



DeLUXE Klds in Harmony Violin Program; Photo by Keba Sharber

CREATIVE CONNECTIONS:

# The Value and Potential of the Houston Cultural Districts

Fall 2023 | Prepared by Jana Fredricks for the Houston Cultural Districts

This report was made possible by the generous input of many individuals and organizations. Special thanks to the many artists, nonprofit and business representatives, District residents, and visitors who brought meaning and insight to this process.

# Table of Contents

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## REPORT

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	6
Ecosystem Needs of Houston's Arts & Culture Sector	8
Frameworks	10
Key Findings: Cultural Vibrancy	12
Key Findings: Community Cohesion	22
Key Findings: Economic Development	28
Discussion	35

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Cultural District Profiles	36
Appendix B: Methodology	43
Appendix C: Report Definitions	45

# Executive Summary

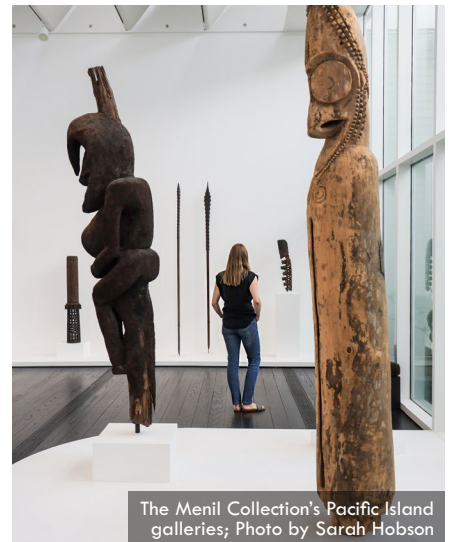
This report articulates a framework for impact and builds understanding of the short- and long-term outcomes of the Houston Cultural Districts. According to the Texas Commission of the Arts, the purpose of the Houston Cultural Districts is to harness the power of the cultural resources within their geographic boundaries to stimulate economic development and community vitality. There are seven state-designated Cultural Districts across Houston, including 5th Ward Cultural Arts District, Arts District Houston, East End Houston Cultural District, Midtown Houston Cultural Arts and Entertainment District, Houston Museum District, Houston Theater District, and Third Ward Cultural Arts District. Each of the seven Districts has different management structures, cultural assets, programs, and priorities. Despite these differences, some also share common strengths and characteristics which can be leveraged to support collective progress.



Make Music Day, Photo by Viva la Marx Photography



Designed 2 Dance youth dancers at Juneteenth Festival at DeLUXE Theater; Photo by Annie Mulligan



The Menil Collection's Pacific Island galleries; Photo by Sarah Hobson

## CREATOR-FOCUSED DISTRICTS

(Arts District Houston, Midtown Houston Cultural Arts and Entertainment District) offer robust engagement opportunities for independent artists in the greater Houston area and a high concentration of for-profit arts businesses such as galleries and artist studios. Programs produced by these Cultural Districts include art markets, artist residencies, artist microgrants, and consolidated postings for artist opportunities and resources.

## HERITAGE-FOCUSED DISTRICTS

(5th Ward Cultural Arts District, East End Houston Cultural District, Third Ward Cultural Arts District) effectively prioritize the celebration of neighborhood creativity and preservation of cultural legacy. They contain a high concentration of heritage sites, and programming produced by the Districts includes experiences rooted in cultural heritage and legacy, artist councils, and town halls for the neighborhood's creative community.

## INSTITUTION-FOCUSED DISTRICTS

(Houston Museum District, Houston Theater District) are the most centralized of the Cultural Districts and contain a high concentration of well-resourced arts and cultural organizations. They are effective at increasing access and generating broad awareness of arts and culture in Houston. Governed by a membership structure, these Districts are led by representatives of member organizations and facilitate a beneficial network of arts and cultural organizations.



Navigation Esplanade; Photo by Dan Joyce

Throughout this project, we collected data from interviews, focus groups, and a community survey to elucidate the benefits experienced by the individuals, businesses, and organizations that participate in Cultural District experiences and offerings. This community-driven understanding informed the development of an impact framework articulating the current and potential value of the Houston Cultural Districts. This report presents qualitative and quantitative evidence of the Districts' contributions to Houston's Cultural Vibrancy, Community Cohesion, and Economic Development.



## Cultural Vibrancy

The Houston Cultural Districts contain a diverse array of arts and cultural offerings; they attract visitors and increase access for the people who live, work, and play in Houston; they foster creativity, well-being, and cultural appreciation; and they celebrate neighborhood creativity, preserve cultural legacy, and safeguard their arts and cultural ecosystem.



## Community Cohesion

The Houston Cultural Districts gather friends and families and foster civic pride and engagement; they build valuable connections within Houston's arts and cultural ecosystem and catalyze mutually beneficial cross-sector collaborations.



## Economic Development

The Houston Cultural Districts generate business and employment opportunities; they attract neighborhood development; and they support the financial sustainability and growth of District businesses, nonprofits, and artists.

## Findings Highlights

The Cultural Districts are microcosms of Houston's larger arts and cultural ecosystem, and they grapple with many of the challenges facing the sector as a whole. There is the perception of fragmentation within the arts and cultural sector, with few opportunities to rally around common needs, share resources, and address historic inequities. The Houston Cultural Districts hold a unique position as a unified collective that is connected to and has buy-in from a broad array of arts and cultural contributors, including organizations, businesses, and individuals. Their cultural assets include 84 arts and culture nonprofits, 47 for-profit arts businesses, 28 parks, 17 heritage sites, and more than 400 artist studios. In Houston's decentralized arts and cultural ecosystem, the Cultural Districts are well-positioned to facilitate cross-sector action around common goals, such as resource cultivation and increased visibility of arts and culture in Houston.

The 84 arts and culture nonprofits located in the Houston Cultural Districts constitute a substantial share of the city's arts and culture sector, totaling more than \$503 million in annual expenditures. Surveyed nonprofits with annual budgets of greater than \$250,000 reported increased access to funding through the Texas Commission on the Arts' Cultural District Project Grant Program, and 69% of surveyed nonprofits reported being better able to serve their community because they are located in a Cultural District. One nonprofit leader stated: "Cultural offerings bring people together, create community, and showcase the diverse cultural richness in Houston. All of those are factors that play a significant role in my organization's success." Over the last year, the Houston Cultural Districts have demonstrated their ability to forge connections between nonprofit organizations, evidenced by 77% of surveyed nonprofits reporting increased ability to advocate for their needs and 80% indicating a stronger sense of community as a result of Cultural District participation.

District offerings include more than 3700 artist engagements and 60 residencies annually, in addition to 400 artist studio spaces. 59% of surveyed artists reported four or more professional engagements in the Houston Cultural Districts during the last 12 months, and 34% reported six or more. Despite the prevalence of professional opportunities in the Cultural Districts, artists reported a lack of access to space and resources. One artist shared "The issue I hear the most, which I experience as well,

is a lack of affordable space for artists to work ... Most of the places that exist are too pricey." Only 36% of surveyed artists reported having access to adequate resources to advance their creative practice.

Cultural District businesses include arts businesses such as bookstores and galleries, as well as non-arts businesses such as restaurants, hotels, breweries, and retail shops. Business owners report being inspired to innovate their business practice and a more robust network of supporters as a result of Cultural District participation. These hubs of creativity and history attract like-minded businesses across sectors, activating under-used spaces and creating employment opportunities. One business owner stated: "[Our business] really wanted to be here, where creativity is bouncing off the walls and there's a vibrant ecosystem that resonates with our brand and inspires really cool ideas ... it's a symbiotic relationship."

The Houston Cultural Districts are home to 62,700 Houstonians and receive 11.2 million local and non-local visits annually. 14,000 Houstonians volunteer at District nonprofits each year. District visitors and residents reported benefits such as spending more time with friends and family, and increased civic pride, quality of life, and cultural awareness. 87% of surveyed visitors reported feeling proud of Houston's art and culture, and 78% felt more invested in Houston's future as a result of Cultural District experiences. "Being here makes me realize how art makes Houston a better place to live!" shared a visitor at a free public art event in one Cultural District. 88% of surveyed residents reported being more likely to invite friends and family to their neighborhood, and 71% of visitors reported spending more time with friends and family as a result of Cultural District experiences. 82% of surveyed residents and visitors felt inspired to live their lives more creatively.

A variety of benefits were reported by all types of Cultural District participants, from business owners and residents to visitors and artists. This acknowledgment came alongside a call to amplify these benefits: a call to boost awareness and District visitation, increase available resources, foster inter-sector connectivity, and create more professional opportunities to meet the needs of District participants as well as Houston's arts and cultural ecosystem.



