BUILDING AUSTIN'S CREATIVE CAPACITY

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

Report to the

**City of Austin
Economic Development Department
Cultural Arts Division**

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INTRODUCTION

In order to assess the available support services for creatives in Austin and identify gaps and overlaps in the provision of those services, the Cultural Arts Division of the City of Austin's Economic Development Department commissioned an assessment of the creative sector's needs. The *Building Austin's Creative Capacity: Creative Sector Needs Assessment* used two online surveys to collect data from individual creatives and leaders of nonprofit arts and cultural organizations regarding their support needs and the available services. A full analysis of the survey data, titled *Creative Sector Needs Assessment: Gap Analysis Report*, was delivered to the Cultural Arts Division (CAD) in June 2015.

The survey was actively promoted through CAD's extensive networks in the cultural community in order to garner responses from creatives and organizations working in a range of creative disciplines, organizational structures, and career stages that reflects the cultural diversity of the city's population. In many respects, these outreach efforts were successful: the survey was completed by 528 individual creatives and 67 representatives of cultural institutions. However, there were concerns that Austin's communities of color, in particular the African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian American populations, were underrepresented in the survey results. Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown of the survey respondents.

Table 1: Race and Ethnicity of Survey Respondents and the General Population in the Austin Metropolitan Area

	Percent of respondents	Austin-Round Rock MSA*
African American or Black	2.7%	7.5%
Asian	3.3%	5.2%
Native American or Alaska Native	2.3%	0.8%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.4%	0.1%
White	78.1%	71.7%
Hispanic	8.9%	32.5%
Non-Hispanic	79.2%	67.5%

*Source: The Nielsen Company (2015 estimates)

CAD was concerned that people of color working in Austin's creative sector may experience challenges and needs that are not fully captured in the survey findings. It was important to CAD to give these communities the opportunity to surface any additional information about their creative careers. For instance, are there language difficulties, cultural specificities, or content issues that need to be addressed with these populations to ensure appropriate resource access? CAD therefore decided to host three community conversations with minority groups to discuss the survey findings and assess to what extent participants feel that the survey accurately reflects their concerns, or whether they face resource and service needs that differ significantly from those mentioned by the survey respondents.

The participants for these focus groups were recruited through personal invitations from CAD staff members after soliciting recommendations for the list of invitees from leaders from these particular communities. The groups included a mix of individual creatives and representatives of nonprofit cultural organizations, ranging in age from their late-twenties to over sixty and representing an approximately even balance of male and female participants. Eighty percent of the creatives were long-time residents of the Austin area, and about 20% had arrived in the city within the past 3 to 4 years. The nonprofit organizations that were represented at the meetings tended to be rather small in terms of their annual budgets and program offerings. Many of them only have one or two fulltime staff members. While a variety of artistic disciplines were represented at the meetings, a disproportionate number of the individual creatives in attendance work in the visual arts or in theatre.

The participation rates for the focus groups are shown in Table 2. While some participants were both active as individual artists and employed by a nonprofit, Table 2 reflects the status they reported when registering for the focus group.

Table 2: Overview of Focus Groups and Participation

				# of Participants		
Focus Group	**Location**	**Date**	**Time**	**Individual Creatives**	**Nonprofit Staff**	**Total**
Hispanic/Latino	Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center	09/30/15	1:00 - 3:30pm	5	5	**10**
Asian American	Asian American Resource Center	09/30/15	5:30 – 8:00pm	5	4	**9**
African American	George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center	10/01/15	11am – 1:30pm	4	11	**15**

All participants were fiercely committed to their creative practice, the health of their cultural community, and the sustainability of their work and audience in the Austin area. At the convenings, they demonstrated a strong desire to network and build community with each other, in addition to getting access to information on cultural resources. They participated in these focus groups out of a shared dedication to improving the cultural opportunities in Austin for creatives and audiences.

