



Essex County  
Community Foundation

# ESSEX COUNTY CULTURAL PLANNING LABS

## Summary Report

Montserrat College of Art  
Beverly  
January 4, 2019

Newburyport Art Association  
Newburyport  
January 22, 2019

Peabody Access TV  
Peabody  
February 22, 2019

El Taller  
Lawrence  
March 8, 2019



## Cultural Planning Labs: An Overview

As a component of the Creative County Initiative (CCI), Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF) partnered with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) to develop and deliver four sub-regional cultural planning labs for municipal officials, planners, and arts leaders from the nonprofit and private sectors in Essex County.

### Goals and Objectives:

The goal of the labs was to introduce the community benefits of cultural planning to stakeholders in Essex County.

Desired outcomes included:

- An expanded base of knowledge about the benefits of a cultural planning approach.
- An expanded base of knowledge about cultural resources in Essex County and their importance to the livability and vitality of the region.
- An expanded regional network of support for county-level cultural planning initiatives, which will commence in calendar year 2019.

## Lab Participation

In order to prepare Essex County communities for cultural planning initiatives, invitees included municipal planners, elected and appointed officials, local boards and committees, local cultural councils and representatives from key arts, culture, business, and tourism organizations.

A total of 122 participants attended across four labs, representing a diverse set of people, organizations, and interest areas. Additionally, thirty of the thirty-four municipalities in Essex County were represented.

Participation by Category	Total Participants
Arts Organizations	33
Municipal Staff	33
Municipal Boards/Committees	17
Elected/Appointed Official	14
Business	11
Non Profit	6
Other Govt	4
Tourism	3
Funder	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>122</b>

## Lab Program

Each four hour lab had a consistent agenda designed to inform, engage, and encourage collaborative work across the county and across sectors.

### ECCF Welcome

Each lab kicked off with a welcome and introduction by the Essex County Community Foundation. Karen Ristuben, Program Director for ECCF’s Creative County Initiative provided an overview of the program.

### Cultural Planning 101

Participants were given a brief orientation to regional planning, the role of regional planning agencies in providing support for arts and culture planning, and current efforts by MAPC and MVPC to advance arts and culture through regional initiatives led by both agencies.

A range of approaches to cultural planning were introduced:

1. Cultural Asset Mapping
2. Regional Cultural Plan
3. Comprehensive Cultural Plan
4. Arts & Culture Component of a Municipal or Regional Plan
5. Cultural District Plan
6. Discipline-Focused Cultural Plan
7. Specialized Arts or Cultural Assessment
8. Specialized Arts & Culture Issue Plan or Study

### Discussions by Topic

Each lab hosted discussion groups focused on five topic areas explored through the lens of arts and culture in Essex County. Discussion was facilitated by MAPC, MVPC, and ECCF staff.

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Cultural Facilities   | 4. Cultural Organizations & Creative Businesses |
| 2. Community Development | 5. Government Capacity                          |
| 3. Economic Development  |   |

Each discussion group reported the highlights of their observations and brainstorming to all lab participants. *Feedback and consistent themes across all discussions and labs are on the pages that follow.*



## Discussion Approach:

Attendees at each lab chose one discussion group to participate in. Using the Innovators' Compass - a tool that helps structure how we approach problem solving in an unique format - facilitators led their group through **five prompts** to thoroughly explore each topic, thinking specifically about the context of Essex County.

1. People: Who's involved?
2. Principles: What matters most for everyone involved? What are guiding values?
3. Observations: What's happening? Why?
4. Ideas: What other ways are there? Imagine the future.
5. Experiments: What's a step to try?