Muralist Royal Sumikat; Photo by Felix Sanchez

## Looking Ahead

With this foundation in place, several opportunities emerge for the Houston Cultural Districts to explore. Now that the Cultural Districts have a broad understanding of how District experiences and offerings contribute to Houston's Cultural Vibrancy, Community Cohesion, and Economic Development, it will be necessary to evaluate the role and impact of programs and initiatives produced by the Districts both individually and collectively. By focusing on programmatic and organizational effectiveness, the Districts will build internal capacity and further amplify the benefits experienced by participants. To this aim, the varied strengths and unique features of the seven Districts can be leveraged to meet ecosystem needs. Successful programs produced by a single District, such as artist microgrants and neighborhood artist councils, have the potential to be replicated or scaled across Districts. As the Districts develop programs and initiatives, there is an opportunity to increase engagement of District businesses and organizations as well as more fully activate cultural assets within and across Districts. Cultivating

intentional and ongoing relationships with arts organizations and businesses will support data collection activities and inform program design. While this evaluation focuses heavily on the arts ecosystem, there is an opportunity to build relationships and partnerships with non-arts organizations in the Districts, such as heritage sites, parks, community and faith-based organizations, and educational institutions.

Throughout this process, the Cultural Districts have intentionally prioritized a "bottom-up" process that holds space for intentional listening and elevates the needs of their communities. As they articulate a shared vision for the future of their collaboration, the Districts will be in a position to, if resourced appropriately, take coordinated actions that strategically address common needs. As umbrellas for so many creative individuals, entities, and experiences, the Houston Cultural Districts are uniquely positioned to safeguard the arts and cultural ecosystems of their Districts and instigate outsized benefits across the sector.

# Introduction

In 2005, the Texas Legislature authorized the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) to designate Cultural Districts in cities across Texas. Today there are 52 Cultural Districts across Texas, seven of which are located in Houston, the most-state-designated Cultural Districts in any Texas city. The TCA defines Cultural Districts as special zones that harness the power of cultural resources to stimulate economic development and community vitality. The Cultural Districts are intended to become focal points for generating business, attracting tourists, stimulating cultural development, and fostering civic pride.

16 years after the program was established, the Houston Cultural Districts began meeting regularly to share concerns about preserving, strengthening, and sustaining their districts. They

recognized that as a group they could work together to address these concerns and achieve common goals. In 2022, the Houston Cultural Districts received funding from Houston Endowment to undertake a collective visioning project, including an evaluation to better understand the collective quality of life and economic impact their Districts make on Houston.

Together, the Houston Cultural Districts represent a broad cross-section of the diverse neighborhoods and arts experiences that make Houston so unique. While each has a distinct identity, operating structure, function, and goal, each Cultural District uses art as a tool to educate, inspire, and improve quality of life while supporting their community and Houston's economy.



Kouman Kele African Dancers at Juneteenth Festival at DeLUXE Theater; Photo by Annie Mulligan

## 5TH WARD CULTURAL ARTS DISTRICT

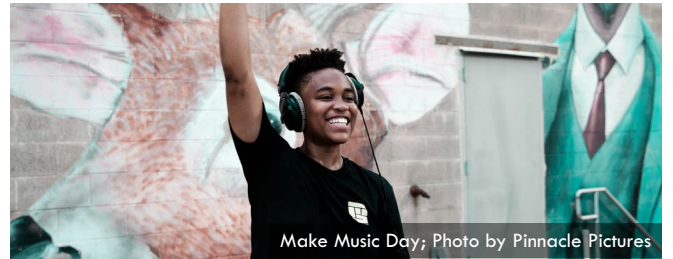
(est. 2020) is a living Cultural Arts District run as an initiative of the 5th Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation. Located in a historic community, 5th Ward is a center of African American history driven by a strong belief that “There is no art without people,” and that art is a way of life.



Ballet Folkloric dancer at East End Street Fest; Photo by Dan Joyce

## EAST END HOUSTON CULTURAL DISTRICT

(est. 2014) is a vibrant and diverse District that showcases a vast array of murals and urban art in Houston's oldest neighborhood. Operating as an initiative of the East End District, East End Houston Cultural District showcases public art, Hispanic culture, and is rich in historical sites and structures that connect the community to its heritage.



Make Music Day; Photo by Pinnacle Pictures

## ARTS DISTRICT HOUSTON

(est. 2015) has a rich history and encompasses two of the city's oldest neighborhoods. Run as a program of Houston-based arts service organization Fresh Arts, Arts District Houston is home to 370 studio spaces for local artists, designers, and makers, housing the highest concentration of working artists in the state of Texas.



Angled - Textiles de Nuestras Tierras (Textiles from Our Lands) Sign Wrap by Sebastien Gomez de la Torre

## MIDTOWN HOUSTON CULTURAL ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

(est. 2012) is home to thriving arts and culture experiences, from music venues and public art to historic architecture and stunning museum collections. An initiative of Midtown Management District, Midtown Houston Cultural Arts and Entertainment District brings quality cultural arts-based programming, projects, and events that combine nature, visual arts, and sustainable development to the broader community of Houston.





**HOUSTON MUSEUM DISTRICT** (est. 1997) houses one of the country's densest concentrations of cultural institutions. The Museum District comprises 19 member organizations and is governed by a board of member nonprofit leaders. The District includes a diverse range of institutions that provide a variety of revolving exhibitions, art collections, performances, film series, and hands-on activities.



**THE HOUSTON THEATER DISTRICT** (est. 1995) is a cultural and entertainment epicenter featuring world-renowned performing arts organizations in downtown Houston. The District includes seven member organizations, is operated by Theatre District Improvement, Inc, and governed by a board of member nonprofit leaders. The District houses nearly 21,000 seats and boasts professional resident companies in all of the major performing arts disciplines.



**THIRD WARD CULTURAL ARTS DISTRICT** (est. 2020) is a community platform that emphasizes cultural identity and its impact on the urban landscape. Operating as a program of Project Row Houses, Third Ward Cultural Arts District exists to preserve, protect, inspire, and share the artistic and cultural legacy of the Historic Third Ward with current and future generations of artists and creatives.

This report defines a framework for articulating the value and potential of The Houston Cultural Districts to the city of Houston both now and in the future, acknowledges ecosystem needs that affect District operations and effectiveness, identifies paths for continued evaluation, and defines the perimeters by which The Houston Cultural Districts will hold themselves accountable as they seek to monitor progress and understand their impact over time.

**THIS REPORT CONTAINS:**

1. A summary of ecosystem needs.
2. A framework articulating the intended outcomes and potential of the Houston Cultural Districts in the areas of Cultural Vibrancy, Community Cohesion, and Economic Development.
3. A schema for understanding the seven Districts' unique value proposition and strengths.
4. Key findings from mixed-methods evaluation activities.

## Needs of Houston's Arts & Culture Ecosystem

At the outset of this project, the Houston Cultural Districts made explicit their goal to change how the arts in Houston are valued and perceived, within Houston and nationally. Understanding the overarching needs of Houston's arts and cultural ecosystem more broadly has proven essential to fully articulating the role and potential of the Houston Cultural Districts as a collective.

Houston is the 4th most populous city in the United States and one of the most diverse cities in the country. Known as a fast-growing center for world commerce, Houston is rich in cultural diversity, history, and creative expression. The strengths of Houston's arts and cultural sector are many — Houston is home to more than 550 art and cultural organizations, from internationally acclaimed visual and performing arts institutions, to artist service organizations, to community-based arts nonprofits. The sprawling cityscape is dotted with more than 1,000 murals, and neighborhoods feature public artworks of all mediums. Houston's artists experiment across disciplines, creating work not only in traditional venues, but also in coffee shops, front yards, and former warehouses.

This abundant vibrancy is an enormous asset to the city of Houston, but many members of Houston's arts and cultural ecosystem pointed to underlying common needs that greatly impact the sustainability and growth of the sector. There appears to be broad agreement across the arts and cultural community that Houston is rich with cultural assets, and also that the city has struggled to convert those assets into widely known and accessible experiences. One nonprofit leader noted: "I don't know that Houston has the right megaphone for the complexity and diversity of art that exists here." Focus group participants reflected on the fragmented and "siloes" nature of Houston's arts and cultural ecosystem, citing a lack of effective coordinating mechanisms and information channels. Individual entities or Districts often have information on events and exhibits, but there is no effective centralized place to find compiled information on cultural activities or opportunities to connect.

Survey respondents and focus group attendees noted that large arts and cultural institutions in Houston have broadened their efforts at outreach, representation, and engagement, but that there were still opportunities for increased inclusivity through thoughtful outreach, reduced financial barriers, accessibility

improvements, and cultural diversity. One survey respondent wrote: "I envision a future where the art reflects the cultural diversity of Houston's population, supporting not only Black and white artists but also Asian, Latin, and Middle Eastern artists included in the most diverse city in America."