This report consists of a brief discussion of the methodology, a summary of key findings culled from all three focus groups, detailed analyses of the discussions in each individual focus group, and a set of final conclusions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Christine Harris conducted the focus groups on behalf of WolfBrown. The format and approach was designed by Christine and John Carnwath of WolfBrown and supported by the Cultural Arts Division. CAD staff recruited the attendees after developing a list of potential attendees from recommendations that were submitted by leaders in the each of the three communities. The Parks and Recreation Department's Museums and Cultural Programs provided meeting room space in the three city-owned cultural centers. Light refreshments were provided and key staff members from Austin's Economic Development Department, Cultural Arts Division, and the Parks and Recreation Department's Museums and Cultural Programs attended the meetings. WolfBrown arranged for a $40 stipend for each participant. CAD sent a copy of the survey findings (*Building Austin's Creative Capacity: Gap Analysis Report)* to all participants in advance of the focus groups.

Harris facilitated discussions of a series of questions in a roundtable format with each focus group. These questions were based on reviewing the gap analysis findings to determine to what extent the findings reflect the situations of the focus groups. The core questions used to guide the conversation included, but were not always limited to:

- What has been your experience in accessing support services and resources in the Austin area?
- With respect to the resources and services you know about, how well do they meet your needs? How could they meet your needs better?
- As you reflect on developing your creative practice/organization, what types of learning content would be most valuable to you?
- What are your preferences for types of learning experiences?
- What do you think about the creative 'vibe' in Austin?
- What would give Austin a 5 out of 5 for 'being nurturing and supporting the creative sector'?

Each session was attended by two or three staff members from the aforementioned departments of the City of Austin. The attending staff members included Janet Seibert, Vicky Valdez, Sylnovia Holt-Raab, Meghan Wells, and Laura Esparza. While there were initial concerns that the presence of City staff members might stifle an open and frank conversation, it did not appear that the focus group participants were "holding back" with their comments or critiques in any way. Indeed, the presence of City staff members seems to have been encouraging to participants since it demonstrated the sincerity of the City's desire to hear their thoughts, and it was helpful that the staff members were able answer questions at the end of each focus group session.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

In general, the focus groups confirmed the results of the online survey, but they also added some contextual differences worth noting. This section summarizes the responses from all three focus groups in three overarching topic areas: 1. Assessment of existing resources; 2. Service and resource preferences; and 3. Living and working in Austin.

Assessment of Existing Resources

With respect to assessment of existing resources, the groups generally agreed with the larger survey. They appreciate the support services that they are aware of, but believe there needs to be more effort in helping people become aware of all that is available. Among the small arts and cultural organizations represented in the focus groups, the costs of participation and lack of time are considerable barriers. A comment from the Latino group exemplifies remarks made in all of the groups: *"Right now I don't have staff, money or time to move my organization up. Workshops just give us more work – they don't help us get to the next level."*

Likely because the participants in these focus groups primarily represented the perspectives of individual artists and very small nonprofits, there was general agreement that grant writing and fundraising are very challenging. This is partly due to the processes themselves and partly due to funders who are more interested in the number of residents who are being served than more intimate measures of community impact. As one participant put it, *"We often don't serve a large number of people, but we are deep into the community with lots of families on lots of levels."*

Access to space was very important to these groups, and this need was expressed differently in the focus group meetings than in the online survey results. Whereas there was a general desire for greater accesses to affordable creative spaces in the online survey, each of the minority populations participating in the focus groups is served by its own City-supported cultural center. The attendees think of the respective cultural centers as a creative 'home,' and while they value the cultural centers for this as well as for performance and administrative reasons, they believe that more must be done to ensure these spaces are accessible to all users and patrons. As one participant said, *"it needs to be run as an event space, not a city office."*

In the focus groups, increasing access to affordable, appropriate spaces in their respective cultural centers surfaced as the top priority, with access to other affordable spaces across the Austin area as a second space-related concern. Many artists of color produce work for audiences both within their ethnic or cultural communities and for wider audiences across Austin. The limited availability of spaces at cultural centers limits participation from within their cultural communities, and the difficulty of finding alternative spaces throughout Austin makes it challenging to attract the wider Austin audience.