## Discussion by Innovators Compass Area

### People: Who is Involved?

A full list of people categories across all five small group discussion topics:

People Categories	# References
Local Government	66
Individuals & Families	62
Community-Based Organizations	34
Cultural Organizations	27
Businesses	24
Cultural Facilities	24
Other Government	19
Funders	19
Business Organizations	16
Education	13
Real Estate Industry	11
Media	5
Religious Institutions	4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>324</b>

### Observations: What's happening? Why?

While no clear dominant themes emerged, participants observed a range of current conditions including:

- Evidence of events - festivals, art-making, performances
- Increasing collaboration over past several years
- Perception of public benefits of arts & culture is improving but much still needs to be done
- Artists are priced out of affordable living, working, and presenting spaces
- Investment in the arts is inconsistent
- Living wage challenges prevent young creatives from staying in area
- Lack of public policy & public commitment supporting arts

## **Discussion by Innovators Compass Area**

### **Principals: What Matters Most?**

Out of 194 comments related to the Principles section of the conversation across all small discussion group topic areas and all four labs, the top five principles identified include:

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (22% of responses)
- Valuing Art and Artists (11% of responses)
- Collaboration and Communication (11% of responses)
- Sense of Place (10% of responses)
- Well-being (9% of responses)

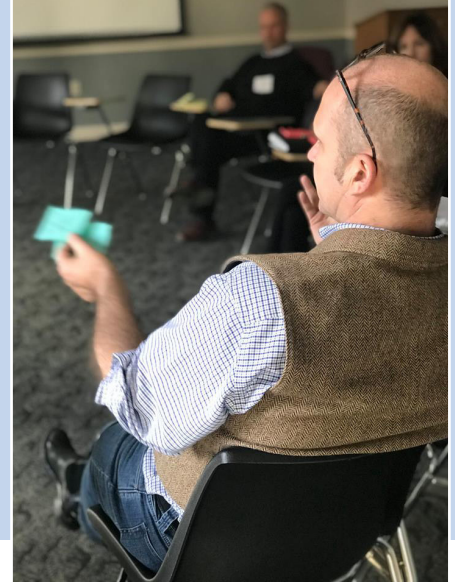
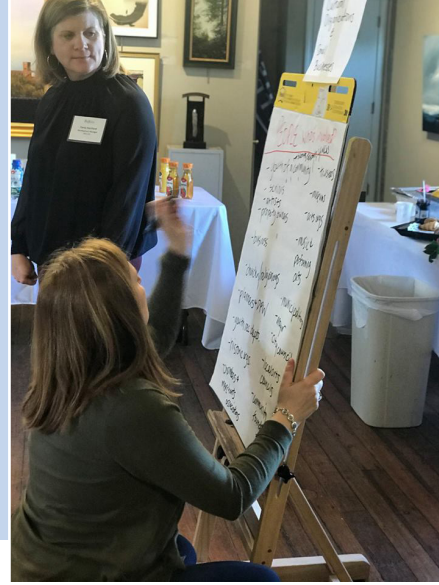
Additional principles identified included Access and Affordability, Education and Storytelling, Understanding Constraints, Acknowledging and Respecting History, Sustainability, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Leadership, and Values-orientation.

### **Ideas & Experiments: What ways are there? What's a step to try?**

Participants' ideas for strengthening the arts & culture ecosystem included:

