), and other potential program sponsors.

3.23 Facilitate meaningful connections among the City of Orlando and Orange County's creative community through active networking and developing a dynamic, in-person event that prioritizes relationships, collaborations, and business opportunities (e.g., an annual creators conference).

CANVAS charts a 10-year path toward building the infrastructure, securing funding, and creating opportunities that will retain artists and creatives and draw new talent to the City of Orlando and Orange County.

3.3 **Provide Small Business Supports**: Provide small business supports – training, technical assistance, start-up assistance, loans, and grants – adapted to the needs of the creative sector.

3.3.1 Collaborate with Orlando Economic Partnership, National Entrepreneur Center, and area chambers of commerce to identify available small business supports and design adaptations for creative sector needs.

3.3.2 Educate artist-owned businesses about existing business development programs at the City of Orlando and at Orange County and supporting nonprofits, that provide one on one counselling, such as Career Source.

3.4 **Build Markets for Artists**: Identify and support opportunities to create marketplaces for artists – markets, fairs, pop-ups, gigs, networking – and to allow artists to develop their own marketplace concepts.

3.4.1 Create a funding category to provide seed funding for artists' marketplaces (see 3.2 Catalyze Artists' Collective Action, above). Consider making such proposals eligible within United Arts' Community Vibrancy grants program.

3.4.2 Collaborate with the municipalities' cohort and the Main Street organizations to identify and co-sponsor artists' marketplace proposals (see 2.6 Assist Municipalities to Develop Their Arts, above).

3.5 **Support Artists in Civic Leadership Positions**: Expand and facilitate the participation of artists in civic leadership.

3.5.1 Create guidelines and a structure for municipal government and community organizations to include artists in leadership roles, such as urban planning, community development, and other policy and planning positions.

3.5.2 Develop an artist-in-residence or "creative strategist" program placing artists within municipal government to bring their creative perspectives and problem-solving to the work of government departments, offices, and programs. (Example: County of Los Angeles Creative Strategist Program).

Cross Reference 2.5 Support Teaching Artists.

Goal 4: Strengthen Creative Placemaking and Public Art

We value great urban experiences and view creative placemaking as essential to memorable gathering spaces. We seek to amplify the use of urban design, public art, and live arts activities in vitalizing public spaces.

Effective, creative placemaking is best seen as a symbiotic relationship between the built form and programming that encourages exploration. Creative placemaking should center urban design and land development principles on the creation of place that incorporates considerations of the five senses, ranging from visual to auditory.

In addition to permanent locations for outdoor art and performing space, placemaking should contribute positively to local branding, identity, and be memorable, or capable of creating memories, using integrated design approaches. These elements include usage of indoor and outdoor programmable space that is fun, flexible, and well designed; thereby, promoting connectivity between people, places, and uses. Possible approaches include exploring and building community identity, intuitive wayfinding, 24/7 safety enhancements, and integrated shade and nature-centric approaches designed for people of all ages and abilities.

To better curate public realm art, and treat it more like an outdoor gallery, there should be well-defined approaches addressing various forms of creativity from murals to 3-D installations. This effort could be linked with possible funding which supports practices. In particular, there should be small area rules, programs and plans, identifying optimal spaces and activations to avoid visual and physical clutter and allowing communities to plan ahead. This all should be further supported by sustainable operations and maintenance plans. Private sponsorship and abutting property owner engagement could also be pursued, as appropriate.

Orlando has identified several key areas for creative placemaking initiatives. The city's Main Streets Program reflects many design principles and best practices reflected in specially planned communities such as Lake Nona and Baldwin Park. In addition, a number of the Main Street districts such as SoDo, Mills 50, the Milk District and Thornton Park have successfully implemented innovative creative practices such as animated light shows, whimsical wayfinding, and decorative crosswalks, all demonstrating what can be done with limited resources and volunteer support. Future revitalization of Loch Haven Cultural Park also represents prime opportunities for creative placemaking. Outside of Orlando, Pine Hills wants to pursue revitalization of its public spaces, more public art, and development of a cultural trail. Apopka wants to focus placemaking efforts on its downtown core.

4.1 **Enhance Zoning and Development**: Use planning strategies within the Downtown CRA and comparable County Community Redevelopment Agencies (CRAs) to incentivize the integration of arts, culture, and community spaces into new developments, fostering a vibrant, mixed-use environment that enhances the cultural fabric of the community.

4.1.1 Zoning Incentives: Consider incentive zoning within Cultural Arts Corridors, Special Districts, and/or CRAs to encourage developers to integrate arts, cultural, and community spaces into new developments. This may include offering increased building height allowances, reduced Impervious Surface Ratios (ISR), waived Floor Area (FAR) minimums, reduced parking requirements, or expedited permitting for projects with designated spaces for art galleries, performance venues, community centers, or creative workspaces.

4.1.2 Overlay Zones: Consider the implementation of cultural overlay zones within Cultural Arts Corridors, Special Districts, and/or CRAs to ensure new developments contribute to the artistic and cultural identity of the area. The overlay zone would impose requirements that promote arts-related uses, such as integrating public art installations, designated cultural spaces, or architectural elements that reflect the community's cultural heritage.

4.1.3 Mixed-Use Zoning: Promote mixed use zoning regulations that encourage a blend of retail, residential, and cultural spaces in new developments within Cultural Arts Corridors, Special Districts, and/or CRAs. Special attention should be given to ensuring that the scale and design of these mixed-use developments align with the character and identity of the surrounding neighborhood.

4.1.4 Housing and Live-Work Opportunities: Work with nonprofit or arts-friendly developers on affordable artist housing and live/work opportunities. Housing affordability and proximity to workspaces, including considerations of transportation connectivity are priority issues for artists and creatives. Live-Work regulations geared towards the artist community can be created as subsets of existing regulations within the County, ranging from Artisanal Industrial to vertically or horizontally integrated mix use.

4.1.5 Adaptive Reuse Ordinance: Consider a simplified set of building codes and streamlined review processes specifically tailored to adaptive reuse projects in the arts sector.

4.1.6 Form-based zoning approach: Support approaches that recognize the physical form and relationship of the building to its surroundings over conventional land-use classifications, enabling greater flexibility in repurposing structures for arts and cultural uses.

4.1.7 Define and categorize adaptive reuse types for arts and cultural purposes, to outline specific criteria for projects that convert underutilized buildings into cultural or community spaces.

From the vibrant strokes of Mills 50's murals to the delicate details of Winter Park's galleries, every corner of Orange County contributes color to our living canvas.

4.1.8 Consider financial and procedural incentives: These may include expedited review, tax credits, grants, and low-interest loans, to support adaptive reuse projects focused on arts-based renovations.

4.1.9 Consider waiving or reducing non-essential parking requirements, setback regulations, and other building codes for adaptive reuse projects focused on arts and cultural uses.

4.1.10 Implement a streamlined review process for adaptive reuse projects, specifically for arts-related conversions.

4.1.11 Consider incentives for the preservation of significant architectural or historical elements in adaptive reuse projects, with encouragement to retain key heritage features to maintain cultural identity while accommodating modern arts functions.

4.2 Develop Transitionary Buffer Areas: Implement Transition Buffer Areas between entertainment and residential zones, incorporating sound mitigation strategies such as superior building standards, and sound barriers, as well as sound diminishing landscaping and green walls.

4.3 Design for Vibrant, Walkable Cultural Spaces: Foster vibrant, people-centered environments by promoting walkability, active frontages, and flexible outdoor gathering spaces.

4.3.1 Walkability and Street Activation: Consider wide shaded sidewalks, active street frontages, and micro-mobility-friendly infrastructure that incorporates considerations of visual, tactile, and auditory considerations in design for a diversity of users. These design elements can be considered for model festival streets that can be developed within various Main Streets and County downtowns.

4.3.2 Promote temporary or permanent comfortable, shaded outdoor seating, pop-up markets, and informal gathering spaces.

4.4 Utilize Flexible Regulations: Implement flexible noise mitigation policies and special event permits that accommodate temporary artistic and cultural expression to enhance the success of festivals and community events.

4.4.1 Extend Alcohol Permit Allowances for Special Events (outside of the City of Orlando) that would permit open carry and other alcohol allowances to the extent permissible by local ordinances and state statutes, for festivals and community arts events. Consider creating an open container program that can be utilized to help fund local initiatives. (Refer to the City of Tampa: a local proven practice.)

4.5 Align City of Orlando Public Art Program with National Best Practices

4.5.1 Create a unified approach to public art across city departments to maximize impact and efficiency.

4.5.1.1 Establish a Public Art Coordination Team with representatives from relevant offices, departments, and divisions (Venues, , Community Affairs, Families, Parks & Recreation, Transportation, Economic Development including Planning, and the DDB/CRA) that meets quarterly to align public art initiatives.

4.5.2 Update, through amendment, the Public Art Master Plan to include a number of key components such as a curatorial framework, artist selection guidelines, and sustainable operations or create a new stand-alone master plan encompassing these and other elements.

4.5.3 Update the Public Art Ordinance and and consider the following options:

4.5.3.1 Consider a private development requirement or voluntary contribution with specifics and thresholds for projects.

4.5.3.2 Establish clear in-lieu fees options addressing the public art fund for pooling in-lieu fees to fund City project.