All focus groups expressed a need for greater access to basic operational business support services (e.g. marketing, fundraising, business planning). However, just having access to these services is not enough – they need assistance in understanding how to

implement what they learn in these professional development opportunities within their day-to-day work. Participants in the Asian American group in particular mentioned that the currently available workshops and courses are "*often too general to apply to artists without enough knowledge of how a creative business works. [It] needs a more artistic focus.*" The participants in these focus groups believe that their business mindset is unique, and they would like business resources tailored to the needs, contexts, and backgrounds of artists.

While monetary issues were the predominant concern among representatives of arts/cultural organizations in the online survey, the level of anxiety about this is particularly high among minorities in the cultural sector. The focus group participants believe minorities are under-represented in traditional philanthropy and often these groups have little access to individual donors or private foundations. The online survey suggests that more support goes to established institutions than newer or smaller organizations, which also means that a disproportionate amount of funding flows to euro-centric organizations (which tend to be larger and more established).

As focus group participants reflected on financial support for their programming, they expressed that traditional foundations don't appreciate their impact and therefore aren't attracted to supporting their work. These creative organizations work very intensely with smaller numbers of participants because the impact of their work affects whole families and oftentimes entire neighborhoods. Traditional philanthropy often prefers to support those programs reaching large numbers of people, which is not how many of these cultural programs operate.

Service and Resource Preferences

In reviewing the service and resource preferences, there was much congruence between the focus groups and the online survey. The focus group participants voiced particular support for the survey's findings regarding networking and mentoring. They would like more opportunities to learn from each other and be exposed to people working in various stages of their practice.

As in the larger survey, participants in the focus groups want more self-directed learning opportunities, but they also appreciate a mix of learning formats. The Hispanic/Latino group said there was a need for services delivered in Spanish. One participant noted, "*Many new artists want to get started but Spanish is their first language.*" The Hispanic/Latino group appreciated opportunities to be with a mix of creatives and cultural organizations.

A need was expressed for more mentoring support along the path of their creative businesses. All of these groups appreciated that they had much to learn from people further along in their creative careers – both from within their cultural communities and across all creative disciplines represented in Austin. This was mirrored in their desire for a wider range of business skill development services. There was strong interest in learning business skills earlier in their careers and having support for increasingly sophisticated learning throughout their careers. A quote from the Asian group highlights this: "*We need to learn business skills earlier. I know that I need it and that if I want to be in the field I need to learn the skills.*"

Both the Hispanic/Latino and the African American groups mentioned a desire for a 'hub' or central place for services. This comment expands the survey respondents interest in shared services to the next level of delivery. These participants were looking for shared community as well as shared artistic space. Such a resource center wouldn't be culturally specific or focused on a particular ethnic community as the City's cultural centers currently are, but rather a central information hub that can help all of Austin's creatives advance their professional practices.

A difference between the online survey respondents and the focus groups was the desire for access to more personalized services. Quotes from the African American group ("*can people in the City be assigned 10 organizations each that they meet with once a month and then come together to compare notes on what is needed?*") and the Asian group ("*There is that middle space where I need more access to networking and money. I need to meet the next people up the ladder*") reflect this need.

Living and Working in Austin

With respect to living and working in Austin the focus groups were in agreement with survey respondents that there is an exciting creative "vibe" in Austin and the Latino group gave credit to the "umbrella/fiscal agent grants" for supporting that vibrancy.

The cost of living and working in Austin is the major concern of creatives and nonprofit organizations in greater Austin – no matter their cultural identity. This concern was consistently voiced across all focus groups. As one member of the African American group put it, *"If you can't afford to live here then you can't make art here."* Similar to what was reflected in the Open Community meeting, Austin artists have to make a living by selling their work outside of Austin (often in Houston and Dallas) – currently there is not enough work being purchased from these artists locally.

When asked about rating Austin as a supportive place for creatives and nonprofit arts and culture organizations, all three focus groups would have given a lower rating than the online survey respondents for all of the categories. Comments from the participants focused on needing a larger market for their work, lack of support for their cultural contributions, and difficulty attracting audiences. These comments largely mirror those in the online survey, but there was greater emphasis on their cultural artistic identity in the focus groups.

