



The Impact of Arts and Culture Strategies on Streetscape Design and Mobility Projects

Background

PolicyLink believes that arts and culture are core components of an equitable society, and that they also provide key strategies for achieving equity. Arts and culture can activate, amplify, and extend the power and reach of the voices of the one-in-three Americans living in or near poverty, to accelerate equity for themselves and the nation. PolicyLink lifts up and magnifies arts and culture as both a core component and approach to equitable development and movement building.¹

Our efforts span the breadth and depth of the fields in which PolicyLink works, touching health, infrastructure, equitable economy, workforce development, and every issue in our portfolio. PolicyLink also works closely with the creative placemaking field, which leverages arts and culture by diverse partners to strategically shape the physical and social character of a place in order to spur economic development, promote enduring social change, and improve the physical environment.² Read our [framing paper](#) to learn more about how equitable development policy can be advanced across multiple sectors when aided by arts and culture practices. Also see www.communitydevelopment.art for other PolicyLink research about creative placemaking, and arts and culture.

This is the second component in a series exploring avenues of new research regarding arts, culture, and equitable development. The goal of the series is to encourage the examination of these issues and see that the importance of arts and culture strategies is recognized by potential researchers and those who can use that research.

This document, the second in the series, invites researchers to develop a research plan to inform and support policy change related to the use of arts and culture strategies in street (re) design and mobility projects. The proposed research is inspired by the 90th Avenue Corridor Repavement and Redesign project in Oakland, California, which is currently underway. The project utilizes artistic and cultural strategies to enhance safety and mobility for local residents. See the sidebar on next page for more information about the project.

PolicyLink hopes this research will provide data and findings to make a strong case for policy change, which could then be supported and advocated for by leaders in both the arts and transportation fields. The nature of these issues and a commitment to equity both call for approaches to research that are participatory and inclusive with the residents of the communities.

Specific Research Aim

The overall aim of this envisioned research is to learn from the experience of Oakland's 90th Avenue Corridor Redesign and other similar projects to guide and inform the establishment of policies and programs with similar objectives.

More specifically, this could include a designated funding source to support cities and localities to create and implement their own street design standards to be responsive to their community's unique needs.

Although the federal guidelines around street design do set parameters for what city agencies can do with their streets, there is some leeway for local and city agencies to set their own standards. For example, Sacramento's legal and planning departments have worked to build more flexibility into standards, by installing bulb-outs, traffic circles, and narrower streets after residents complained previous standards were too rigid and did not result in livable neighborhoods.³ One of the main barriers to innovative, more pedestrian, and bicycle friendly street designs is a lack of dedicated funding for research, development, and testing of alternative standards.⁴

The aim of the research would be to measure the impact of existing arts and cultural strategies on mobility-related developments and projects, which we hope will inspire the US Department of Transportation and/or other local, state, and regional transportation agencies and entities to set aside funding for the research, development, and testing of creative and culturally relevant streetscape designs. We hope cases like the 90th Avenue Corridor Redesign in Oakland can be lifted up as promising practices to be replicated across the country.

We anticipate this research will inform and inspire transportation and planning agencies to formulate and implement this and other policies that prioritize pedestrians and bicyclists by integrating creative and culturally relevant approaches into their criteria for a successful project.

90th Avenue Corridor Redesign



[Oakland's Department of Transportation collaborated with the Scrapper Bike Team](#) to improve accessibility and mobility in the six-tenths of a mile stretch of 90th Avenue between Bancroft Avenue and International Boulevard. In an area that has seen its share of violence and traffic fatalities, the project aims to slow down speeding cars and improve safety. As a part of the city's 2014 five-year paving plan and the East Oakland Planning for Paving [initiative](#), the project, begun in 2019, will include improvements such as travel lane reduction, upgraded high visibility crosswalks, and painted pedestrian safety zones.⁵

Two blocks were completed by the end of 2019. With the plan to install a Scrapper Bike mural in the center median starting June 2020, the city hopes these changes to the classic street design will create a safer refuge for pedestrians crossing the street and allow people to more easily see and be seen by cars. The project is anticipated to be completed by October 2020.

“Our hope is this will calm down traffic and make it safe for seniors and children to be able to cross the street. We’re envisioning that in the future people will feel safe to bike along the path. We’ll also be hosting a bunch of community events as we finish out the completion,” project manager Brytanee Brown said.⁶

Key Questions and Information Needs

Our foremost objective is to encourage and solicit research concepts and plans about the practitioners and agencies engaged in creative placemaking and arts and culture efforts that have the potential to advance equitable policy change for the 100 million Americans living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. While PolicyLink does not have the funding to support new research projects at this time, we are committed to working with potential partners to raise the necessary support as well as to encourage and guide low-cost pilot projects, such as those done by groups of students in connection with their curriculum.