4.5.3.3 Provide flexibility in the ordinance to allow for cultural spaces, temporary public art, and creative placemaking activations.

4.5.4 Strengthen the Public Art Board and clarify the authority and qualifications of board members, ensuring diverse representation and expertise in public art.

4.5.5 Compile a comprehensive inventory and assessment of the public art collection and establish regular procedures for maintenance and conservation.

4.5.6 Provide arts and culture technical assistance to Main Street Districts, which will promote best practices throughout the city.

4.6 Align Orange County Public Art Program with National Best Practices

4.6.1 Update the Orange County Public Art Plan to create a vision, curatorial frameworks, specific guidelines, conservation and maintenance policies, disaster preparedness policies, and other policies and guidelines required for a sustainable program.

4.6.1.1 Align the update with the City of Orlando Public Art Plan update to complement and support initiatives.

4.6.2 Update the Public Art Ordinance and align with the County Comprehensive Plan.

4.6.2.1 Ensure all departments adhere to the ordinance through annual audits of capital projects.

4.6.3 Evaluate staffing needs for an expansion of the public art program.

4.6.4 Compile a comprehensive inventory and assessment of the public art collection and establish regular procedures for maintenance and conversation.

4.6.5 Support municipality-specific initiatives and provide toolkits and resources to help smaller municipalities develop their own public art programs.

Cross-reference 2.7 Support Community-initiated Arts Activities.

Cross-reference 3.4 Build Markets for Artists.

Cross-reference 5.4 Support Affordable Creative Spaces.

Cross-reference: 5.5 Support Improved Transportation for the Arts.

Goal 5: Build Cultural Sector Resilience

Our cultural landscape is a rich tapestry of creators, spaces, and organizations that already make us unique. We acknowledge the ongoing challenges of sustainable funding, facility development, affordable spaces, and professional opportunities, and recognize that fulfilling our creative potential requires strategic investment in what we already have. CANVAS prioritizes building upon our existing assets, strengthening the foundation of our artist community, nonprofit arts organizations, and the cultural venues and gathering spaces that make our creative ecosystem unique.

5.1 Build Organizational Capacity: Enhance efforts to cultivate organizational capacity and resilience across the nonprofit arts and culture sector.

5.1.1 Provide technical assistance and other capacity building focused on small and midsized arts and cultural organizations. Activities could include strategic planning, training in arts management, board development, fundraising, marketing, branding, audience development, technology, and other relevant topics. Consider utilizing a cohort of organizations participating in capacity building to amplify the impact of the assistance.

5.1.2 Explore a continuation of the DeVos capacity-building cohort to extend the impact of the planning and training services.

5.1.3 Consider support for relationships pairing larger and smaller organizations to provide mutual support and learning.

5.2 Establish a Capacity-Building Fund: Develop a fund to provide a pathway of organizational development for organizations that face specific barriers in access to resources. Link funding to technical assistance and consider creating a cohort of organizations to support and reinforce one another's efforts.

5.2.1 Explore creation of a public/private fund for this purpose.

5.2.2 Partner with existing capacity-building funding and programs, such as Rally and Empowering Good, as appropriate.

5.3 Cultivate Corporate Arts Donors: Create a donor cultivation/development program that forges connections with corporations and businesses and introduces them to opportunities in the arts. Consider linking to a board training program that emphasizes diverse participation and placements.

5.3.1 Convene partners in this space, such as United Arts, Edyth Bush Institute, and DeVos Institute to explore creation of a corporate donor development program.

5.4 Support Affordable Creative Spaces: Develop a multi-faceted program to increase access to affordable creative space.

5.4.1 Develop a comprehensive online, countywide directory of available public and private spaces – theaters, studios, galleries, classrooms, community/recreation centers, churches, etc. Build on current resources including the County's cultural facilities map (Cultural Locations Explorer) and United Arts venues data.

5.4.2 Provide facilitation and technical assistance for cultural facilities and spaces projects.

5.4.3 Proactively identify, promote, facilitate, and invest in cultural facility and creative space projects.

5.4.4 Create new and repurpose existing capital funding programs for cultural facilities and creative spaces, including ARC capital grants – see Funding Options, below.

5.4.5 Facilitate the success of privately initiated creative space projects through permitting, other regulatory assistance, and incentive programs.

The sustainable Canvas - building a framework strong enough to support our grandest artistic visions.

5.4.6 Actively promote and facilitate the inclusion of creative spaces and uses within private development projects.

5.4.7 Develop a toolkit to assist and encourage developers to embed creative space in their development projects.

5.4.8 Explore partnerships with the Orange County Housing Authority, Orlando Housing Authority, Orange County Housing Finance Authority, and other housing agencies to develop affordable artists live/work projects.

5.4.9 Explore partnerships or incentives for private or nonprofit developers to create affordable artists live/workspaces (see Creative Placemaking recommendations 4.1.4).

5.4.10 Review and expand the existing Venue Subsidy Funding program to increase its utility in addressing the affordability challenge. Consider increasing the total amount of available funds, expanding accessibility for small- and mid-sized applicants, and increasing rehearsal as well as performance uses.

5.4.11 Support the expansion of United Arts Spark the Arts! Program providing artists with access to temporary studio and/or housing space.

5.5 Support Improved Transportation for the Arts: Improve transit options for arts venues and events to expand all-ages and abilities public access.

5.5.1 Assure arts representation in transportation planning efforts and policy discussions impacting transit access to the arts.

5.5.2 Support arts and cultural organizations and venues to align with and publicize available transit to their audiences.

5.6 Increase Operating Support for Nonprofit Arts and Cultural Organizations: Recognizing the essential role that general operating support plays in the capacity of the nonprofit arts sector to be stable, effective tourism partners and fulfill the brand promise of the destination, review and revise grant criteria to increase the total amounts and renewability of this form of funding.

5.6.1 Review grant eligibility and criteria to prioritize operating support.

5.6.2 Increase allocations to operating support program grant categories and consider multi-year awards that are contingent on the annual appropriations process.

Cultural Tourism

Connecting to and building upon the United Arts of Central Florida's Cultural Tourism Initiative will amplify the region's vast array of cultural assets for the benefit of residents as well as visitors. The initiative includes a direct goal to "support local artists and arts organizations." The program supports the entire cultural sector by aligning tourism goals with those in the cultural plan in many ways. It already manages and hosts a robust cultural calendar, local guides, and an artist directory. Tourism readiness exists on a spectrum; pathways are needed for smaller organizations to participate at appropriate levels while developing their own capacity for stronger marketing. The training program can benefit organizations as well as artists to prepare them for service provision and sales opportunities with convention and other tourism-related business.

5.7 Build Arts and Cultural Organizations' Capacity for Tourism: Build the capacity of smaller and emerging cultural providers to sustain and improve the quality, diversity, awareness, and brand of cultural experiences throughout the City of Orlando and Orange County.

5.7.1 Facilitate collective impact workshops for multiple organizations on branding for small and midsize organizations to create more tourism-ready organizations throughout the county and improve local brand relevance.

5.7.2 Encourage small and midsize organizations to participate in professional development programs (i.e. United Arts) aimed at making them "tourism-ready".

5.7.3 Coordinate collaborative marketing initiatives with United Arts that group smaller cultural organizations, spaces, and places within the context of authentic community experiences, thematic trails, or neighborhood character to create more diverse and compelling visitor experiences that complement large standalone institutions and anchor cultural attractions.

Cross-reference 2.1 Community Cultural Centers in Undeserved Areas and 2.2 Creative Spaces in Libraries and Recreation Centers

Goal 6: Elevate the Arts as a Strategic Civic Partner

Our arts and cultural sector represent a powerful yet underutilized catalyst for transformation across social services, healthcare, public transportation, safety initiatives, education, and other civic domains. While our creative community currently maintains valued partnerships within the healthcare and educational fields, it lacks the comprehensive infrastructure necessary to achieve its full potential for broader societal impact. Strategic investments in education, promotional outreach, sustainable funding models, and evidence-based research will unlock new avenues for collaboration, ultimately enriching community resilience and vitality through the unique perspective that arts and culture bring to civic challenges.

6.1 Establish the City of Orlando and Orange County as a National Leader in Arts in Healthcare: Expand recognition and support for arts in healthcare, building on current networks and partnerships.

6.1.1 Create a County-led cohort, building on the Health Needs Assessment Network.

6.1.2 Engage the philanthropic community in this work to expand available funding.

6.1.3 Connect with academic institutions such as University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine.

6.1.4 Work with a local partner for assessment and research to demonstrate success and contribute to national understanding of the efficacy of arts in health.

6.2 Expand and Formalize Arts Partnerships with Other Sectors and Organizations.

6.2.1 Include a representative from the Interfaith Council on the Arts and Cultural Affairs Advisory Council.

6.2.2 Facilitate artist residencies in faith communities, focusing on themes of hospitality, kindness, and human connection.

6.2.3 Work with the community to identify cultural-use spaces for artists and organizations at faith-based institutions and other spaces.