Each of the focus groups was asked what would need to change in order for them to "strongly agree" that Austin is a great place to live and work. The number one item they mentioned was that their cultural centers would need to be more flexible and adaptable to their needs. Specifically, they would need to be fully available as performance spaces and provide more opportunities for education and sharing services.

These groups also agreed that more promotion of buying local art and investing in local artists would be beneficial to the arts community. Affordable housing and work space were the other key areas in which Austin was thought to fall short of being "a great place to live and work."

The main findings from these cultural community focus group meetings can be summarized as follows:

- o The participants would like the City's cultural centers to be more amenable to their needs (e.g., longer opening-hours, more performance and meeting spaces) in addition to having more access to affordable space in Austin.
- o Many small (often one-person) organizations have little time or money to access services.
- o Individuals and organizations from these communities find financial resources (public and philanthropic) are very difficult to access.
- o Given the density of the market in Austin, audience development is very challenging for everyone in the arts/creative sector (regardless of race or ethnicity)
- o The focus group participants were even less enthusiastic about Austin as a place for creatives and cultural organizations than the respondents in the online survey.
- o More so than was delineated in the general survey, the focus group participants indicated a need to start with very basic business support services early on in their careers and to have continual access to developing their business skills, including professional mentoring.

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUPS

This section details the individual focus group discussions under the headings Assessment of Existing Resources, Service and Resource Preferences, and Living and Working in Austin. These categories mirror the categories in the *Conclusions and Recommendations* as well as those in the *Executive Summary*. There is also a section on recommended priorities.

Assessment of Existing Resources

HISPANIC/LATINO

The Hispanic/Latino focus group represented the creative disciplines of visual art, theatre, dance, ceramics, music and arts education. The age range was approximately mid-30's to over 60 with about half representing Hispanic/Latino cultural organizations and the other half individual creatives with a wide variety of creative practices, not limited to specifically Hispanic/Latino culture or audiences.

With regard to access to support services, the Hispanic/Latino group had a good sense of what resources and services are available but had serious concerns about the cost of the services and finding the time to access the services. Many of the organizational participants were operating their business with a very limited staff (often as a staff of one) and believed they had little opportunity to grow their business or even leverage the resources available to move forward. *"Right now I don't have staff, money or time to move my organization up. Workshops just give us more work – they don't help us get to the next level."* Also, reflecting on limited time and money, both individual and organizational participants said *"the cost of my time and limited dollars is too high for the return."*

The administrative costs were also an issue with respect to writing and submitting grants. Concerns were reflected about CAD's cultural grants and others. *"City cultural grants are too rigorous for the amount of money and staff expertise. Texas Commission on the Arts is a much better experience – more friendly, open and non-rigorous."*

This focus group believed that the Latino/Hispanic culture is not recognized or valued by foundations, so it is hard to get enough money to add staff or other resources. In particular, it is very difficult for the smaller organizations to get funding because most Latino groups are much more focused on community impact than the number of people served. As a result, the foundations don't see large numbers served in grant applications. And yet, participants said *"there are 24,000 Latino students in AISD but they are not all getting served by Latino arts."* There is more demand than supply of cultural programming. *"We often don't serve a large number of people but we are deep into the community with lots of families on lots of levels."* In addition, participants believe that the emphasis of the HOT tax on arts-based tourism is perceived to be a challenge for the more community-based arts groups.

The Latino focus group expressed a need for access to more basic infrastructure services – space to reduce overhead, grant money to support administrative assistance, additional staff support to take advantage of the resources that can help them advance. Above all,

the focus group participants were concerned that the Latino population does not have the access to the art and culture that it could, and should, have, and that artists and cultural organizations are limited in their capacity to deliver services to their community.