Houston's arts and culture sector has a relatively underdeveloped advocacy infrastructure in comparison to many arts-vibrant cities across the United States. While there have been recent successful advocacy efforts, the infrastructure for sustained coordinated action is minimal. 85% of surveyed artists and nonprofits indicated that leveraging collective action to advocate for common needs was Important or Very Important. The overwhelming motivation for collective mobilization is to increase and diversify financial resources for Houston's arts and cultural sector. In recent years, the sector has spent important time focusing on the appropriate and equitable distribution of the current pool of city funding via the Hotel Occupancy Tax. Even so, there is sweeping agreement about the urgent need to pair equitable distribution with an effort to 'grow the pie' of available funding and that this will require sustained advocacy and coordination.

Focus group participants frequently spoke of the challenges of running small arts enterprises, whether as a for-profit business owner, nonprofit leader, or an independent artist: the lack of financial sustainability and space insecurity, the desire for increased opportunities to sell and exhibit, and the sense that a citywide lack of awareness of arts and cultural offerings is limiting the potential for widespread audience engagement. Artists and creatives in Houston perceive significant barriers to growing their practices, and in particular view accessing grants as a time-consuming process where resources often go to a recurring group of "insiders."

Many artists shared that they are struggling to afford to live and work in Houston. The Kinder Institute's 2023 State of Housing report shows that the majority of renters in the city are cost-burdened, and 54% of artists surveyed for this project do not have access to the space they need to move their creative practice forward.<sup>10</sup> One artist shared that, "Even gainfully employed, I feel like my days are numbered." Arts appreciators emphasized the necessity of "providing for the creative

<sup>10</sup> "The 2023 State of Housing in Harris County and Houston," Rice University: Kinder Institute for Urban Research. Rice University, July 25, 2023. <https://kinder.rice.edu/research/2023-state-housing-harris-county-and-houston>.



I love the Nickel Street Festival on Lyons Ave; Photo by Melissa Phillip

engines that make this city interesting and worth living in." Some highlighted the disconnect between a lack of space for artists and numerous underutilized buildings throughout the city, and many spoke of a need for "appropriate development," and disincentivizing "tone-deaf" or "insensitive" development to retain artists and counteract gentrification.

Community members of all types — artists, nonprofit leaders, Cultural District residents, and business owners — spoke of a desire to preserve cultural legacy and honor the multi-layered history of Houston neighborhoods. One Cultural District resident shared "We tend to wash away the sense of place in Houston." The City of Houston's 2015 Arts & Cultural Plan recommended that the city develop a program of neighborhood-based cultural tourism, a sentiment echoed during our discussions and focus groups. 83% of survey respondents indicated that promoting the unique cultural identities and histories of Houston's neighborhoods was Important or Very Important. One focus group participant called for "acknowledgment and celebration of the creative manifestations that have always been present here."

While there is broad agreement about the systemic challenges inhibiting Houston's arts and cultural sector from realizing its full potential, historic inequities regarding access to funding and due recognition have contributed to sector fragmentation and resulted in a significant erosion of trust. The discussions held as a part of this project led arts and culture community members to underscore that any efforts to move forward as a whole and progress toward systems-level change must begin with a committed investment in trust-building and reconciliation.

The Houston Cultural Districts are microcosms of this broader ecosystem, which unavoidably impacts District operations and effectiveness. Discussions with Cultural District participants, however, yielded insight into how the Houston Cultural Districts are generating benefits for their communities and are uniquely positioned to influence systemic change. One focus group participant envisioned the Houston Cultural Districts as "cultural umbrellas," as ecosystem stewards capable of effecting meaningful change by addressing the needs of their diverse and interconnected communities.

# Frameworks

## IMPACT FRAMEWORK

At the beginning of this process, the only consistent evaluation practice implemented across Districts was an annual report required by the TCA's Texas Cultural District Program. These existing practices provided a helpful basis as we sought additional ways to capture and reflect the breadth, richness, and diversity of the arts and cultural activities of the Houston Cultural Districts. Utilizing an inductive approach, we built a place-based understanding of how broad creative placemaking concepts such as "community vitality" present and manifest across the Houston Cultural Districts. Thematic analysis of qualitative insights generated through discussion and focus groups led to the development of a framework that captures the benefits the Houston Cultural Districts bring to the city of Houston. This report details qualitative and quantitative evidence of these benefits and highlights areas for growth. Additional information about the data collection process, reporting requirements, and evaluation of the state's Cultural District Program is detailed in the Methodology (Appendix B).



### The Houston Cultural Districts contribute to the **CULTURAL VIBRANCY** of Houston

#### The Houston Cultural Districts...

- Cultivate a rich and diverse array of arts and cultural experiences
- Attract visitors and increase access to arts and culture for the people who live, work, or play in Houston
- Foster creativity, well-being, and arts and cultural appreciation
- Celebrate neighborhood creativity, preserve cultural legacy, and safeguard their District's arts and cultural ecosystem



### The Houston Cultural Districts contribute to the **COMMUNITY COHESION** of Houston

#### The Houston Cultural Districts...

- Gather friends and families
- Foster civic pride and engagement
- Build connections within Houston's arts and culture sector
- Catalyze mutually beneficial cross-sector collaborations



### The Houston Cultural Districts contribute to the **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** of Houston

#### The Houston Cultural Districts...

- Generate new business opportunities and revenue streams for District nonprofits, businesses, artists, and cultural practitioners
- Support the financial sustainability and growth of District nonprofits, businesses, artists, and cultural practitioners
- Attract neighborhood development

## CULTURAL DISTRICT STRENGTHS TYPOLOGY

Each of the seven Districts has different management structures, cultural assets, programs, and priorities. Despite these differences, some also share common strengths and characteristics that can be leveraged to support collective progress. Survey response data from individuals who work or live in a Houston Cultural District (including nonprofit and business representatives, artists, and residents) demonstrate that District participants perceive differences in the specific benefits provided by each District. An in-depth look at this trend revealed additional common characteristics between some Districts, which we developed into a loose typology of District strengths.

### CREATOR-FOCUSED DISTRICTS

(Arts District Houston, Midtown Houston Cultural Arts and Entertainment District) offer robust engagement opportunities for independent artists in the greater Houston area and a high concentration of for-profit arts businesses such as galleries and artist studios. Programs produced by these Cultural Districts include art markets, artist residencies, artist microgrants, and consolidated postings for artist opportunities and resources. Almost all arts nonprofits in these districts have been established relatively recently (after 2000) and are medium-sized on average (with an annual operating budget between \$250,000 and \$1 million).

### HERITAGE-FOCUSED DISTRICTS

(5th Ward Cultural Arts District, East End Houston Cultural District, Third Ward Cultural Arts District) effectively prioritize the celebration of neighborhood creativity and preservation of cultural legacy. They contain a high concentration of heritage sites, and programming produced by the Districts includes experiences rooted in cultural heritage and legacy, artist councils, and town halls for the neighborhood's creative community. The arts and culture nonprofits in these districts have an average budget size of less than \$250,000.

This typology is not intended to be strict or impermeable — for example, Theatre District (Institution-Focused) and East End (Heritage-Focused) both boast a relatively high concentration of opportunities for independent artists (characteristic of Creator-Focused Districts). Categorizations may shift or be added as the Districts grow and evolve, but it is important to understand the commonalities and differences across the Districts at this juncture in time. This understanding will enable the Districts to minimize program and operational redundancies, guide collective and individual fundraising asks, and build strategic cross-district partnerships to meet the needs of the larger ecosystem.

### INSTITUTION-FOCUSED DISTRICTS

(Houston Museum District, Houston Theater District) are the most centralized of the Houston Cultural Districts, due to their membership-driven governance structure. They are the most established of the Districts (established in 1997 and 1995, respectively) and contain a high concentration of well-resourced arts and cultural organizations. Historically, these Districts received sustained support from the city of Houston's Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT Funds), though recent changes have been made to support the equitable distribution of this limited pool of public funding. This long-term financial support strengthened the capacity of the Districts and their nonprofit organizations, contributing to their effectiveness at increasing access and generating broad awareness of arts and culture in Houston. Governed by a membership structure, these Districts are led by representatives of member organizations and facilitate a beneficial network of arts and cultural organizations. Most arts and culture nonprofits in these Districts were founded prior to 1980 and have an average budget size of greater than \$10 million.

**KEY FINDINGS:**

# Cultural Vibrancy

Houston's diverse arts and cultural scene is regarded as one of the city's chief offerings, and the Houston Cultural Districts contribute significantly to its cultural vibrancy. The Districts cultivate a broad array of arts and cultural experiences that span disciplines, cross public and private spaces, feature artists from the neighborhood, and artists from across the globe. They increase arts and cultural awareness and introduce visitors to new ideas, important histories, and cultures they have never experienced before, uplifting the city's innate creativity and preserving the cultural legacy of its layered history.