6.2.4 Create grant opportunities for collaborative projects between arts organizations and other sectors.

6.2.5 Explore establishment or expansion of cross-sector partnerships with the arts, such as veterans and military affairs, sports and athletics, or criminal justice.

Strategic Pillars

Governance and Leadership

Orange County's arts and culture sector is supported primarily by three entities: Orange County Arts and Cultural Affairs Office, Orange County's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, the City of Orlando, including the Downtown Orlando CRA, which are the major arts funders in the region, and United Arts of Central Florida, which is the region's designated local arts agency. These entities have yielded positive results, including increased public and private revenues for the arts, investments in capital facilities, support for cultural tourism, and a range of strategic initiatives targeted at specific community needs.

The City of Orlando and Orange County collaborated in development of this plan. One opportunity emerging from the planning process is to reinforce ongoing collaboration. United Arts can be included in recognition of its role as a valued partner. Working together on an ongoing basis would strengthen regional arts leadership. It would help preserve their relationships, clarify roles, identify new opportunities, and coordinate the direction of cultural policy.

Having an ongoing working relationship and structure could also greatly assist and amplify implementation of this plan. These agencies possess the capacities, information, and resources to coordinate implementation efforts across a complex regional arts ecosystem.

CANVAS represents unprecedented collaboration between the City of Orlando and Orange County — leveraging $37+ million in combined public and private arts funding to maximize impact and avoid duplication across our diverse communities.

Governance and Leadership Recommendations

1. Establish a Coordinating Committee of the City and County
Form a standing committee of relevant City and County offices and departments with its partner, United Arts, to update one another on an ongoing basis, oversee implementation of the cultural plan, identify new challenges and opportunities, and coordinate policy and programmatic responses.

2. Advance the Orange County Arts and Cultural Affairs Advisory Council
Periodically review and reconfigure the committee structure, as necessary, to better reflect the County's evolving scope of arts programs and responsibilities.

3. Build Orange County's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs Leadership Capacity
Continue to build out the staffing, budget, and associated capacities of Arts and Cultural Affairs to provide leadership and implement this plan.

4. Build the City of Orlando's Leadership Capacity
Explore creating a City leadership position in the Mayor's Office, to coordinate the various groups involved in city arts functions and investments.

Sustainable Funding and Investment

A cultural plan naturally raises expectations for expanded arts funding and questions of how to generate those funds. As described in the Arts and Leadership, Orange County has developed significant public and private arts support. TDT investment is large and has been increasing, and grants are made with a broad interpretation of the requirements surrounding TDT revenues. The Tourist Development Council and Board of County Commissioners have authorized these allocations, signaling political consensus on the important role arts and culture play in tourism as well as quality of life. The philanthropic community actively supports United Arts' Collaborative Campaign and invests in many other arts organizations and projects. Still, the goals and strategies of this plan are aspirational and will require significant new investment. They call for increased support for the nonprofit arts community, individual artists, facility and space needs, and a range of other community benefits.

The City currently funds the arts primarily through general fund allocations and CRA revenues. Because of pressures on the general fund, this has made increased arts funding more challenging. But as with the County, this plan raises expectations of, and will invite increased investment.

In addition to increased resources for the arts, arts and cultural sectors are healthier with diversified revenue sources. Diversification decreases reliance on a single source and buffers downturns. This is particularly relevant for The City of Orlando and Orange County, with its high reliance on tourism revenues. Tourism is large and growing but is not guaranteed. Funding recommendations must address a broadening of revenue sources for the arts. It is also advisable to create a reserve fund for the arts community, to provide a cushion against down years.

The following funding options provide a menu of increased, diversified, and reserve revenues for the arts and to implement this plan in the coming ten years.

Potential County Funding Options

1. Enact a Percent-for-art Requirement for Private Real Estate Development

Research, develop, and adopt a county percent-for-art ordinance requiring art in private real estate development with appropriate thresholds, exclusions, and an in-lieu option, in consultation with the development community. Consider implementing this recommendation as part of the recommended public art master planning process.

2. Expand and Enforce the Percent-for-art Requirement on County Capital Improvement Projects

Enforce and regularize implementation of the existing percent-for-art requirement. Consider expanding the requirement from the current "reasonable amount" (generally interpreted as 1%) to 2% and redefining allowable uses of the funds for placemaking as well as public art. Review and update the current ordinance as part of the recommended public art master planning process.

3. Increase General Fund Allocations

The largest portion of the County's arts budget is allocated from TDT, but it also currently allocates general funds to the arts each year. In FY2025, TDT funds totaled $14 million while general funds were $1 per capita (about $1.5 million) plus an additional amount (about $750,000) for salary and operating costs of the Arts and Cultural Affairs Office and Fusion Fest. Increasing either or both portions of general fund allocations would help diversify arts revenues and reflect a broader commitment to arts support.

4. Prioritize Cultural Facilities in the ARC (Application Review Committee) Funding Program

In 2023, the Orange County Board of County Commissioners approved $75 million in "excess unencumbered" TDT funding for the ARC program, to be distributed over five years. In addition, the Commissioners will withhold up to $5 million annually for five years from Visit Orlando's budget to supplement this funding (if certain revenue thresholds are met). Community-based organizations can apply for ARC funding to support cultural and tourism initiatives. While all of this funding has been allocated to cultural facilities projects, this significant pool of funding could be prioritized for projects to increase arts access in underserved areas of the county, such as community cultural centers, arts spaces within libraries and recreation centers, and/or artists live/work and studio projects.

5. Create a Reserve Fund for the Arts

There is currently no reserve fund for the arts to address volatility in arts revenues. A "rainy day" fund would be available to supplement available arts dollars in the event of a natural disaster, economic downturn, public health emergency, or unforeseen circumstance. Having a reserve can fill in funding gaps and reduce the disruption caused by decreases in arts grants. It will also enhance resiliency in the arts sector and preserve its capacity to support tourism. To finance the reserve, the County can allocate an additional tenth of a percent of TDT funds for the arts annually, segregating and restricting this funding. Over ten years, the incremental increases would boost the arts share of TDT revenues from 5% to 6% of the "first four cents," generating an aggregated total of approximately $10 million.

Potential City Funding Options

1. Enact a Percent-for-art Requirement for Private Real Estate Development

Consistent with the Growth Management Plan, research, develop, and adopt a City percent-for-art ordinance requiring art in private real estate development with appropriate thresholds, exclusions, and an in-lieu option, in consultation with the development community. Consider crafting the ordinance to allow flexible use of in-lieu fees for arts purposes. Consider implementing this recommendation as part of the recommended public art master planning process.

2. Consider an Increase of General Fund Allocations

The City currently allocates general funds and CRA revenues to the arts each year. In FY2025, CRA revenues totaled approximately 70% of the total $6 million arts investments and 30% of general funds. As a matter of policy, the City could invest greater amounts of general funds to implement specific community priorities identified in this plan.

3. Continue Allocations of DDB/CRA Revenues

While DDB/CRA revenues are subject to fiscal challenges that are similar to general funds, the DDB/CRA has chosen to allocate significant resources to arts initiatives. As with general funds, the DDB/CRA can continue to invest in specific community priorities identified in its regulatory plan consistent with this planning effort.

Arts and Culture Marketing

Marketing is a strategic pillar in this plan because it functions as the bridge between the region's artistic vision and audience engagement. Marketing promotes cultural offerings, but also shapes public perception, builds relationships, and contributes to financial sustainability.

The City of Orlando and its departments and agencies as well as Orange County and stakeholders all play a role in marketing and work in concert, each with distinct yet complementary roles. These roles may need to be clarified to reduce redundancies and make best use of existing assets (e.g., cultural calendar, county map of cultural facilities, branded campaigns, public art) for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Sharing resources, expertise, and audiences across these agencies can increase local and visitor engagement with arts and culture, expand reach into underserved communities, and support sustainable growth for participating organizations. How the City, County and partners collaborate on marketing should be documented, including the specific actions for funding agencies, implementing agencies, and joint responsibilities:

- Budgeting for collective marketing efforts
- Developing integrated marketing campaigns that showcase the variety and interconnectedness of the arts and culture community
- Maximizing existing or developing new shared platforms and tools to reduce individual marketing costs while increasing overall visibility of arts and cultural opportunities
- Creating cross-promotional opportunities that encourage audiences to explore multiple and cultural experiences
- Pooling data and insights to better understand audience behaviors and preferences

Leveraging Efficiencies

Strategic marketing collaboration creates numerous efficiencies:

- Repurposing content across multiple channels and purposes
- Synchronizing timing of announcements for maximum impact
- Sharing research findings and audience insights across departments
- Coordinating community presence at events and activities
- Aligning budget allocations to maximize return on investment

Potential Funding Agency Actions, as led and funded by Orange County with participation by the City of Orlando and the DDB/CRA

- Establish clear objectives for collaborative marketing initiatives that address the local, regional, and tourist markets
- Develop grant structures that incentivize collaborations
- Create simple metrics that do not increase administrative burden on smaller organizations and prevent participation
- Convene regular marketing meetings between organizations to facilitate knowledge sharing
- Fund research on audience segmentation and market analysis that benefits the entire arts and culture ecosystem
- Provide technical assistance funding and training on marketing and branding
- Develop multi-year funding commitments to support sustainable collaborative efforts