The participants fully appreciated the role of the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center and explained that if your organization can present, perform or be resident in the building, it saves costs – *"when I perform at the MACC more money goes directly into my art rather than overhead."* The City-owned venue has a Latino Arts Residency Program and a developmental program for Latino arts organizations and artists in all disciplines that provide arts and cultural programming to the Austin community. The challenge is that there are two more phases of construction that were planned that are yet to be implemented. These focus group participants would like to see the MACC completed so that a fuller range of cultural services can be offered to the Latino community.

With respect to space availability in the area, there was the comment, *"the City has given space for nothing for groups but not for the Latino community. We need a census of available spaces."* This is related to the limited financial support available to Hispanic/Latino cultural organizations, mentioned above.

ASIAN AMERICAN

The Asian American focus group represented the creative disciplines of visual art, theatre, dance, photography, comedy/improve, performance art, and music. The age range was approximately early 30's to 50 with about a third representing Asian cultural organizations, a third representing organizations that are not community-specific and the remaining third were individual creatives with a wide variety of cultural practices which were not limited to culturally specific activities. In some cases, the head of the organization (particularly in dance and theater) also performs the art. A couple of the participants were teachers in various university settings.

In assessing their knowledge of support services, the Asian focus group participants registered that they were unaware of all that is available to them. They would like to see better dispersion of information as well as materials better focused on basic needs. "*The material is often too general to apply to artists without enough knowledge of how a creative business works. Needs more artistic focus."* This group would like to see one location or one person who knows where all of the resources are and could advise on which ones are most appropriate for their business.

This group is interested in a wide variety of basic support services, such as marketing and promotion, legal services, and corporate outreach. With regard to access to these services, they prefer a variety of options and suggest repeating services at different times and locations. A couple of the participants were enrolled in Artist Inc, a new business training program, delivered through a partnership between CAD and Mid-America Arts Alliance, which "*trains you in skills you don't want to do but learn to do."* This is an intensive 8-week course for 25 artists at a time. CAD had facilitated 2 classes as of December, 2015. Many of the focus group participants also like the City of Austin's Small Business programs and their free and low-cost classes.

There was serious concern about venue space – they need more small/mid-sized spaces as there can be a 15-16 month wait – "*we find the space first and then figure out what to do with it. We love the Asian American Resource Center but it closes at 6. We need it reasonably priced and easy to get in and out.*" The lower cost venues are booked very far out, and technical rehearsal spaces are too expensive for most people.

AFRICAN AMERICAN

The African American focus group was represented by the creative disciplines of visual art, theatre, dance, writing, film, arts education, and music. The age range was approximately late twenties to 60+ with about half representing African American cultural organizations, and half individual creatives with a wide variety of creative practices – some of which focus primarily on serving their cultural community and others that include serving the wider Austin community. In some cases (particularly in dance and theater), the head of the organization also performs the art. All of these participants were deeply rooted in serving the African American community but many also look for performance opportunities across Austin.

These participants registered that they know the information on resources and services is there but there is so little time to get to it. Some commented that not all of the African American businesses have easy access to these resources. The issue of time and staffing was of significant concern - "*When you are doing everything, you don't have time or money to hire someone else to do it. We need creative time.*"

Finding funding is a large issue for this focus group. They believe that many foundations have a grant application process that is too challenging for the potential money, and as the 'HOT tax' has to be dedicated to public performance and exhibition (arts-based tourism) it requires smaller organizations to tap their limited resources for community work to build in such public events. These participants also believe the reporting requirements for grants are too cumbersome - "*If we don't self-report what we have accomplished to the City we don't get access to the resources.*"

These community members are interested in basic business services like accounting, marketing, web design, business planning. They would appreciate templates that could be adapted and used for their purposes.

The George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center is perceived as an excellent community resource, although the participants would like more meeting space options. There was discussion regarding a resident theater company at the Carver. Such a step would require further investigation.

Service and Resource Preferences

HISPANIC/LATINO

This group is interested in services provided in Spanish so that new immigrants and up and coming artists have access to opportunities. "*Many new artists want to get started but Spanish is their first language.*"

This focus group asks that the City assist them in thinking creatively about supporting themselves better and helping other support organizations understand what the Latino community is doing. They like having the Mexican American Cultural Center but believe that if the City can complete the project they will have more options to support their needs for performance space, artistic displays and classroom space.