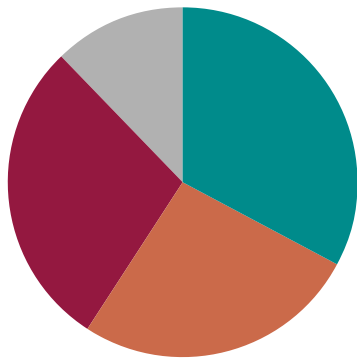
**HOUSTON CULTURAL DISTRICT ASSETS INCLUDE:**



# The Houston Cultural Districts cultivate a rich and diverse array of arts and cultural experiences

## Arts and Culture Nonprofits

Arts and culture nonprofits in the Houston Cultural Districts produce and present a substantial, diverse array of programming annually. The size of these organizations varies, and disciplines span the visual and performing arts. More than 30% of nonprofits report a multi- or interdisciplinary focus. All of these organizations make invaluable contributions to Houston's diverse fabric of arts and cultural offerings.



### ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGETS OF NONPROFITS

Less than \$250,000	30%
\$250,000 to \$999,999	24%
\$1,000,000 to \$9,999,999	26%
\$10 million and above	11%

### Annual programming by district nonprofits includes:

#### Arts and Culture Experiences

- 376 Performing Arts Productions
- 214 Visual Art Exhibitions
- 278 World Premieres
- 206 Commissioned Works
- 70 New Public Art Installations
- 56 Festivals

#### Artist Engagement

- 3752 Artist Engagements
- 123 Grants Distributed
- 62 Artist Residencies
- 42 Fiscal Sponsorships

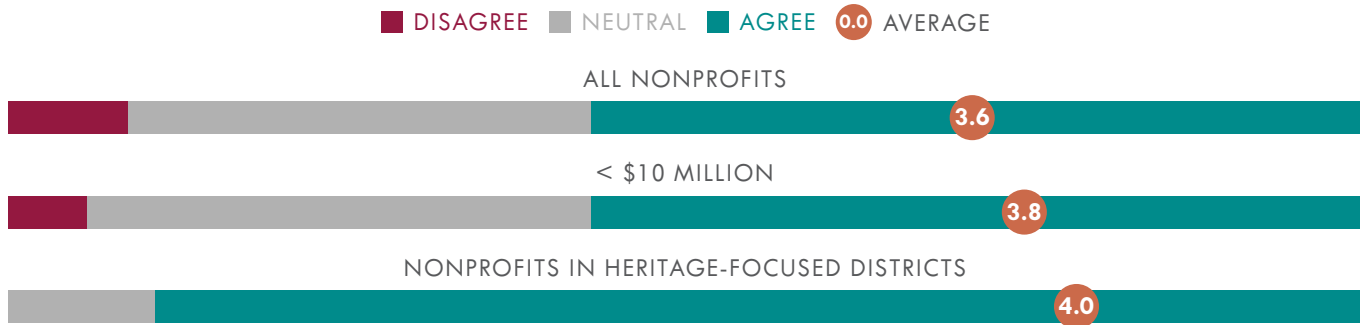
#### Education

- 233,704 K-12 Students Served
- More than 65,000 Hours in Schools
- 1,641 Field Trips
- 204 In-School Programs

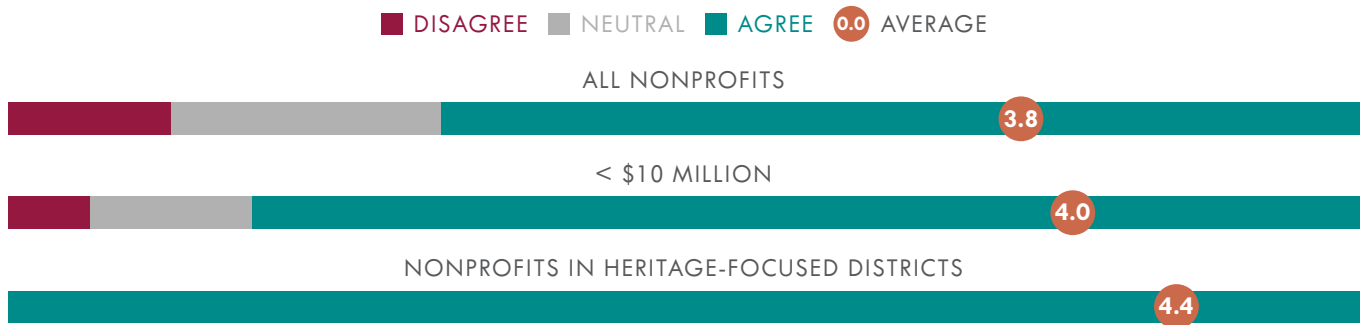
In addition to the programming above, Cultural District nonprofits present and support work by individual artists and small- and mid-sized nonprofits from the greater Houston area, evidenced by the number of Residencies and Fiscal Sponsorships they provide. For example, Houston Theater District's Jones Hall, Wortham Theater Center, Alley Theatre, and Hobby Center for the Performing Arts present work by nearly 30 small- and mid-sized companies annually. In Midtown Houston Cultural Arts and Entertainment District, MATCH (Midtown Arts & Theatre Center Houston) has presented 4,500 performances by more than 500 small- and mid-sized organizations and individuals since opening in 2015.

57% of nonprofit survey respondents report that being located in a Cultural District enables them to produce more effective programming, and 69% report they are better able to serve their communities. These benefits are even higher for organizations with annual operating budgets of less than \$10 million and those located in Heritage-Focused Districts. One nonprofit leader stated, "Cultural offerings bring people together, create community, and showcase the diverse cultural richness in Houston. All of those are factors that play a significant role in my organization's success."

### NONPROFITS PRODUCE MORE EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING



### NONPROFITS ARE BETTER ABLE TO SERVE THEIR COMMUNITIES



### OTHER ARTS & CULTURE OFFERINGS

While available data best captures nonprofit programming, participants highlighted other types of meaningful art and cultural experiences that regularly occur in the Houston Cultural Districts. These include programming produced and presented by the 34 for-profit arts businesses located in the Cultural Districts, 50% of which are artist studio and gallery spaces. Exhibitions, improv performances, art markets, record releases, readings, and open studios exemplify experiences provided by for-profit arts businesses. Kindred Stories, a bookstore in Third Ward committed to celebrating the works of Black authors and artisans, regularly programs Author Talks, Writing Workshops, and Storytelling for youth. In Arts District Houston, Station Theatre leads improv classes and presents comedy shows weekly.

Additionally, participants emphasized the value of the public art infused throughout the Houston Cultural Districts. One resident said, "It brings me a lot of joy to see public art outside, even if I don't tend to go to places of art ... it's very 'low-barrier'." The Houston Cultural Districts have recorded more than 250 public art installations within their bounds, including nearly 150 murals in East End Houston and more than 30 multi-modal public art installations throughout Midtown Houston. All of the Houston Cultural Districts boast public art spaces devoted to arts and culture. For example, Fifth Ward Jam is a public art space in 5th Ward that transformed an abandoned house into a sculptural community stage. The stage hosts community events and is made from materials found within the neighborhood. These parks and public art spaces are popular sites for festivals and markets showcasing the work of local artisans as well as formal and informal community gathering spaces.





East End Farmers Market Vendor; Photo by Dan Joyce

This data best reflects organized cultural programming in Houston's Cultural Districts, but it is important to note that it is challenging to truly capture the full breadth of arts and cultural expression available to visitors and residents. This is due, in part, to a lack of consolidated information flows, but also because some cultural experiences simply resist quantification. One East End artist and resident pointed to the ephemera of DIY artist-organized pop-up events, which may occur in a neighbor's yard with music performances, an art show, and locally-made clothes for sale. It is clear that many Cultural District participants see themselves as surrounded by creative expression, one sharing that "There are no barriers to participating in things because art is everything." One Third Ward Resident summed this up perfectly:

*"There's a history of residents in Third Ward being artistic just in their day to day lives. Like 'the Flower Man', running around and collecting his colorful detritus and decorating his house. People will sit on the front porch and play music. There's a history here, a culture of people incorporating art into their day to day activities."*

**What would amplify the richness and diversity of arts and cultural experiences in the Houston Cultural Districts according to participants?**

- More inroads for emerging artists
- Resourcing arts and cultural offerings that reflect and celebrate diverse experiences and cultures
- Improved retention of Houston artists
- More multidisciplinary public art integrated into public spaces
- More opportunities to engage and inspire the next generation of artists and creatives

# The Houston Cultural Districts attract visitors and increase access to arts and culture for the people who live, work, and play in Houston

**THE HOUSTON CULTURAL DISTRICTS REPORTED 11.2 MILLION VISITORS IN 2022**, 2.7 million of which attended free arts and culture experiences at District nonprofits.<sup>10</sup> During a 12-month period from July 2022 through June 2023, **35% OF TRIPS TO HOUSTON INCLUDED AT LEAST ONE VISIT TO A HOUSTON CULTURAL DISTRICT**, 53% of which were in-state travelers, and 47% were domestic travelers.<sup>12</sup>