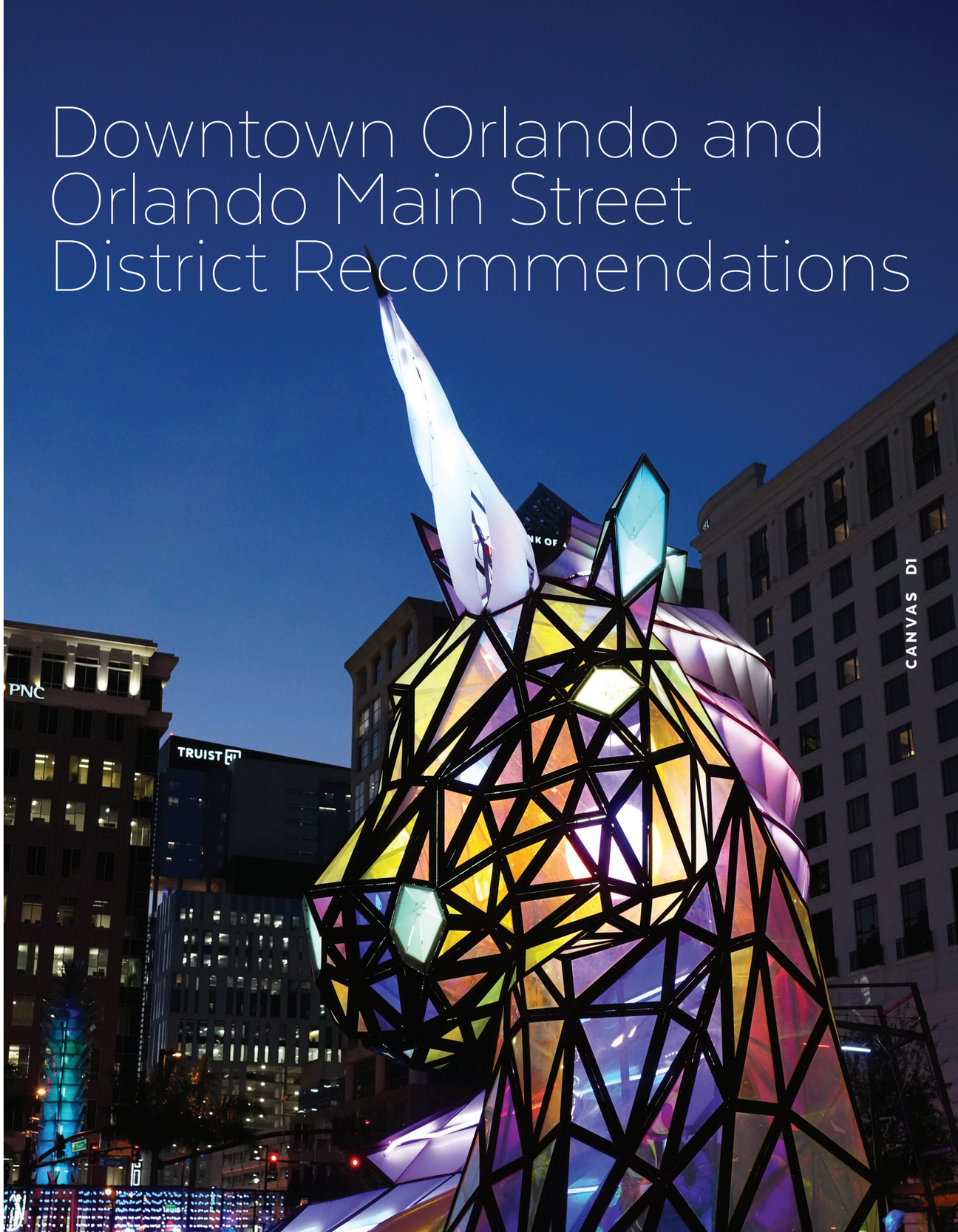
Evaluation and Impact Framework

Measuring the outcomes and impact of this cultural plan is essential to ensure its successful implementation, demonstrate value to stakeholders, and guide future decision-making. Annual implementation plans and evaluation criteria allow The City of Orlando and Orange County to make necessary adjustments, align with annual budgets and communicate the plan's progress to the broader community. This endeavor will be led and funded by Orange County with support from the City of Orlando in data collection.

It is recommended that the City of Orlando and Orange County will collaborate to develop and maintain a coordinated system for monitoring implementation progress. It is advisable to also consult with United Arts, which is beginning development of communitywide indicators to measure success of their efforts. This approach will:

- Establish shared definitions and metrics
- Eliminate duplication of data collection efforts
- Provide a more comprehensive view of the cultural ecosystem
- Leverage the existing expertise and resources of each organization

Downtown Orlando and Orlando Main Street District Recommendations



The Downtown Orlando CANVAS

Overview

Downtown Orlando serves as the cultural heart of the city and a vital nexus for Orange County's broader creative ecosystem. The area encompasses diverse artistic venues, from world-class facilities like the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts and community venues to intimate spaces such as CityArts, independent theaters, and community-based arts organizations. This cultural landscape extends beyond performance venues to include the Orlando Public Library, Orange County Regional History Center, as well as urban parks such Luminary Green, Lake Eola Park, and the developing "The Canopy", under I-4. Supporting these activities are vibrant neighborhood parks, historic areas, and emerging creative technology sites such as the international Electronic Arts (EA) Orlando Florida headquarters and the University of Central Florida's Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy (FIEA), both sited in Creative Village*.

Geography and Analysis Areas

This analysis primarily focuses on the Downtown Development Board and the Community Redevelopment Agency at the City of Orlando planning areas, as well as the greater downtown Main Street Districts.

This section addresses Strategic Planning Activities, Cultural Venues and Programming, Music and Performance, Community Events and Music Festivals, Innovation Districts, the Emergence of Third Places, the Orlando Main Street Program, and Key Findings followed by Recommendations. The Recommendations address four areas: 1) Meet the Need for Cultural Activity, 2) Enhance Connectivity for Cultural Access, 3) Update Processes and Remove Barriers, and 4) Enhance City/County Coordination for Arts and Culture.

***While every effort was made to include key downtown arts and culture related activities, certain areas, in particular, such as urban design elements, architecture, and historic preservation are not included.*

A Downtown
Where Culture Naturally
Lives and Breathes

Strategic Planning Activities

Over the last two decades, under the leadership of Mayor Buddy Dyer, a number of strategic planning activities have directed and shaped downtown's remarkable growth. In addition to world class venue development, there have been significant mixed-use expansion, roadway improvements, and sustainability upgrades. The strategies behind many of these activities, along with commensurate policies, are addressed in the elements of the 2025 Growth Management Plan (GMP) Refresh as well as separate Transportation, Venue, and Sustainability plans. The Community Redevelopment Agency's planning activities have complemented these efforts through the 2015 DTOutlook Downtown Orlando Community Redevelopment Area Plan as amended. Addressing a 1,664-acre planning area, the plan has analyses, policy recommendations, and strategies addressing a broad range of activities, from transportation access and connectivity to arts and culture development.

DTO Action Plan

A more recently completed CRA planning activity is the 2024 DTO Action Plan. Recognizing marketplace and socio-economic changes during COVID, with significant downtown in-migration, where office and civic uses have been outpaced by residential and leisure activities, the CRA sought ways to best address these changes. Consequently, in 2022 new planning efforts were undertaken, resulting in an action plan focusing on the CRA Central Business District (CBD) and the Lake Lucerne District, with proposed actions beyond these boundaries. The plan leverages downtown Orlando's earlier visioning work by creating an action-driven process that focuses on streets, civic spaces, mobility options, and neighborhoods. These elements were determined to be critical in contributing to collective experiences as an urban community and downtown's regional competitiveness. The goal is to develop downtown Orlando as both a significant place for civic life and as well as an authentic regional destination.

The DTO Action Plan shares CANVAS's vision-driven approach to creating vibrant, inclusive communities where arts and culture flourish through genuine human connection. The principles and strategies developed through this downtown planning activity directly inform CANVAS's recommendations for downtown Orlando and the many Main Street Districts, both inside and outside of downtown. The following is a high-level discussion of the DTO Action Plan and its intersections with CANVAS.

While multi-faceted, the Plan could be generally organized into two main parts or themes, pertinent to this analysis. These themes include Impact on People and Impact on Place, both with associated actions guiding downtown development.

Impact on People

The first DTO Action theme is *Impact on People*. Under this theme there are three (3) interacting sub-parts. The first subpart addresses that downtown should become *A Magnetic Regional Social Hub* which provides cultural and social activities for all, while synergistically connecting with regional cultural ecosystems. The second subpart explores *Cultivating Vibrant Neighborhoods* to support the continued development of downtown Orlando as a unique downtown community, offering people from all walks of life a variety of memorable experiences. And finally, *Helping People Thrive* is tied to ensuring that people not only secure their essential needs, but also find achievable opportunities to live, work, and connect.