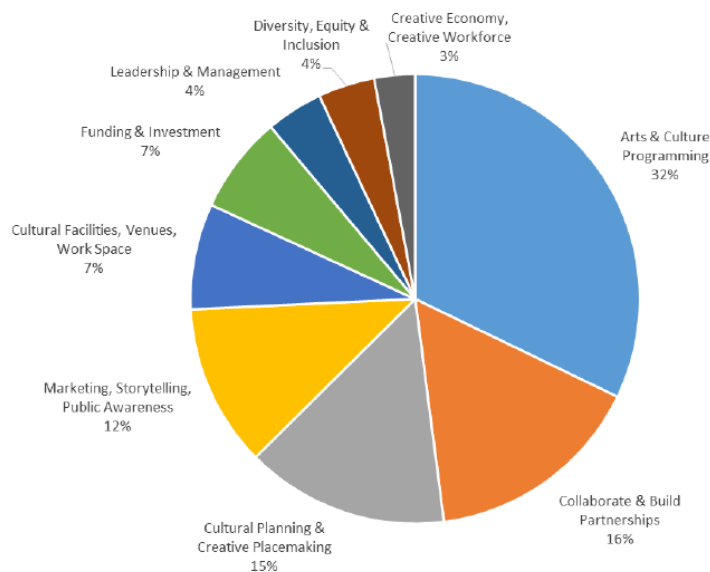
- Hire an art planner for a one-year experiment and measure the impacts
- Include artists in support efforts for the small business economy
- Collaborate and promote arts & culture across cities and towns
- Develop a systems approach to investment to augment one-off support for programs
- Modify zoning codes to allow for creative space development and live/work
- Partner artist professional associations with chambers of commerce
- Develop arts in transportation projects (bus, ferry, train) to increase access and visibility, and to address root transit problems
- Dedicate % of hotel/meals tax for arts & culture
- Develop new models for shared spaces and shared staffing
- Include line item in municipal budgets as leverage for matching grants
- Create systems for elevating new, innovative ideas in cultural development
- Improve messaging on value of arts & culture to communities: jobs, economic impact, cultural equity





## Discussion by Topic: Community Development

From all of the small group discussions focused on Community Development, an analysis illustrates that arts and culture programming is an important strategy to advance community development. In addition, collaboration and partnership is critical to successfully link artists to the work of community development.



### TOP THREE THEMES:

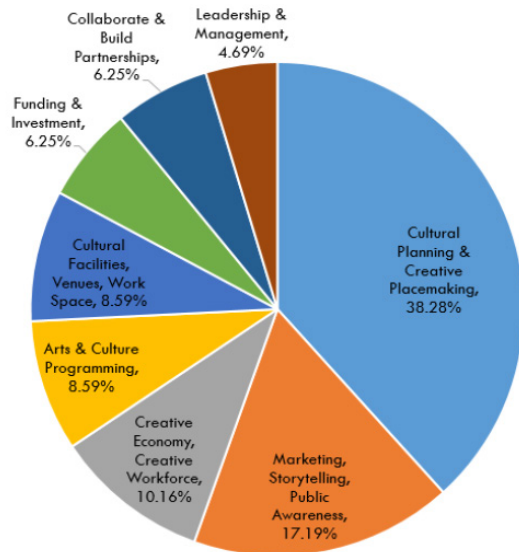
1. Arts & Culture Programming – 32%  
“County-wide festival or event to highlight projects.”
2. Collaborate & Build Partnerships – 16%  
“How can we all come together to discuss resources and opportunities?”
3. Cultural Planning & Creative Placemaking – 15%  
“Connecting communities via bike paths, walking spaces, parklets, benches, other supported transportation.”

## Discussion by Topic: Economic Development

Comments in the Economic Development topic area emphasized the need for greater support to link arts and culture to the business and workforce needs of the region. This need falls into three thematic categories: cultural planning and creative placemaking; marketing, storytelling and public awareness; and creative economy/creative workforce.

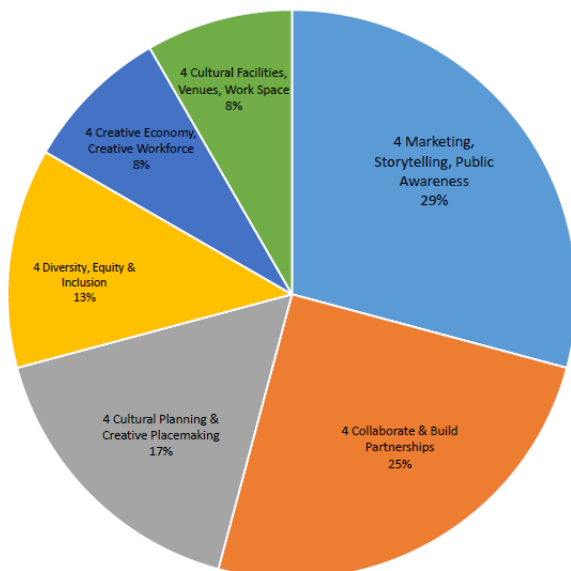
### TOP THREE THEMES:

1. Cultural Planning & Creative Placemaking – 38%  
“Enhance zoning for A&C orgs. To spur investment, businesses, live/work.”
2. Marketing, Storytelling, Public Awareness – 17%  
“Use arts to get your message across.”
3. Creative Economy, Creative Workforce – 10%  
“Opportunities presented by trends with traditional brick & mortar retail.”