Survey respondents report that Houstonians are most aware of offerings in the Museum and Theatre Districts, which report much higher visitation than other Houston Cultural Districts (6 million and 4.3 million in 2022, respectively). These Institution-Focused Districts offer a wide variety of world-class arts and cultural offerings and experiences from around the globe. In a case study conducted by the Texas Cultural Trust, a temporary exhibit at the Museum District's Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH) in the spring of 2016 attracted 69,000 visitors, 18% of which were from outside of the Harris County region.<sup>13</sup> The total economic impact of visitor spending was \$3.8 million, generating \$70,000 in state tax revenue.<sup>14</sup>

## HOUSTONIANS ARE AWARE OF ARTS + CULTURE OFFERINGS

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE

IN ALL CULTURAL DISTRICTS



IN INSTITUTION-FOCUSED DISTRICTS



While emphasis is often placed on a Cultural Districts' ability to establish a tourism destination, local visitors underscore that the Cultural Districts, and arts experiences Houston more broadly, bring immense value to their lives as Houstonians. One resident of the Museum District shared: "I walk to the museums everyday and just walk right in . . . So many museums are free, so you can walk in anytime, and that respite for an hour is such a gift. It's so therapeutic."

78% of resident and visitor survey respondents indicate that the Houston Cultural Districts increase their access to different types of arts and cultural experiences, and 76% reported increased connectivity to arts and culture nonprofits and artists. Frequent visitors (who attend Cultural District offerings six or more times annually) and Museum District residents reported above-average benefits in this area.

10 Annual Cultural District Report to the Texas Commission on the Arts

11 SMU DataArts, "The Cultural Data Profile, 2018-2022," generated by Jana Fredricks, using culturaldata.org, <https://culturaldata.org/what-we-do/for-arts-cultural-organizations/the-cultural-data-profile/>.

12 Houston First, Symphony Tourism Economics

13 Texas Cultural Trust and TXP, Inc., "The Tourism Economic Impact of Cultural District Grant Funding, Four Case Studies" (report, Austin, Texas, 2016), 5.

14 Texas Cultural Trust and TXP, Inc., "The Tourism Economic Impact of Cultural District Grant Funding, Four Case Studies", 5.

### CULTURAL DISTRICTS INCREASE ACCESS TO ARTS + CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE ● 0.0 AVERAGE



### CULTURAL DISTRICTS INCREASE CONNECTIVITY TO NONPROFITS + ARTIST

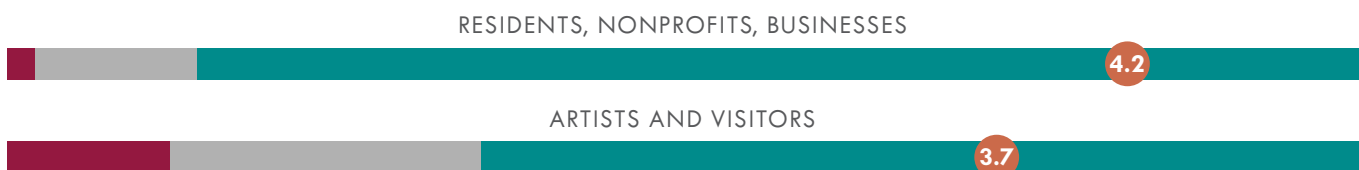
■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE ● 0.0 AVERAGE



Cultural District participants further demonstrate the ecosystem-wide need for centralized information streams and increased visibility for arts and culture. Survey data shows that even those closest to the Cultural Districts are not always knowledgeable about all of the arts and cultural experiences on offer. 86% of survey respondents who identify as residents, nonprofits, and businesses indicate they are knowledgeable about the offerings of the District they are located within. Visitor and artist respondents, on the other hand, who tend to engage across Cultural Districts, report less clarity about District offerings.

### RESPONDENTS ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT CULTURAL DISTRICT OFFERINGS

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE ● 0.0 AVERAGE



#### What would amplify the Houston Cultural Districts' ability to attract visitors and increase access to arts and cultural offerings?

- Equitable promotion of arts and cultural offerings across the Houston Cultural Districts
- Coordinated marketing efforts and centralized information hubs
- More low- and no-barrier arts and cultural experiences
- Improved public transportation and parking solutions
- Programmatic partnerships between Cultural Districts

# The Houston Cultural Districts foster creativity, well-being, and arts and cultural appreciation

Survey responses and reflections from local, regional, and national Cultural District visitors illuminate clear themes about why people value their experiences in the Houston Cultural Districts.

## Houston Cultural District experiences inspire and spark creativity.

82% of surveyed Cultural District residents and visitors feel inspired to live their lives more creatively as a result of Cultural District participation.

### HOUSTON CULTURAL DISTRICT EXPERIENCES INSPIRE ME TO LIVE MY LIFE MORE CREATIVELY

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE



*"Being here reminds me there's creativity in every one of us."*

*"The synchronized dance was something both my wife and I loved... As we were waiting for our car on the valet - my wife did the dance and a few others joined her... Keep being BOLD!"*

*"I'm reminded how many people around me are creating beautiful things everyday."*

*"Being here makes me realize the wonders that humans can create. Wonderful!!!"*

*"It's an avenue to create inspiration or ideas for me after feeling dry or bored in daily life."*

## Houston Cultural District experiences promote joy, peace, and well-being.

81% of surveyed visitors indicated that having access to arts and culture experiences was important to their well-being.

### HAVING ACCESS TO ARTS AND CULTURE EXPERIENCES IS IMPORTANT TO MY WELL-BEING

■ NOT IMPORTANT ■ NEUTRAL ■ IMPORTANT 0.0 AVERAGE



*"Being here makes me realize I enjoy the little things in life. The beauty of color, the simplicity of hearing music, and the feeling of a cool breeze."*

*"[Music is] great for your mental health: you can relax and allow the music to wash over you – visualize your cares floating away on the notes ... Music is good for the soul!"*

*"Culture is an important part of my life. It gives me pleasure, peace, good moments and food for my soul!"*

*"The staging and the quality of the artists made me forget the traffic of Houston and a hectic beginning of the year."*

*"Time spent outdoors, browsing art, listening to live music with family & friends is good for the soul."*

*"Attending these helps balance the stress and difficulties of the big city."*



Mary Am, a mosaic water feature by Shahzia Sikander

### Houston Cultural District experiences increase cultural awareness.

89% of surveyed visitors report increased appreciation for different cultures as a result of Cultural District experiences.

#### VISITING THE HOUSTON CULTURAL DISTRICTS INCREASES MY APPRECIATION FOR DIFFERENT CULTURES

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE

4.3

*"We are all here to celebrate culture. Something beautiful."*

*"Being here makes me realize Houston's Hispanic culture is very rich and diverse. It's also very close-knit and full of supportive community members."*

*"Came to watch one play but saw multiple cultures and styles in art."*

*"I feel a sense of community ... historic history blended with new: multi-culturally rich."*

*"My soul is fed by art and theatre. They provide a window into viewing the world from different perspectives."*

*"It gives people the opportunity to build bridges and close the gaps of misunderstandings about our heritage and cultures."*

### Houston Cultural District experiences increase appreciation for the beauty, diversity, and quality of artistic and cultural expression in Houston.

*"The students often say they don't like that kind of music, but when they left this concert all they wanted to do is return the following year. This is a great opportunity for them to grow in their musical lives."*

*"Being here reminds me that art is beautiful! And that creatives are beyond amazing."*

*"One of the best musical performances I've ever seen. It exceeded my expectations a hundred times over!"*

*"Being here makes me realize that art is subjective and everyone's art can be pretty."*

*"There are so many talented artists in Houston!"*

# The Houston Cultural Districts celebrate neighborhood creativity, preserve cultural legacy, and safeguard their District’s arts and cultural ecosystem

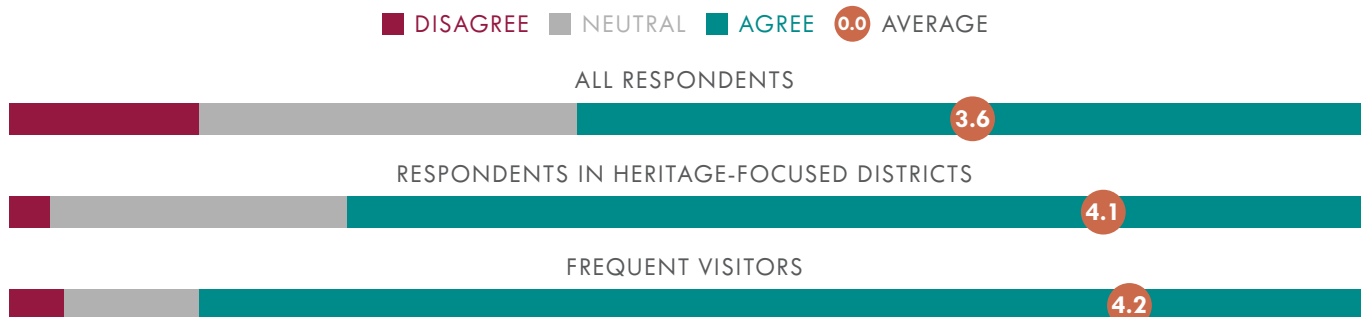
*“Art and culture bring the neighborhood together and have the potential to preserve cultural forms unique to our part of the city even as gentrification threatens to erase it. Creative expression is an antidote to violence, including the violence of gentrification, poverty, incarceration, and displacement.”*