Outlined below is a preliminary set of information needs we believe can help make the case for policy change in favor of arts and cultural approaches in street design and mobility projects. We respect the researcher(s)' decision to pursue any combination of these if what is outlined below is overly prescriptive.

Research objectives, initial questions, and information needs:

- Examine the various street redesign programs across the country that have been driven by the arts and culture of a specific community.
 - Find examples of projects where a community's creative and cultural approaches diverged from traditional rigid design standards.
 - Explore what impact this strategy has had on the community's safety and mobility.
 - Document how creative and cultural innovations and entrepreneurship were embedded into planning and design processes.
- Explore whether DOTs that have expanded their planning criteria to include culturally relevant solutions are making a more equitable impact in communities. Inquiries may include measures which explore with residents:
 - How has this project impacted you and your community?
 - Do you feel safer in this area?
 - Do you feel happier now?

- Develop and implement a research plan to assess the impact of the 90th Avenue Corridor Redesign project
 - Utilize nontraditional measures to understand the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the impact on social cohesion, and physical and community health.
 - Utilize appropriate transportation measures to understand the impacts on bike ridership, etc.

Target Audience

The target audience for this research includes, but is not limited to:

- Departments of transportation at the local, statewide, and federal levels
- City and regional planners
- Mobility justice advocates
- Nonprofit transportation policy and advocacy organizations
- Affordable housing agencies, organizations, and advocates
- Transit agencies
- Bicycle and pedestrian groups
- Transportation, civil engineering, and landscape architecture researchers

Research Methods

Research methods could consist of one or more of the following:

- A scan of culturally relevant street (re)design and mobility projects in the United States
- A literature review of existing resources, tools, and articles on aforementioned projects
 - E.g. National Association of City Transportation Officials' [Urban Street Design Guide](#)
- Surveying impacted community members
- Interviews with artists who led artistic or cultural engagement projects related to street (re)design
- Exploring local cases and their impact on community through case studies:
 - Redevelopment of the 90th Avenue Corridor in East Oakland
 - Revamping of Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC
 - The Slow Jams street safety and activation strategy in Los Angeles
 - COVID-19 response: Cities opening streets to pedestrians and cyclists
 - Other examples

The research would entail a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and should, as noted above, follow principles and practices of community-based participatory research (CBPR) wherever possible.

Deliverables and Schedule

We hope that this invitation to explore an important topic encourages researchers to take up these questions, whether as part of their ongoing activities or as the start of a new initiative. For those who would like to explore a partnership with PolicyLink, we envision a process by which prospective researchers work with PolicyLink to sharpen plans for a study and raise the resources for it:

- A concept paper or letter of interest in which the research team conveys their ideas and approach, which would serve as the basis for discussion and planning with PolicyLink about the scope of both the project and the resources necessary to carry it out.
- For a team or teams identified to proceed with us, a thorough research proposal that outlines in more detail the research needs and objectives mentioned above, along with a development strategy jointly created with PolicyLink.

Notes

- 1 To advance equity, PolicyLink advocates for groundbreaking policy changes that enable everyone, especially people of color, to be economically secure, live in healthy communities of opportunity, and benefit from a just society. PolicyLink is guided by the belief that the solutions to the nation's challenges lie with those closest to these challenges: when the wisdom, voice, and experience of those traditionally absent from policymaking drive the process, profound policy transformations emerge.
- 2 Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa. *Creative Placemaking*. National Endowment for the Arts. Washington, DC, 2010.
- 3 John Urgo, Meredith Wilensky, Steven Weissman, "Moving Beyond Prevailing Street Design Patterns: Assessing Legal and Liability Barriers to More Efficient Street Design and Function," a paper prepared by the Center for Law, Energy and the Environment at Berkeley Law School, for the Center for Resource Efficient Communities at the College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley, 2010. https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/4.1_CREC_codes_and_standards.pdf.
- 4 Urgo, Wilensky, and Weissman, 2010.
- 5 J. Tyska, "Photos: Scaper Bike Lane Part of 90th Avenue Repaving And Redesign Project in Oakland," October 15, 2019, *East Bay Times*.
- 6 J. Tyska.

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Photo on page 2: "[scraper bike ride 2010 016](#)" by [Oakland Local](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

Contact Details

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