## Discussion by Topic: Cultural Organizations & Small Business

Collaboration and the use of models, templates, and best practices were key themes when considering how cultural organizations can be supported and strengthened.



### TOP THREE THEMES:

1. Collaborate & Build Partnerships - 25%  
“Develop learning tours”
2. Cultural Planning & Creative Placemaking - 19%  
“Create placemaking models to duplicate and scale among communities”
3. Marketing, Storytelling, Public Awareness - 17%  
“Give creatives and planners the tools and the story”

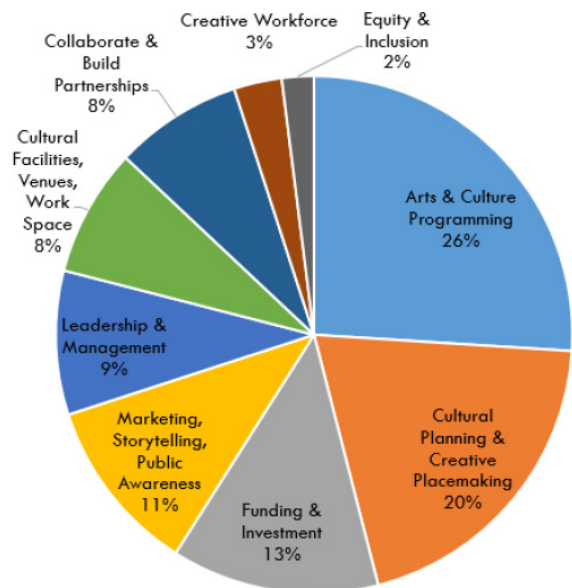


## Discussion by Topic: Government Capacity

Government Capacity themes emphasized the opportunities and challenges of government supporting arts and culture, particularly at the municipal level. The growing recognition of the value and importance of arts and culture programming is reflected in that theme's prominence.

### TOP THREE THEMES:

1. Arts & Culture Programming – 26%  
"Encourage outdoor activity with art."
2. Cultural Planning & Creative Placemaking – 20%  
"Redefine bylaw regarding signage/ordinances to allow for public art."
3. Funding & Investment – 13%  
"Line item in city budget for matching grants for leverage."

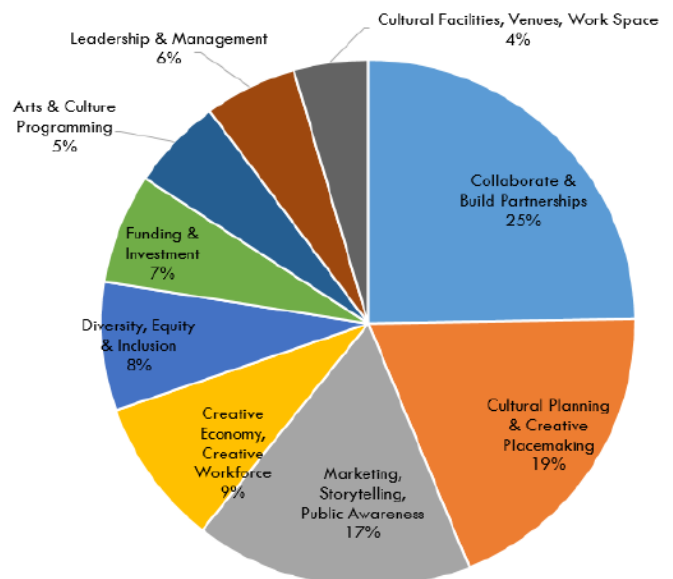


## Discussion by Topic: Cultural Facilities

Collaboration and building partnerships was the dominant theme in conversations about cultural organizations and small businesses with cultural planning and marketing and storytelling also among the top three themes.