– East End Resident

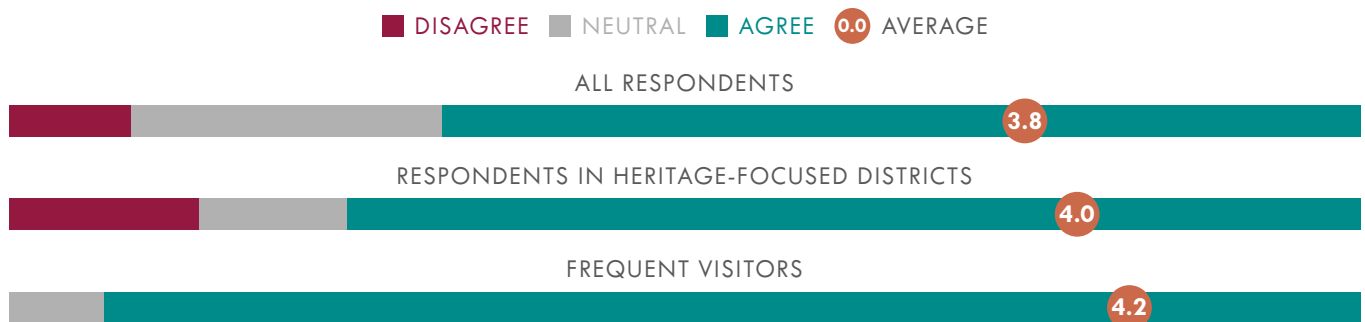
The Houston Cultural Districts strive to celebrate and preserve the innate creativity and artistry of District artists and residents. District experiences have the potential to elevate the significance, relevance, and multicultural history of their communities and contribute toward a distinctive identity rooted in cultural legacy. The Houston Cultural Districts are uniquely positioned to safeguard their creative and cultural ecosystem by recognizing past and present community contributions and generating dialogue about the sustainability and accessibility of Cultural District experiences, assets, and offerings.

58% of survey respondents agreed that the Houston Cultural Districts preserve the cultural legacy and celebrate the creativity of their neighborhoods. Frequent visitors and respondents in Heritage-Focused Districts report higher-than-average benefits in this area.

## HOUSTON CULTURAL DISTRICTS PRESERVE THE CULTURAL LEGACY OF THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD



## HOUSTON CULTURAL DISTRICTS CELEBRATE THE CREATIVITY OF THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD



As several Houston Cultural Districts grapple with the positive and negative impacts of increased development, preserving and honoring neighborhood histories are increasingly top of mind for Cultural District participants. Heritage-Focused Districts, including East End Houston Cultural District, Third Ward Cultural Arts District, and 5th Ward Cultural Arts District, continually draw connections between District experiences and the histories, cultures, and identities of place.

For nearly 10 years, East End Houston Cultural District has produced a free annual festival celebrating art, music, and heritage featuring dance and musical performances by groups like Las Americas Ballet Folklorico, Segundo Barrio Choir, and a variety of Mexican and Chicano artists. One attendee shared "Being here makes me feel connected to my culture," and another called for "more ethnic festivals like this in Houston." Project Row Houses in Third Ward Cultural Arts District produces a signature biannual program called Artist Rounds wherein seven row houses are open to visiting artists to display works that address a topic, question, or challenge facing the local community. The inaugural program was launched in 1993 as a way to amplify a narrative and culture historically ignored, unseen, and invisible by institutions. Three decades later, the program is free and open to the public five days a week and continues to evolve and prompt dialogue with neighbors, artists, activists, innovators, and practitioners.

As umbrellas for so many creative individuals, entities, and experiences, the Houston Cultural Districts are uniquely positioned to safeguard the arts and cultural ecosystems of their Districts, and perhaps even instigate outsized benefits across the sector. Districts have devoted time and resources to addressing the needs of their individual communities through micro-grant programs for District artists (Midtown Houston) and fiscal sponsorships for artist-driven projects (Arts District Houston's Fresh Arts). To meet the artistic, cultural, and economic needs of District artists, 5th Ward Cultural Arts District will soon be home to an affordable housing community for artists, including a residency program wherein artists will receive free housing in exchange for projects that engage with the 5th Ward community.

Throughout this research project, the Cultural Districts have intentionally pursued a "bottom-up" process that holds space for intentional listening and elevates the needs of their communities. As they articulate a shared vision for the future of their collaboration, the Districts will be in a position to, if resourced appropriately, take coordinated actions that strategically address common needs.

**What would amplify the Houston Cultural Districts ability to celebrate neighborhood creativity, preserve cultural legacy, and safeguard their District's arts and cultural ecosystem?**

- Wayfinding and informational signage about historical District assets and contributions
- Incorporation of histories that go deeper than the immediate past
- Dedicated structures for community listening and input from the arts and cultural community
- Arts and culture community representation on the board of District operating entities



East End Farmers Market; Photo by Dan Joyce

KEY FINDINGS:

# Community Cohesion

*“Cultural activities have a direct impact on the cohesiveness of the community.”*

—Cultural District Visitor

Across data collection activities, Cultural District participants share how the activities and offerings of the Houston Cultural Districts contribute to their sense of community by building relationships and connectivity through arts and culture. As one District Resident shared: “Arts and culture are important because it creates a community value, a sense of belonging to the community.” The Houston Cultural Districts gather friends and families, foster civic pride and engagement, build connections within Houston’s arts and cultural sector, and catalyze cross-sector collaborations.

## The Houston Cultural Districts gather friends and families.

Meaningful experiences with friends, neighbors, and loved ones were a core benefit of Cultural District experiences cited by visitors and residents. Residents, in particular, noted the social benefits of Cultural District participation. “We gather a lot at the institutions. You know, the museums, they’re our friends, they’re also our neighbors. We are really, really fortunate to have a very tight-knit community” shared one Museum District Resident.

88% of surveyed District residents shared that they are more likely to invite friends and family to their neighborhood because they live in a Houston Cultural District, and 71% of visitors reported spending more time with friends and family as a result of attending Cultural District experiences.

*“Being here makes me realize how blessed I am to have my perfectly imperfect family.”*

*“Being here makes me feel loved & fulfilled in my friendships”*

*“Three generations attended the performance. I was especially pleased to introduce my granddaughter to this artform. It was a positive experience for all.”*

*“I value time with my mother! I’m glad we enjoy similar things, like art festivals!”*

*“Art and culture is important because I get to see my neighbors!”*

### I AM MORE LIKELY TO INVITE FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO MY NEIGHBORHOOD BECAUSE I LIVE IN A HOUSTON CULTURAL DISTRICT

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE



### I SPEND MORE TIME WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY BECAUSE I ATTEND CULTURAL DISTRICT EXPERIENCES

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE





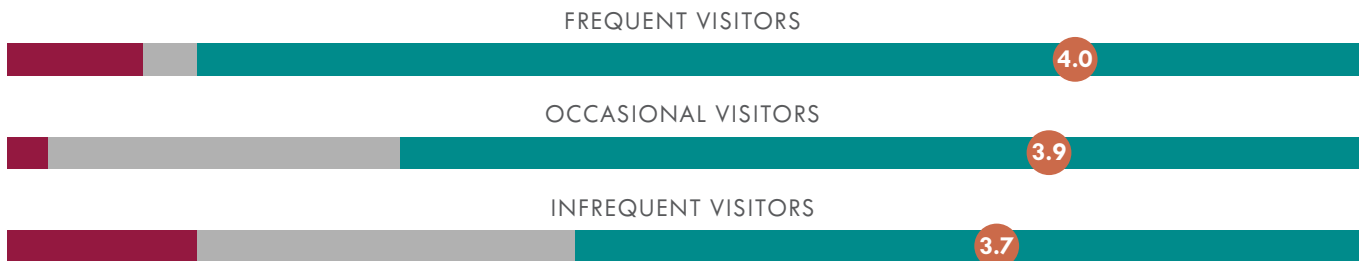


Son Kissd Dance at DeLUXE Theater Photo by Doogie Roux

Cultural District visitors reported a stronger sense of community as a result of Cultural District participation. Data shows that Frequent Cultural District visitors (six or more annual visits) were 28% more likely to report a stronger sense of community than infrequent visitors (one to two annual visits, respectively). This trend is echoed in visitor responses for several indicators of Cultural Vibrancy and Community Cohesion.