Actions on Place

The second DTO Action theme is *Actions on Place*. Similar to the prior theme, under this approach there are three subparts. The first subpart is *A Place for Everyone* which promotes downtown as the area's Central Social District with cultural activities, diverse commercial activities, and opportunities for all. The second subpart is *Public Realm for People*, which embodies the idea that downtown Orlando should be a "great park," establishing a dense network of active, memorable spaces that align exceptional urban experiences with Orlando's lush natural environment. And lastly, *A Network of Easy Movement* addresses the concept that moving around downtown should be intrinsically rewarding due to an intuitively connected mobility network, allowing a range of people-centric movement in the street or on the sidewalk.

DTO Action Plan Activities and CANVAS Connections

While by no means an exhaustive summary, the following initiatives from the DTO Action Plan demonstrate how coordinated activation, public-private development and infrastructure improvements can strengthen our cultural ecosystem, consistent with CANVAS recommendations and include Enhanced Cultural Corridors, Creative Connectivity, and Community Gathering Spaces, as well as Programing of Festival-Cultural Infrastructure and Area Impacts and Gateway to Cultural Experience.

Urban CANVAS: Creating a downtown where every street corner, plaza, and trail becomes part of a living cultural experience that welcomes residents and visitors to explore, create, and connect.

Enhanced Cultural Corridors: Converting Orange and Magnolia Avenues, as well as possibly Rosalind Avenue, from one-way to two-way streets as addressed in the DTO Action Plan. These changes will allow the Lymmo free bus to flow more naturally with traffic while opening opportunities for canopied streetscapes, wide sidewalks with shaded and accessible street furniture, and interconnected micro-mobility options. Slowing down pass-through traffic and adding more curbside uses such as parking, pick-up and drop-off zones, and outdoor dining areas and gathering spaces will strengthen community connections and build arts and culture linkages.

As explored in the CANVAS planning activities, mobility transformations directly support downtown's cultural corridor, creating new possibilities for festival streets along Magnolia Avenue abutting Heritage Square and the Downtown Library, while strengthening east-west connections to Lake Eola Park and Orange Avenue.

Creative Connectivity: The completion of downtown's 8.5-mile bike loop will connect more than a dozen neighborhoods and various Main Street districts through the Orlando Urban Trail, Gertrude's Walk, Lake Underhill Path, Bumby Path, and Cady Way Trail. This network creates pathways for residents to discover cultural experiences throughout our community while supporting the kind of neighborhood-to-neighborhood cultural exchange that CANVAS envisions.

Community Gathering Spaces: Creating more community gathering spaces and transforming them into memorable places was an area of interest in the CANVAS survey and small group exchanges. The proposed DTO Action Plan 30 S. Orange project at Orange Avenue and Pine Street exemplifies how underutilized urban sites can become dynamic community spaces. This urban park-plaza serves as a model for similar cultural activation throughout downtown and Main Street districts. Drawing inspiration from beloved public spaces like New York's Paley and Greenacre Parks, the project design prioritizes adaptable seating, shade, water features, and food services—creating the kind of face-to-face community spaces where cultural connections flourish naturally. This approach informs similar projects like the proposed Livingston Corner Urban Park and complements developing leisure spaces such as "The Canopy" (under I-4) and Art² at Robinson Street and Orange Avenue.

Programming of Festival- Cultural Infrastructure and Area Impacts: The DTO Action Plan proposed Church Street improvements represent a two-phase approach to cultural placemaking, a common theme during CANVAS discussions. The first phase focuses on early activation through programming and temporary public plaza retrofits—the kind of community-driven cultural programming that CANVAS supports. The second phase will focus on reconstructing certain segments of Church Street, as festival streets, with dedicated infrastructure for unique cultural celebrations and community gatherings that strengthen our bonds with one another. These improvements to Church St. will impact potential area-wide community building connections, including further west to the Parramore Neighborhood and the proposed Westcourt project.

A new $500 million mixed-use development, Westcourt will bring retail/restaurants, hotel, and residential units as well as a new convention/entertainment venue. Westcourt is expected to have a blend of mixed-tenure, mixed-income residential units, which may support housing opportunities for artists, the latter being supported by CANVAS as essential for retaining young creatives.

Gateway to Cultural Experience: The DTO Action Plan identified Lake Lucerne Park's transformation as one of downtown's most significant opportunities for cultural placemaking. This underutilized space at the transition from Orange Avenue to Magnolia and Rosalind Avenues, and bordering the elevated East-West Expressway (SR 408), has tremendous potential to become a magnetic regional social hub. It is anticipated to include cross generational cultural and social infrastructure, including boardwalks, performance spaces, and playgrounds. Further strengthening our region's creative ecosystem is Lake Eola Park. As Orlando's signature facility, it underwent master planning in 2021. Implemented improvements along with lessons learned from the ongoing multi-year renovation project should further inform Lake Lucerne enhancements. Ultimately, it is hoped that Lake Lucerne will serve as a key gateway that channels people from throughout our community into downtown's cultural heart and park system, all the while creating meaningful connections to surrounding neighborhoods as well as the SoDo Main Street district, the Pulse Memorial, and the Orlando Health campus.

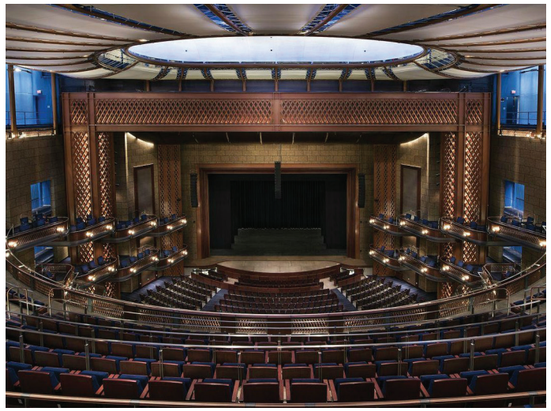
Other Areas of Analysis and Findings

In addition to the earlier discussion about the intersections of the DTO Action Plan and CANVAS, certain elements of downtown Orlando's current arts and culture ecosystem were explored. They include certain highlights grouped as follows: Cultural Venues and Programming, Music and Performance, Community Events and Music Festivals, Creative Village Innovation District, and the Emergence of Third Places. This discussion is followed by an overview of Main Street districts in and around downtown and their art and culture activities followed by Findings, all leading to Recommendations.

Cultural Venues and Programming

Downtown Orlando offers rich programming in history, performing arts, and music across venues of varying scales. The Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts anchors the district with five internal venues ranging from the 2,700-seat Walt Disney Theater to the intimate 150-capacity Judson's Live. Since opening in 2014, the Center has drawn major touring productions while fostering local artistic development.

The area's cultural offerings reflect both grassroots creativity and established excellence. Local artists find platforms at venues like SAK Comedy Lab, which showcases improv comedy, while the Orlando Fringe (artspace and international festival) has historically provided experimental theater opportunities. The Orange County Regional History Center invites residents and visitors to explore the region's heritage through exhibits spanning 2,000 years of history in a beautifully restored five-story courthouse, while the Orlando Public Library regularly displays exhibits of local art. An important venue not yet developed is the proposed Holocaust Museum for Hope and Humanity, near downtown's Senator Beth Johnson Park, in the CRA North Quarter. Downtown Arts District's City Arts and the Wells'Built Museum are also important facilities with a diversity of offerings. Outdoor programming complements these indoor venues, with the Walt Disney Amphitheatre at Lake Eola providing an iconic lakeside setting for performances complemented by the neighboring the See Art sculpture display, while further west is Luminary Green with its popular outdoor movies.



Music and Performance

Downtown Orlando's music scene encompasses both classical and contemporary expressions, contributing significantly to the area's cultural and economic vitality. The historic Bob Carr Theatre, established in 1926, previously served as home to the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra and Florida Symphony Youth Orchestra, and was the City's premier performance space with 2,518 seats. In 2013, Bob Carr was integrated into the 68-acre Creative Village, a mixed-use development and innovation district. The theatre has subsequently closed and will be repositioned as a tech incubator. With the closure of the Bob Carr, the Orlando Philharmonic moved to the Plaza Live in the Milk District, while the Florida Youth Symphony relocated to the Dr. Phillips Performing Arts Center.

The broader downtown area benefits from proximity to major event venues including the Kia Center (18,500 capacity), home to the Orlando Magic and major concerts, and Camping World Stadium. Originally built as a New Deal WPA project with 8,900 seats, the stadium has expanded to 60,000 capacity and is currently undergoing another extensive renovation coordinated with off-site improvements. Camping World Stadium hosts large-scale events including the annual Electric Daisy Carnival electronic dance music festival on Tinker Field. Pop-up performances and installations, including United Arts of Central Florida-supported DTOLive!, regularly activate public spaces throughout the downtown. The Seneff Arts Plaza at the Dr. Phillips Center, too, creates opportunities for spontaneous cultural encounters.

Community Events and Movie Festivals

While events downtown change on a regular basis, repeat signature events include Fireworks at the Fountain in Lake Eola Park, Come Out With Pride Orlando in Lake Eola Park & Downtown Orlando, FusionFest at Dr. Phillips Center & Downtown Orlando, Fiesta in the Park in Lake Eola Park, and Downtown Florida Puerto Rican Parade & Festival as well as the internationally acclaimed Immerse. Recurrent movie festivals include the Orlando Film Festival, Orlando Urban Film Festival, and the Global Peace Film Festival.