### TOP THREE THEMES:

1. Collaborate & Build Partnerships – 25%  
"Bring Chambers of Commerce and cultural councils together."
2. Cultural Planning & Creative Placemaking – 19%  
"Road map for elevating new ideas like shared work spaces/maker spaces."
3. Marketing, Storytelling, Public Awareness – 17%  
"Articulate and make case to small businesses."



## Lab Comment Card Analysis

Participants were invited to fill out a Commitment Card which prompted them - based on their learnings from the lab - to write down what they felt ready to work on and where they still needed help to achieve their goals.

### What Will I Work On? - summary of themes:

Themes: What Will I Work On?	# Comments	% of Comments
<b>Collaboration &amp; Building Partnerships</b>	24	32%
<b>Cultural Planning &amp; Creative Placemaking</b>	18	24%
<b>Marketing, Storytelling, Public Awareness</b>	14	19%
<b>Arts &amp; Culture Programming</b>	8	11%
<b>Cultural Facilities, Venues, Work Space</b>	5	7%
<b>Creative Economy, Creative Workforce</b>	3	4%
<b>Funding &amp; Investment</b>	2	3%
<b>Leadership &amp; Management</b>	1	1%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>

### What Will I Work On? - Direct feedback:

#### Collaboration and Building Partnerships Highlights:

- “Collaborate with Beverly planning and administration to push a public/private arts & development agenda to strengthen and differentiate our community.” - Business and Development Leader, Beverly
- “Increasing collaboration with the arts & cultural community. Offer our properties for creative events. Cross-pollinate our events with local museums & artist communities.” - Director of Art & Community Engagement, Environmental Nonprofit
- “Continue to develop collaborations with current partners, while seeking new partners we haven’t thought about yet.” - Director, History & Culture Center

#### Cultural Planning and Creative Placemaking Highlights:

- “Incorporating cultural development/arts into the Strategic Plan we’re creating to revitalize our Downtown.” - Elected Official, Topsfield
- “Begin dialogue with town decision-makers and planning board to plant seeds to grow support for cultural planning - ideologically & financially, maybe long-term.” – Planner, Town of Newbury
- “Long-term arts & culture planning - think how to seamlessly implement arts & culture in planning.” - City Planner, Peabody

#### Marketing, Storytelling, Public Awareness Highlights:

- “Developing stronger base of support for arts & culture as integral component of our local & regional community fabric (local & regional economy, educational programming, quality of life)” – Elected Official, Beverly
- “Community awareness of arts; better integration of Cultural District into community.” – Member, Essex River Cultural District

## Lab Comment Card Analysis

Participants requested assistance in the same areas where they wished to start working. Collaboration and building partnerships was referenced the most with marketing, storytelling and public awareness – especially the need for data and help making the case – coming in second.

What Do I Need Help With? - summary of themes:

Theme: What Do I Need Help With?	# of comments	% of comments
Collaboration & Building Partnerships	25	34%
Marketing, Storytelling, Public Awareness	18	25%
Cultural Planning & Creative Placemaking	14	19%
Funding & Investment	13	18%
Arts & Culture Programming	2	3%
Leadership & Management	1	1%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100%</b>

## NEXT STEPS....

Throughout these labs, participants provided a great deal of foundational information to support and guide the work of Creative County Initiative for the next several years.

- Short term projects will include regional Cultural Asset-Mapping and technical support for Essex County cities and towns that include arts and culture in municipal planning efforts.
- As we continue to build a stronger infrastructure for our artists, cultural producers, partners, and stakeholders across the county and its subregions, we expect to raise and allocate over \$1 million in funding over the next three years.

Please follow up with us - your thoughts and feedback are critically important as we move the Creative County Initiative forward.

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!**



## Creative County Initiative Leadership Team

### STEERING COMMITTEE

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