**I HAVE A STRONGER SENSE OF COMMUNITY BECAUSE I PARTICIPATE IN CULTURAL DISTRICT ACTIVITIES**

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE



# The Houston Cultural Districts foster civic pride and engagement

Across visitor reflections and survey responses, Cultural District experiences evoke pride in Houston and its arts and cultural vibrancy. As one East End Resident said: "Everybody wants to know a superstar ... that's how we treat our artists." Attending Cultural District experiences inspires 87% of visitor respondents to feel more prideful of arts and culture in Houston and 78% to feel more invested in Houston's future. Survey responses indicate that the more frequently a visitor attends Cultural District experiences, the more pride and investment they feel.

*"Being here makes me feel inspired & proud to be a Houstonian"*

*"We are lucky to have so much talent and so many performances in Houston. Grateful."*

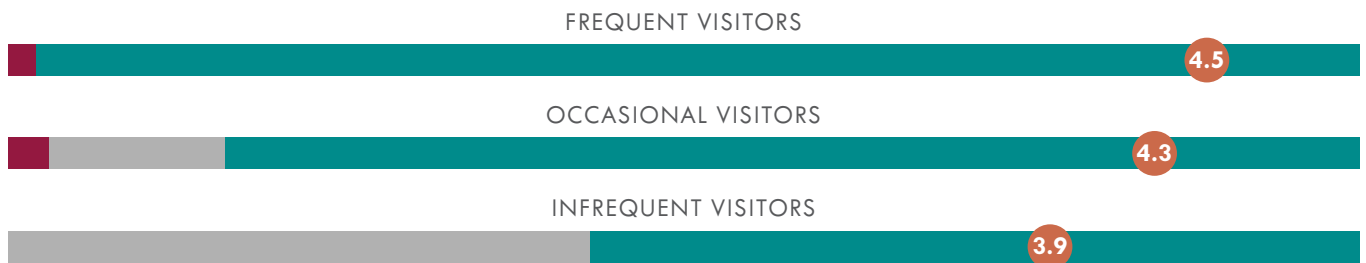
*"Being here makes me realize how art makes Houston a better place to live!"*

*"My neighborhood is a cool place to live!"*

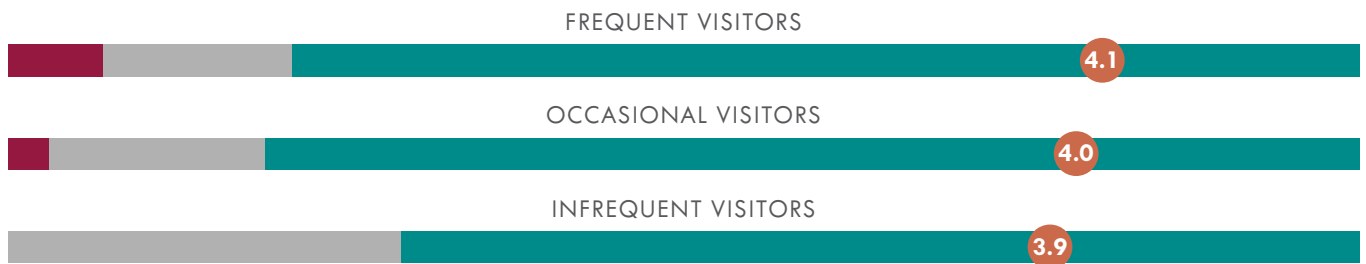
*"It's wonderful to have such a world-class organization within a 40-minute drive of home."*

## I AM PRIDEFUL OF HOUSTON ARTS AND CULTURE

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE ● 0.0 AVERAGE



## I AM MORE INVESTED IN HOUSTON'S FUTURE



In addition to inspiring a sense of pride, the Houston Cultural Districts provide opportunities for interested participants to engage in acts of service and advocacy. One District visitor who indicated that art and culture were "Very Important" to their well-being stated, "I am a proud volunteer at the Alley Theatre." More than 14,000 Houstonians volunteer in Houston Cultural District nonprofits annually. In February of 2023, the Houston Cultural Districts in partnership with Houston Arts Alliance collaborated to host bus transportation to and from the annual Texas Arts Advocacy Summit. Nearly 100 interested advocates from across the Districts traveled to and from Austin for a day of learning, connectivity, and advocacy.

# The Houston Cultural Districts build connections within Houston's arts and culture sector

"The arts community is collaborative and supportive. Together, we can do greater things than we can alone. The outcome positively impacts the entire city, its residents, and visitors." -District Artist

Survey data indicates that Institution-Focused Districts generate the strongest connections between arts and culture nonprofits. One Theatre District leader credits the District's membership structure: "The best benefit is that we do a regular convening, which really becomes the service organization that we all participate in ... we all get to talk and compare notes." Another District leader shared "We use each other's strengths and at times collaborate to keep the vibe vibrant and focus on us in our District."

## ARTS + CULTURAL NONPROFITS ARE CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE

ALL NONPROFITS



NONPROFITS IN INSTITUTION-FOCUSED DISTRICTS



In addition to fostering strong interdistrict connections, Theatre District Houston has targeted programming efforts toward cultivating deeper relationships with performing arts organizations across Houston and heightening awareness for the greater community. Houston Theater Week, which celebrated its inaugural year in 2022, is a large-scale collaboration between local theater and performing arts groups that present more than 200 performances and live shows at the best available ticket prices. Theater Week was successful in various ways. In 2022, Houston Theatre Week offered 107 shows and reported a combined revenue of \$572,223 from 17,594 tickets sold.

80% of nonprofit respondents reported a stronger sense of community as a result of being located within a Houston Cultural District. Nonprofit organizations located in Heritage-Focused Districts report higher-than-average benefits in this area.

## NONPROFITS HAVE A STRONGER SENSE OF COMMUNITY

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE

ALL NONPROFITS



NONPROFITS IN INSTITUTION-FOCUSED DISTRICTS





Sip and Stroll Art Tour; Photo by VivaLaMarxPhotography

77% of nonprofit respondents reported they were better able to advocate for their needs as a result of being located in a Cultural District. A nonprofit leader in Third Ward shared: "Collaborating with artists and arts communities allows us to reach broader audiences, advocate for shared resources, and evolve our communities with input from the residents."

### NONPROFITS ARE BETTER ABLE TO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR NEEDS

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE



The Houston Cultural Districts have demonstrated that they are well-positioned to build connections that strengthen the sector as a whole. Over the last 10 months alone, the Houston Cultural Districts brought together more than 100 diverse sector voices through a series of focus groups, interviews, and convenings to discuss systemic challenges and common needs. In addition, the Houston Cultural Districts led Houston's arts and culture sector by hosting a Mayoral Forum for Art and Culture in June of 2023. The event was attended by nearly 500 individuals and welcomed all seven leading Mayoral candidates who participated in a discussion about their standing and interest in the future of arts and culture in Houston.

#### What would amplify the Houston Cultural District's ability to build connections within Houston's arts and culture sector?

- Continued trust-building and reconciliation
- Ongoing pursuit of equitable practices in regard to resource distribution
- Dedicated structure for regular discussion and communications
- Programmatic partnerships between Cultural Districts

# The Houston Cultural Districts catalyze mutually beneficial cross-sector collaborations

The Houston Cultural Districts generate connections between District nonprofits, Businesses, and artists, and facilitate collaborations that enhance arts and cultural experiences and showcase District Assets. 80% of nonprofit respondents reported at least one partnership with another Cultural District organization in the last 12 months, and 34% reported six or more partnerships.

## ANNUAL PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN DISTRICT NONPROFITS

■ NEVER ■ 1-2 ■ 3-5 ■ 6 OR MORE



80% of nonprofit respondents reported at least one partnership with a for-profit business located in their Cultural District within the last 12 months. 34% reported frequent partnerships (six or more partnerships annually). Similarly, 90% of responding businesses participated in partnerships with a Cultural District organization, and 90% partnered with individual cultural practitioners in the last year. The most common forms of partnership were donation of in-kind goods and cross-promotion, followed by space sharing and co-productions.