Creative Village Innovative District

Creative Village (CVD), a 68-acre mixed use development, is in the north-east area of Parramore, in the Lake Dot neighborhood, and is downtown's innovative district. Home to the University of Central Florida (UCF) and Valencia College downtown campus, the creative district includes the Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy (FIEA). The academy offers a globally ranked interactive entertainment Master of Science program, where art, gameplay and design all come together. Also in CVD is EA Sports' Florida regional headquarters, an international video gaming company. Collectively, these activities contribute to a billion dollar-plus industry and are anticipated to draw more commercial activity and complementary uses.

One of these complementary uses is outdoor animation and light shows. Currently, a twenty-minute show including animations and lights set to music is found at the CVD Luminary Green. Due east, the 40 ft. high Solidarity sculpture, situated nearby at Colonial Drive (SR 50) and the Garland Avenue ramp, displays dynamic lighting that enhances the sculpture features and establishes an illuminated night-time gateway to downtown Orlando. Given these and other proposed downtown animation and light applications, a coordinated approach to new technologies should be pursued, particularly for public realm applications.

The Emergence of Third Places: Plazas and Urban Parks

Under the guidance of the City of Orlando's Director of Placemaking, a significant trend has been successfully established to improve and activate public and private plazas, as well as small parks and green spaces throughout the downtown. This effort includes Art^2, an urban space for food trucks, arts and music, the *Unbelievably Real* mural site at the 30 S. Orange Plaza, and the Lake Eola Park expansion area along Central Boulevard. The expansion area includes a mural more than 30 feet high, titled *Achromatic Aria Fresco-An Ode to Harmony*, recently recognized along with the *Unbelievably Real* mural, by a Golden Brick award. City plans further detail improvements that will enhance these important people-centric spaces.

Given the observed growth in creative placemaking, community discussions focused on establishing arts and culture subdistricts with third places linked by innovative corridors forming a greater creative commons. Of importance is planning and organizing these activities as a public realm gallery with funding not only for the actual arts and culture but also for oversight and maintenance. Public participation should also be included in public realm art development.

Orlando Main Street Program

Orlando has 12 official Main Street Districts, all of which serve as potential assets for cultural and arts programming. Several of the Main Street Districts are in or near the Downtown Orlando area and all of them can benefit from the recommendations provided in this section. The Main Street America™ organization, of which Orlando is a coordinating entity, is also addressed in the City-County Opportunity Section. Within Downtown Orlando and adjacent areas, the following Main Street Districts include:

City District: City District comprises business owners working together to strengthen economic development in the heart of Downtown. The district has an eclectic mix of restaurants, bars, arts, and daily live entertainment, which positions it as downtown's entertainment district. Its businesses and diverse area activities are also supported by its proximity to events at the Kia Center, Inter & Co (Soccer) Stadium, and the Dr. Phillips Center. The District also promotes "Immerse," a performance and interactive art festival, led by Creative City Project.

Ivanhoe Village Main Street District: Adjacent to beautiful Lake Ivanhoe, the Main Street District, once known for Ivanhoe Row antiques, now has a variety of art-focused uses including antique stores, art galleries, and design-focused commerce along with restaurants and retail shops. The district also includes the Orlando Urban Trail and local transit, such as the Advent Health SunRail Station. Undergoing extensive mixed redevelopment (e.g.: The Yard) over the past decade, it has dramatically evolved as new uses have entered the area complementing the Swanson's Ivanhoe Row, Virginia Drive, Loch Haven Cultural Park, and the AdventHealth Village areas. The district is also home to several significant cultural facilities such as the Renaissance Theatre and Loch Haven Cultural Park, Orlando Ballet, Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando Science Center, Mennello Museum of American Art, and the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre.

Mills 50 District: The Mills 50 District is increasingly known for its foodie offerings and includes Michelin star restaurants with an Asian, American, and Pacific Islander influence. The area also contains a unique blend of independent businesses that specialize in holistic living and art-focused light retail including massage therapy, yoga, acupuncture and martial arts as well as visual artists, design studios, and photographers. It is anchored to the north by connections to Loch Haven Cultural Park, Thornton Park, and Ivanhoe Village Main Street Districts. The Mills 50 District has embraced various art projects, ranging from murals to traffic boxes complemented by the area's memorable mid-century modern architecture. The district does not have a lot of public space, and consequently conducts many popular indoor events, such as pub crawls. It also utilizes local streets such as Thornton Avenue for outdoor events, including the Lunar New Year Dragon Parade. Virginia Drive Live! is a popular joint event with the Ivanhoe Village Main Street District and includes local live music, artists, and vendors.

Parramore District: The Parramore Main Street District is home to the oldest continuing African American neighborhood and the sole Commercial National Registered Historic District in the city. While originally part of the City District, the Parramore Main Street District was independently established in 2022. The district includes major cultural and sports facilities, the Wells'Built Museum of African American History, and the mixed-use Creative Village, with the shared downtown UCF/Valencia campus. The district is also rich in potential with soul food and street art, and ample opportunity for future arts and cultural development. It is anticipated that the city as a recipient of a Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge grant through its award-winning Art Pollination project, will partner with the Parramore Main Street District to install murals and transform traffic boxes. As part of this transformation, it is possible that sections of Church St. and connecting area roads may be modified to festival streets, drawing support for new art inspired businesses similar to the Downtown Arts Collective.

SoDo District: The SoDo District is a business district surrounded by many of Orlando's historic neighborhoods known for their lakes, walkable parks, and streets. The district is anchored by Orlando Health and is accessible from the downtown SunRail Stations connecting to the district's Orlando Health/Amtrak SunRail Station. The SoDo District is a quickly growing marketplace, where retail chains are side by side with boutique-style shops and mom-and-pop restaurants. This district hosts an annual event called "LightUp SoDo," with the tenth anniversary in 2025, a festive celebration featuring the dynamic business community.

Thornton Park District: Due east of the Central Business District (CBD) is the Thornton Park District, a walkable mixed-use district with more than 60 locally owned specialty shops, services, and dining destinations. Located in the middle of the district is Lake Eola Park, where visitors can experience a show at the Walt Disney Amphitheatre or enjoy the See Art Sculpture Collection. The district also includes the Orlando Farmers Market, which has fresh produce, baked goods, crafts, gifts, jewelry, plants, and other artisanal products. The neighborhood uses adaptive reuse approaches to maintain a neighborhood feel and attracts young professionals and urban dwellers to the area.

West Lakes District: The West Lakes District consists of Camping World Stadium, the historic Tinker Field Memorial, and the recently refurbished Lorna Doone Park. The district is a well-known destination for festival goers, sports enthusiasts, and concert fans. It contains many opportunities for future development of vacant land as well as adaptive industrial reuse of vacant or under-utilized buildings. In particular, there are site and structure opportunities that would allow artisanal applications by small businesses, new startups, and aspiring entrepreneurs, as well as those in arts, culinary arts, and small-scale manufacturing to take root. To make a successful transition to new uses, innovative and low barrier regulations and programs need to be developed. Ample district open space may also allow bringing new, larger-scale cultural and arts events to the area.

Other Main Street Districts: While outside of the targeted study area, other Main Street Districts including Audubon Park Garden District, College Park, Curry Ford West, Gateway Orlando, and The Milk District, are no less important to the City's commercial vibrancy. Events that are in downtown should be encouraged to partner with, and display the talents of, the other districts. For example, the culinary arts attributes of Curry Ford West could be tapped to provide food for events within Downtown Orlando, thereby creating synergy within the city and impetus for residents and visitors to further explore the diverse neighborhoods within Orlando. Other Districts, while not immediately adjacent, could also benefit from similar relationships.

Key Findings

While the Downtown area possesses significant cultural assets, it faces challenges in creating a cohesive, accessible, and vibrant arts experience. The City and CRA are making substantial investments in improving micromobility, enhancing streetscapes, and activating public spaces through initiatives such as DTO Live! and the DTO Action Plan initiatives. Recent pedestrianization efforts along the Wall Street Plaza and upcoming redesigns of major corridors such as Magnolia Avenue, Church Street, Orange Avenue, and other roadways serve to create new opportunities for arts integration and public programming, supporting residential, worker, and tourist engagement. As an international destination that drew in over 75 million visitors in 2024, with over 6 million international visitors, there is an opportunity to consider how many downtown venues can be supported. Compared to other international cities with strong reputations for having cultural and performance arts venues, such as New York (64 million visitors in 2024), London (30 million visitors in 2024), Orlando should examine whether and how such visitors could be attracted to downtown and aid in its further economic development through support of the arts and cultural programs. While it may not have the population of other metropolitan cities, the number of visitors suggests that downtown Orlando should examine whether it could support more venues, and whether they should be theatre, museums, or other facilities. Theatre space should be a key focus given the high level of performance talent and literary arts found in the area.

This Downtown Orlando CANVAS Plan section includes recommendations that address four fundamental issues:

Space for Creation and Experience:
Expanding adaptable venues and public spaces where artists can create and present their work, and audiences can engage with improved cultural experiences on a consistent basis.