With regard to presentation of services, these participants prefer a very practical approach: "*present the material and then discuss it; make it real to our situations.*" They like the combination of online access on their time as well as participating in webinars and in-person sessions.

This focus group was interested in sharing resources. They mentioned wanting to learn from having a wide variety of size of organizations in the same program, and they wanted to look at ways in which they could share administrative services. They like the idea of collaborating – "*we could have a hub for the services we have a hard time doing.*"

ASIAN AMERICAN

The participants in this focus group are keenly interested in learning more business skills. They want access to expertise and different sets of skills. Along those lines, they are interested in co-op development, where they not only learn from each other but share support services. The support services they are interested in are basic services, such as marketing and promotion, legal services, and corporate outreach.

With respect to service delivery, these participants prefer a mix of times and repeating services at different times and locations.

"*We need to learn business skills earlier. I know that I need it and that if I want to be in the field I need to learn the skills*". They are also interested in advancing their creative skills but want to make sure they do that at an earlier business stage.

This focus group talked a lot about resources needed at different career stages and expressed a desire for coaching along a career continuum. They would like options for learning as they move through their career. "*After 5/6 years, I need more support systems but what do I need next? I don't know how to find the right people. There is that middle space where I need more access to networking and money. I need to meet the next people up the ladder.*"

AFRICAN AMERICAN

The participants in this focus group expressed the need to understand basic business skills. *"We need things better explained to us, like basic bookkeeping."* This group expressed an interest in exploring bartering of services, which they called "experience trading."

Several avenues of engaging with the African American community were discussed. Using retired professionals as business development mentors and better use of the Texas Accountants and Lawyers for the Arts volunteers were two options mentioned. One idea that was explicitly offered was to use the City's social worker model approach of supporting clients in arranged groups – *"can people in the City be assigned 10 organizations each that they meet with once a month and then come together to compare notes on what is needed?"*

This focus group felt it was important to take the services into the neighborhoods; that is, identify meeting places and bring the services to the community. They saw this as an opportunity for all stages of learning – informal settings for smaller organizations along with more formal opportunities at places like the Carver Museum.

Participants in this focus group wanted more direct support from the City. They wanted more access to individuals who can help with resource access, more money, more mentorship, and a commitment to keep the African American cultural life alive and growing. One person said, *"we need an entire department of support in the City – a City supported center of support."*

Living And Working In Austin

HISPANIC/LATINO

Overall, this group believes that there is a positive vibe in Austin - *"one of the reasons there is a good vibe is that umbrella contracts (i.e. fiscal agents) are available."* However, both individual creatives and representatives of arts/cultural nonprofits feel that they are treading water trying to keep their operations afloat and that they are often forced to prioritize the business needs over their artistic work. These participants also registered concern that Austinites don't buy visual art from local artists (they tend to go to Houston and Dallas), which they believe is undermining the ability of artists to support themselves in Austin.

One Latino musician said, *"It really helps my work and reputation to say that I am an artist from Austin but to make a living I have to perform in larger cities. I can't make a living as an artist in Austin."*

Finally, some significant concern was registered about the audience for Latino culture. The Latino population is 33% of the Austin MSA but these participants' assessment is that there is neither proportionate funding nor programming to reflect the breadth of this population. "*We would like more access to resources and would like to feel encouraged instead of graded. We think it is important for the City to think through its cultural policy and what impact it wants to support."*

What would you need to "strongly agree" that Austin is a great place to live and work?

These focus group participants want more affordable living and working space, as well as a space where artists can hang out and connect with each other. They would also like to see more collection of art and greater willingness to pay for art in Austin. They say that too much is available or expected for free in the local art scene. Finally, they would like to see supportive public policy for the Latino community.