Connectivity and Access:
Building physical, visual, and programmatic connections between Downtown's cultural assets and to areas such as Loch Haven Cultural Park to the north, and to the developing Lake Lucerne and the Pulse Memorial to the south (SoDo), ensuring these resources are accessible to all residents and visitors.

Supportive Systems and Policies:
Removing regulatory barriers, streamlining processes, and creating incentives that advance artistic activity and creative placemaking.

Enhancing City/County Coordination and Partnerships for Arts and Culture:
As a collaboration of the City and County, the CANVAS plan suggests how continuing to work together can leverage greater community impact from the efforts of each, including and extending beyond Downtown.

By strengthening Downtown's cultural infrastructure, the City and County through collaboration can create a more vibrant urban core that attracts diverse audiences, supports creative professionals, enhances economic vitality, and serves as a showcase for the community's artistic identity.

"Our community dreams of a downtown where art isn't confined to galleries — where festival streets come alive with local music, where empty lots bloom into cultural commons, and where every bus shelter, bench, and building tells the story of our varied communities. This is placemaking that puts people first."

-Community Survey Respondent

Downtown Orlando Plan Recommendations

Downtown Orlando's cultural development should advance through four interconnected recommendations that align with the broader CANVAS Cultural Plan:

Downtown Orlando Recommendation #1: Meet the Need for Cultural Activity Space

1.1 **Create Arts and Culture Subdistricts**: Build on the success of existing Districts by establishing designated cultural zones with integrated mixed-use development, combining retail, residential, and cultural spaces. These districts should feature pedestrian-friendly design with wide sidewalks, active street fronts, and arts-integrated streetscapes that encourage exploration and social interaction. Important to building these formally planned zones is activation assistance, including hospitality, wayfinding and safety escorts provided by the Downtown Ambassador Program as well as public right-of-way maintenance implemented by the Downtown Clean Team. These activities should also be supported by community policing.

1.1.1 Focus initial implementation on strengthening existing cultural nodes within the Downtown Orlando CRA, particulary in the Central Business District and Parramore Neighborhood, which already serve as anchors for creative activity. Each district should receive tailored support that preserves its unique identity while enhancing its cultural infrastructure.

1.2 **Transform Downtown Plazas into Cultural Commons**: Consistent with the DTO Action Plan, support the activation of underutilized spaces throughout downtown, such as the 30 S. Orange plaza through public-private partnerships and flexible design approaches. Draw inspiration from successful models in cities like Miami to create temporary cultural uses that enliven surrounding areas while longer-term development plans evolve. Through formal planning efforts, these sites and activities should be supported by sustainable operations and maintenance approaches.

1.2.1 Design these spaces as multifunctional "cultural commons" featuring flexible staging areas, distinctive visual elements, and comfortable gathering spaces. Incorporate small kiosks, food truck access, and pop-up retail opportunities that can serve as incubation spaces for culinary arts startups and sales venues for local artists.

1.2.2 Create an "inspiration" guidebook highlighting past projects, local best practices, and how-to approaches that will support the Main Street Program as well as other nonprofit and business entity creative activities.

1.3 **Develop a Network of Festival Streets**: Designate specific streets forming a coordinated network, capable of regular closure for public cultural events, such as segments of Church Street and Magnolia Avenue as strong initial candidates. When possible, these Festival Streets should incorporate distinctive design elements including high performance decorative pavement, canopied street trees, curb-less approaches where feasible, and removable bollards. Work with transit partners to coordinate public transportation services to these new event spaces.

1.3.1 To maximize usage and community benefit, create streamlined permitting processes specifically for Festival Street activation, removing barriers that currently make the special event programming process somewhat time-consuming. Focus on making special event programming more accessible to smaller arts organizations and community groups, including improved permitting accessibility opportunities.

1.3.2 Champion and educate the benefits of the Festival Street concept to Main Street Districts, particularly focusing on areas lacking community gathering spaces. Design these streets to reflect each district's unique identity while incorporating elements of local arts and culture into the physical infrastructure.

Examples:

Magnolia Avenue: As part of the DTO Action Plan, the Magnolia Avenue segment, north of South Street and south of Washington Street, abutting the Orange County Regional History Center, Heritage Square, and the Library were identified as a future activation area. It is anticipated that segments of Magnolia Avenue could be converted to a curb less facility having multiple points of access, abundant tree canopy, and vibrant street level activities, supporting better east-west connectivity to Lake Eola Park and Rosalind Avenue. Transforming Magnolia Avenue will strengthen Heritage Square as a destination, reposition N. Court Avenue, and draw visitors in from N. Orange Avenue.

Church Street: Consistent with recent downtown planning efforts, certain segments of Church Street also have potential as a festival street and should be redesigned with the goal of creating new shaded outdoor venue space for arts and cultural events.

1.4 **Expand Downtown as a Creative Hub**: Build upon the success of the Discover Downtown Info Center as both a visitor information site and a venue for local artists, with support from an online portal. Examine how this model could be expanded to key transportation hubs as part of a coordinated economic development and cultural tourism strategy, integrating in Orlando's creative identity while connecting visitors to experiences throughout the city.

1.5 **Strengthen Loch Haven Cultural Park Coordination**: Loch Haven Cultural Park represents Orange County's most concentrated collection of cultural assets, housing multiple organizations including the Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando Science Center, Orlando Ballet, Orlando Family Stage, Orlando Shakes, and the Mennello Museum of American Art. This unique cultural campus operates as a complex ecosystem of independent organizations with diverse management structures, program calendars, and operational needs. While each organization excels individually, the park's full potential as a unified cultural destination remains underutilized. Building on previous coordination efforts by the City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Department, additional strategic coordination and enhanced connectivity can further elevate Loch Haven's role as the region's flagship cultural campus while preserving each organization's autonomy.

1.5.1 Develop a Comprehensive Cultural Campus Master Plan. The plan should address operations and event management, governance, programming, facilities, and public spaces.

1.5.1.1 Build on the successful Fringe Festival coordination model to create year-round collaborative programming opportunities that utilize the full campus.

1.5.1.2 Create flexible outdoor spaces and pop-up opportunities that can accommodate individual artists, small organizations, and community events while supporting major institutional programming.

1.5.2 Enhance Physical Connectivity and Visitor Experience: Improve wayfinding, transportation access, and public amenities.

1.5.2.1 Explore opportunities to activate underutilized outdoor spaces, particularly around Lake Formosa, for performances, exhibitions, and community gatherings.

1.5.2.2 Expand micro-mobility connections between Loch Haven, downtown Orlando, and surrounding neighborhoods.

1.5.2.3 Enhance public amenities including additional restroom facilities, outdoor seating areas, food service options, and weather protection structures to support extended campus visits.

1.6 **Support Area Park Arts and Culture Enhancements**: Support ongoing improvements at Lake Eola Park, The Canopy, and Lake Lucerne Park. Lake Eola Park is home to various public art pieces, as well as the Walt Disney Amphitheater. The 2021 Master Plan calls for a complete upgrade of the entire park including new bathrooms, activity areas, boardwalks, and complementary programming. The Canopy is a new Urban Park, in the early stages of development. Potential development arose from the earlier I-4 Ultimate improvements, which created new street level spaces. The Canopy, directly located under I-4, from Church Street to Washington Street, will be an outdoor activity and leisure space. Lake Lucerne Park enhancements, as envisioned in the DTO Action Plan, should directly benefit from lessons learned during Lake Eola Park and The Canopy improvements. Of interest will be new technologies including dynamic lighting and multi-media. All sites should have state of the art creative activations that have sustainable maintenance and operations programming, and align, when possible, to achieve economies of scale.

We envision transforming our individual cultural treasures into a seamless creative ecosystem — where a family can bike from Loch Haven's museums to Lake Eola's amphitheater, discover local artists in vibrant plazas, and experience the authentic spirit of Orlando's distinct neighborhoods, all connected by art-filled corridors and festival streets.

Best practices from these activities should also be shared with Main Street Districts to inspire and guide, and, as feasible, address infrastructure upgrades with a focus on accessibility and include artwork, shade structures,, improved lighting, new or wider sidewalks, comfortable seating areas or benches, and native landscaping.

Downtown Orlando Recommendation #2: Enhance Connectivity for Cultural Access

2.1 Create an Urban Arts and Cultural Loop: Establish a series of designated cultural circuits connecting SunRail and Lynx stops with parks, cultural facilities, and arts venues throughout downtown and area neighborhoods. Use this loop as both a wayfinding tool and a framework for strategic cultural investments, including formally planned public art, cultural programming, and accessible creative spaces, supported by sustainable maintenance and operations programming.

2.1.1 Strive to integrate the loop into the City's Transportation and (DTO) Action Plan cultural corridor planning and implementation efforts by connecting it to the existing north-south cultural corridor along Magnolia and Orange Avenues. This corridor already links the Orlando Urban Trail and Loch Haven Park to the north with Lake Lucerne and the SoDo District to the south. Through this integration, establish new art-focused character areas that highlight art-activated storefronts and key cultural destinations including CityArts, the Dr. Phillips Center, the Orange County Regional History Center, Wells'Built, and the Beardall Senior Center.

2.1.2 The designation of the loop should support the DTO Action Plan social hub concept where new sites could be activated through coordinated programs, creating flexible indoor and outdoor spaces that can be utilized for events and art activations.