ASIAN AMERICAN

The members of this focus group generally want to be considered "artists" rather than "Asian artists." They believe they are somewhat "forced" into an "ethnic identity," while they are interested in more mainstream acceptance and visibility. These participants are committed to their own resourcefulness – *"we can't just follow a road map to success, we need to be self-motivated."*

Concern about patron support was raised. *"There are not that many patrons in Austin that buy local. The patrons that are here want bigger artists from elsewhere."* And another comment was, *"I sell my art elsewhere. Can we collect all local artists on one website – use it to educate the patrons and cultivate more patrons?"*

What would you need to "strongly agree" that Austin is a great place to live and work?

This group would like to see local artists included in mainstream programming, e.g. in museums, galleries, etc. Along with this, they would like a better market to sell their work in Austin. There was some concern about identity – *"our own community is culturally stuck – our community will support international cultural outreach (e.g. national touring programs) but what we need is more support and commitment to being visible in the local mainstream."* Funding options need to be communicated more clearly to raise confidence and morale in the community.

These participants would like to see artistic work better highlighted by the City. For instance, they suggested that the City could develop and promote an award program similar to the B. Iden Payne awards for theater, the Austin Music Awards, and the Critics Table Awards to cultivate recognition, pride, and honor. They see value in developing a residency for an artist from outside Austin to increase quality and local credibility, and they would like to see local Austin artists have residencies in other communities. They are interested in fostering artistic growth opportunities.

Finally, this group wanted a better quality of life – more affordable housing and health insurance along the lines of the musicians' Health Alliance for Austin Musicians program.

AFRICAN AMERICAN

This focus group believes that Austin is a very challenging place to live and work for African Americans. With a declining population, attention to their community needs has been reduced. They believe this negatively impacts the support for and growth of the African American cultural identity and expression. In general, the participants from this community feel very marginalized.

<u>What would you need to "strongly agree" that Austin is a great place to live and work?</u>

These focus group participants would like to see a larger cultural facility with more spaces available for meetings, classrooms, and performances. They want this venue to be run like an event space and not like a city office. They like the Carver Museum but believe it is too small and that the opening hours are limiting. Providing a hub to relate to the African American story would be highly desirable. Houston's S.H.A.P.E. Center was cited as an example (http://www.shape.org).

In addition to accessing performance space, there was interest in more private/public development for artist housing – cooperative housing like the Project Row Houses in Houston's Third Ward – and perhaps including transient residencies for young people who are coming into town. Interest in "incubators" and collaborative spaces was also expressed as important for better working conditions in Austin.

The issue of affordability of working and living in Austin affects how people feel about being in Austin. *"If you can't afford to live here then you can't make art here."*

This focus group was interested in cultivating the African American audience and requested help in making the arts more accessible to the African American community. Independently of the focus group, a group of African American creative met to discuss their common concerns and support needs with CAD staff in a less formal setting, indicating their commitment improving their situation and their openness to dialog about potential improvements.

Prioritizing Activities

Each of the focus groups was asked what they would prioritize for developing the cultural community of Austin. They generally agreed on the following:

- ✓ Keep these conversations going – this is helpful dialogue.
- ✓ Work more closely with artists to develop ideas and policies; *work with us not just for us.*
- ✓ Do something about affordable housing and work space.
- ✓ Provide more accessible funding options, including easier application processes.
- ✓ Ensure that there is continual celebration and support of all diversity in Austin.

CONCLUSION

Overall, there was significant congruency between what was learned from the focus groups and the results of the online survey. The key differences were that the focus group participants wanted:

- more intensive and extensive use of their respective cultural centers;
- more opportunities to interact with and learn from other creatives both within their cultural communities and in the wider creative community of Austin;
- better understanding of how they serve their communities from the philanthropic sector; and
- more basic infrastructure support (money, staff assistance, services support, fundamental business education).

It was also clear that more frequent dialogue with communities of color will not only be welcomed by these the individual creatives and leaders of cultural organizations in these communities, but will also lead to a much fuller understanding of what is and is not working for individual creatives and nonprofit organizations in Austin. These conversations were an excellent beginning of a more engaged dialogue between the City of Austin and the cultural community.