2.1.3 Explore integrated branding programs within a 10-minute walkshed of the actual loop, supporting greater access to local eating and drinking establishments as well as highlighting arts, cultural, and community organizations.

2.1.4 Consider the incorporation of local artist designs into wayfinding signage as well as benches, bus shelters, and other infrastructure along these corridors. Importantly, these routes could be designed with local activities in mind, highlighting culinary and retail clusters along the route, particularly those of a local artisanal nature to engage in developing character districts along the arts loop.

2.1.5 Extend the loop beyond the downtown core to area Main Street districts. Prioritize, in particular, extending these connections westward to various older established neighborhoods including Parramore, linking to the Wells'Built Museum of African American History & Culture and creating avenues for greater cultural participation.

2.1.6 Incorporate aspects of outdoor current art engagement such as the See Art walking tour, the Transportation Department's Urban Art on the Urban Trail tour, and City Planning's historic walking tours, into self-guided activities, along with expansions that call out areas, as noted in 2.1.5.

2.2 Activate the Orlando Urban Trail as a Cultural Corridor: Transform the Orlando Urban Trail into a living cultural corridor connecting downtown north to Loch Haven Cultural Park and then extending it further south to the SoDo Main Street District and the Pulse Memorial. Opportunities should also be pursued to promote this approach, in partnership with nonprofits, throughout the citybike trails, further expanding art connecting to main streets, neighborhoods, and parks.

2.2.1 Integrate public art installations, historical interpretation elements, and performance spaces along the route, with particular focus on the segment between Lake Highland and the downtown Central Business District (CBD).

2.2.2 Ensure the trail serves as both transportation infrastructure and a linear cultural experience, featuring rotating exhibitions, interactive elements, and programmed activities that encourage exploration and connection.

2.3 Integrate Public Art Throughout Downtown Infrastructure: In partnership with the Public Art Coordinator, the Director of Placemaking should create an inventory of building facades, architectural elements, and public realm components that could be used for future short and long-term public art installations. Complementing these efforts, an inventory of existing artwork installations should be created and evaluated to determine how existing and proposed locations will work together to better curate the public realm. As part of this effort, small areas plans and programs should be developed, as needed. Sustainable oversight, funding, and maintenance should also be included in these activities.

2.3.1 Create a program that coordinates the rotation of visual and performing art throughout downtown that reflects Orlando's histories, communities, and voices. Incorporate arts into the design process for all downtown infrastructure, including bus shelters, transit stops, signage systems, and street furniture. Use these elements to create distinctive experiences that enhance placemaking and wayfinding while expressing local culture and identity.

2.3.2 For longer-term uses, explore establishing an intermediate economic use planning approval pathway that applies tactical urbanism principles to arts and culture. This approach will enable the temporary conversion of vacant lots and underutilized properties into semi-permanent cultural spaces that serve neighborhoods while testing ideas for more permanent development.

Downtown Orlando Recommendation #3: Update Processes and Remove Barriers

3.1. Streamline Events Permitting: Support the continued streamlining of the special events permit process, particularly for smaller-scale cultural activities.

3.1.1 Consider raising attendance thresholds for full permits and creating tiered requirements based on event size and impact.

3.1.2 Coordinate with the Special Event Office to identify and eliminate potential unnecessary steps such as recurrent planning approvals for cultural activities in designated areas.

3.1.3 Research best practices for open container regulations and consider establishing cultural event exemptions to support festivals and cultural gatherings throughout downtown.

3.2 Support Creative Businesses and Organizations: Research and develop a coordinated approach to support arts businesses and organizations through financial incentives, streamlined permitting, and the creation of sustainable, affordable spaces, as feasible.

3.2.1 Promote current business development incentives, including restaurant/retail, façade, and related programming to educate, and assist as feasible, existing and new arts and culture related business owners.

3.2.2 Explore innovative ways to promote the Downtown Special Event Grant Program to attract a diversity of users and seek to identify improvements through various evaluation approaches.

3.2.3 Evaluate existing business incentive programs and pilot, if feasible, a complementary time-shared spaces program to help emerging artists and small arts organizations create and present their work downtown.

3.2.4 Update Land Use and Zoning Regulations: Support updates to the zoning code to better accommodate cultural uses, including live-work spaces, gallery venues, performance facilities, and maker spaces across industrial, mixed-use, and commercial districts.

3.2.5 Establish clear arts and cultural use definitions, to support optimal program implementation as well as greater reuse and new development.

3.2.6 For industrial areas (particularly those in Parramore, near West Church Street), consider introducing a future land use subarea policy or overlay district that allows a mixture of uses. This may include residential, commercial, and light industrial uses including artisinal industrial that allows a variety of creative uses.

3.2.7 Develop specific standards for artisanal industries that support creative or small-scale manufacturing while ensuring compatibility with surrounding uses.

3.3 Reform Parking Requirements for Cultural Activities: Revise parking requirements for cultural uses, particularly for temporary activities like markets and festivals. Follow the lead of successful urban cities nationwide by removing specific parking requirements for cultural events in favor of relying on shared, off-street, as well as municipal and private parking options.

3.3.1 Encourage the use of area public parking garages through broad-based marketing as well as implementing electronic wayfinding supported by smart parking garage sensors to identify space availability, as feasible.

3.3.2 As an alternative to parking downtown, educate and encourage visitors to use transit, rideshare, or the Ride DTO program, an on-demand service with pick up and drop off at desired CRA downtown locations.

3.3.3 Consider surveying users during cultural events to better understand their specific parking needs. The results may inform new parking standards.

3.3.4 Continue to require parking and transportation plans for all large events and consider implementing new technologies to track, coordinate, and analyze increasingly frequent overlapping events, evaluating both time and proximity, to reduce conflicts and improve people movement.

3.4 Create Clear Guidance for Cultural Development: Develop user-friendly guides that clarify key permitting processes and allowable uses for arts and cultural organizations. These resources should help creative organizations navigate city requirements more effectively.

3.4.1 Analyze how current noise regulations could be amended to reflect best practices formulated to balance the needs of cultural vitality with quality of life for downtown residents. Seek to create thoughtful exemptions that accommodate evolving needs of cultural development in mixed-use districts with residential uses or abutting residential neighborhoods.

Downtown Orlando Recommendation #4: Enhance City/County Coordination and Partnerships for Arts and Culture

4.1 Form a Joint Coordination Task Force: Create task force or committee, comprised of members from both city and county in the areas of transportation, planning, public art, community affairs, parks and recreation, and other disciplines, divisions, and departments as needed to increase communication and joint planning for events and infrastructure. These relationships, when structured to meet regularly, will allow for easier coordination such as on transportation logistics for special events, along with initiatives that will require longer term solutions, such as addressing affordable housing needs for the creative class. As applicable, include the Downtown Orlando Partnership (DOP), Orlando Economic Partnership (OEP), Downtown Arts District (DAD), and United Arts of Central Florida, among other relevant entities, as appropriate. See also, Strategic Pillar 1, Governance and Leadership, Establish a Coordinating Committee of the City and County.

4.2 Address Transportation Issues for Arts and Culture: Transportation is a regional issue, and coordination between the City and the County, especially regarding special events, will increase accessibility and connectivity for residents and visitors. Integrating arts and culture into the regional transportation system may also be part of a program that will encourage transportation ridership and can draw from cultural resources from both entities to craft a comprehensive program. While SunRail has previously implemented programs such as "Art is Moving," a rolling art gallery, and cross promotions with various entities like the Orlando Museum of Art, consider promoting transit ridership for free museum entry e.g., DAD Third Thursdays, and events such as Fourth of July Fireworks. Future projects such as Urban Arts Loop could also be integrated into SunRail, LYNX, and other transportation systems marketing as well.

4.3 Expand Housing for the Creative Sector: Housing for the creative sector is part of the overall regional housing affordability issue and requires active collaboration to create new opportunities to retain local and regional talent. As recommended in 5.4.8 of the main City/County plans, explore partnerships with the Orange County Housing Authority, Orlando Housing Authority, Orange County Housing Finance Authority, and other housing agencies to develop affordable artists live/work projects.

4.4 Utilize and Coordinate Multi-event/Multi-venue Programs: The City and County could collaborate on multi-day/multi-destination, multi-event or venue efforts. This can range from thematic months like Miami Spice, run by the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, to creation of a regional trail effort, such as the Cherohala Skyway Scenic Byway, which mapped out historic, outdoor, and cultural assets and events to promote exploration of the region. In a similar vein, Orlando and Orange County could take advantage of the already existing hospitality sector as a launchpad to create regional "exploration routes."

NATIONAL

The desire to create.
It always starts with imagination.

Before the seed takes root in rich soil,
or steel jolts forward on the track,
and ochre is brushed on a fabric frame,

someone had an idea that bloomed and grew so large in the mind
it had to spill over into existence –

cultivating furrows of braided land and glowing groves of tangerine and green,
glinting off towers and technology in shades of chrome, copper and graphite,
and covering our walls, bodies and lands with the color and emotion of our lived history and hopes.

Creativity is the medium of innovation.

CANVAS

Cultural Plan
for the City of Orlando
and Orange County