## ANNUAL CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

■ NEVER ■ 1-2 ■ 3-5 ■ 6 OR MORE

REPORTED BY NONPROFITS



REPORTED BY BUSINESSES



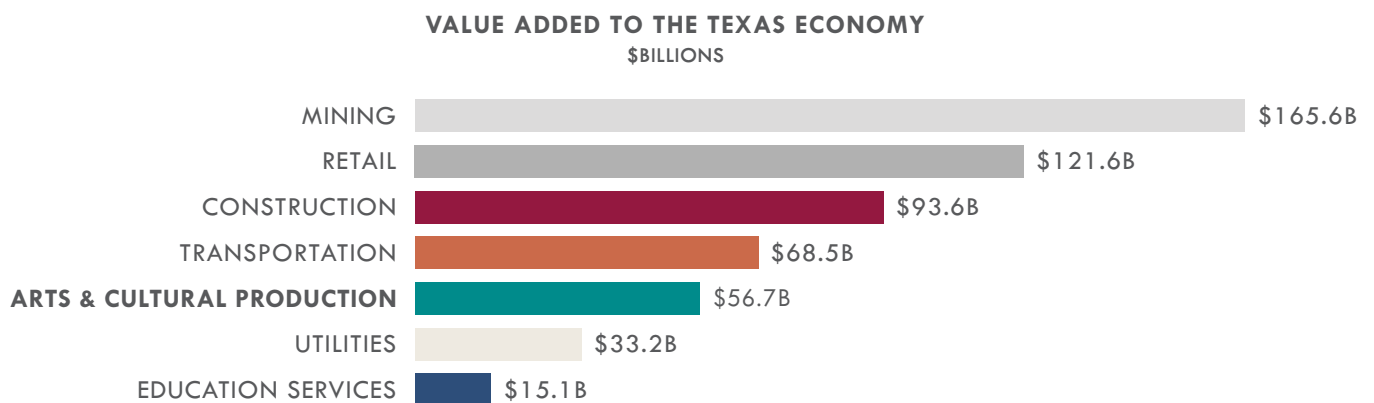
Throughout focus groups and survey responses, Cultural District businesses reported more than economic benefits as a result of Cultural District participation. Though we engaged fewer businesses than any other participant group, those we heard from reported a stronger sense of community (80% of business respondents), increased support for their business (70%), and 50% reported that their business is more successful as a result of being located in a Cultural District. An Arts District Houston business owner shared, “[Our business] really wanted to be here, where creativity is bouncing off the walls and there’s a vibrant ecosystem that resonates with our brand and inspires really cool ideas ... it’s a symbiotic relationship.”

KEY FINDINGS:

# Economic Development

Data shows that the Arts and Culture Industry, and Cultural Districts themselves, make significant contributions to state and local economies. This section compiles existing research on the impact of the Arts and Cultural sector on the state and local economy, demonstrates ways this economic activity plays out across the Houston Cultural Districts, and highlights the economic benefits organizations, businesses, and individuals experience by contributing to and participating in the Cultural Districts.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that Arts and Cultural Production accounts for \$56.7 billion and 2.8% of the Texas economy, ranked 5th among comparison sectors. Core arts and cultural industries, which include Houston Cultural District nonprofits and for-profit arts businesses, generate \$11.9 billion in Value Added to the Texas economy.<sup>10</sup> Taxable revenue from Texas' core arts and culture industry has increased by 30% over the last 10 years.<sup>11</sup> In 2021, the industry generated \$6 billion in taxable sales, totaling nearly \$380 million in state sales tax revenue.<sup>12</sup>



In 2022, Houston's arts and cultural organizations generated \$1.1 billion in Value Added, \$11.8 million in local sales tax, and \$8.1 million in state sales tax.<sup>13</sup> Houston Cultural District nonprofits alone total \$503.8 million in annual expenditures and generated \$8.6 million in local sales tax and \$6 million in state sales tax in fiscal year 2022.<sup>14</sup>

Houston is the 8th-largest cultural employment base in the country, employing over 31,000 Houstonians in the arts and entertainment field.<sup>15</sup> Cultural District nonprofits sustain 4,100 full-time equivalent jobs, roughly a 14% share of the city's cultural employment.

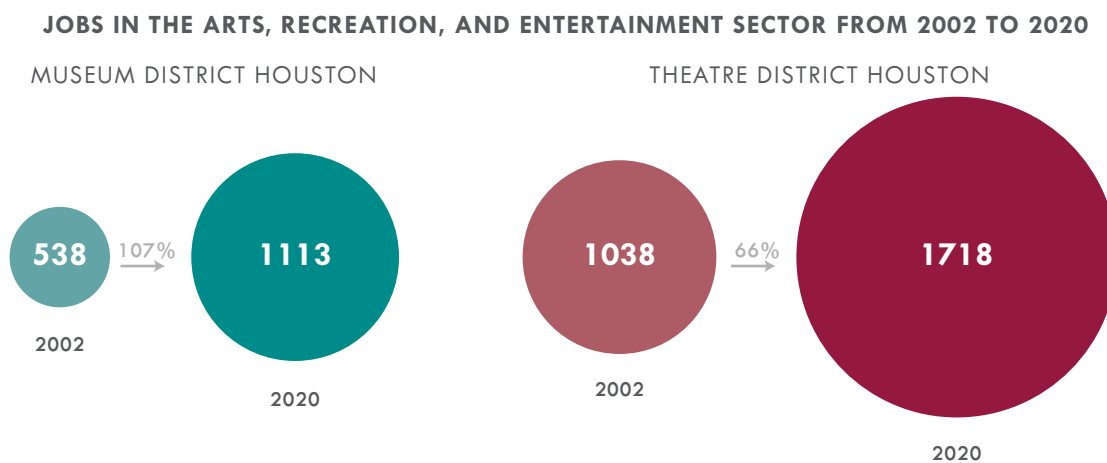
A case study published by Texas Cultural Trust reports that \$542,000 in Cultural District Project Grant funding generated \$52.3 million in economic activity, a **2 TO 1 RETURN ON INVESTMENT IN STATE TAX REVENUE**.<sup>16</sup> One example highlighted in the report is a \$130,000 grant from the Cultural District Project Grant Program in support of Houston Ballet's 2022-23 production of The Nutcracker. The production generated \$14,774,918 in economic activity and \$296,086 in tax revenue.<sup>17</sup>

10 Bureau of Economic Analysis and National Endowment for the Arts, "Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account: Texas – 2021" (report, Suitland, MD, 2023).  
11 Texas Cultural Trust, "2023 State of the Arts Report" (report, Austin, Texas, 2023), 22.  
12 Texas Cultural Trust, 23.  
13 2022. Americansforthearts.org. 2022. <https://aep6.americansforthearts.org>.  
14 2022. Americansforthearts.org. 2022. <https://aep6.americansforthearts.org>.  
15 TDC, "Wreckage, Recovery, and Resilience: The Houston Arts Ecosystem in the Wake of Hurricane Harvey" (report, Houston, 2021), 7.  
16 Texas Cultural Trust, 26.  
17 Texas Cultural Trust, 27.

# The Houston Cultural Districts generate business and employment opportunities, and revenue streams for District Nonprofits, Businesses, Artists, and Cultural Practitioners

The Houston Cultural Districts support business and employment opportunities by driving demand for District commodities and experiences through increased visitorship. The Districts provide increased access to grant opportunities for nonprofits and concentrates opportunities to sell and showcase arts and cultural products.

Houston Cultural District nonprofits expend an estimated \$503.8 million annually and sustain 4,100 full-time equivalent jobs. In 2022, District nonprofits reported \$262.9 million expended in labor income, including \$48.6 million in compensation to visual and performing artists.<sup>18</sup> The overwhelming share of this economic activity is generated by the Theatre District and Museum District, which are home to Houston's oldest and largest institutions. Given the relative maturity of these Districts, their long-term impact on job creation is most evident. The Districts added 1,255 jobs to the Arts, Recreation, and Entertainment sector from 2002 to 2020, increasing the number of arts jobs in their Districts by 80% on average.<sup>20</sup>



Increasing District visitorship is key for many Cultural District participants. One business owner shared, “[The Cultural District] becomes a magnet for people from outside the area to come” and “if we keep visitors within the same area then all of us can benefit.” In addition to driving local visitorship, the Houston Cultural Districts strive to establish their Districts and the city of Houston as a world-renowned center for arts and cultural experiences, attracting in-state and out-of-state visitors. Data shows that arts and culture tourists spend more and stay longer than other tourists.<sup>21</sup> They go to restaurants, shops, and visit other nearby businesses as part of their cultural experiences. In 2021 alone, Houston visitors spent \$1.5 billion on Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and in the state of Texas, tourist spending on Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation generated close to \$10 billion in economic impact.<sup>22 23</sup>

18 2022. Americansforthearts.org. 2022. <https://aep6.americansforthearts.org>.

19 SMU DataArts, “The Cultural Data Profile, 2018-2022,” generated by Jana Fredricks, using culturaldata.org, <https://culturaldata.org/what-we-do/for-arts-cultural-organizations/the-cultural-data-profile/>.

20 U.S. Census Bureau, “Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics,” generated by Jana Fredricks, using data.census.gov, <https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/>.

21 Texas Cultural Trust, 25.

22 Travel Texas, “Economic Impact” (Austin, Texas, 2023).

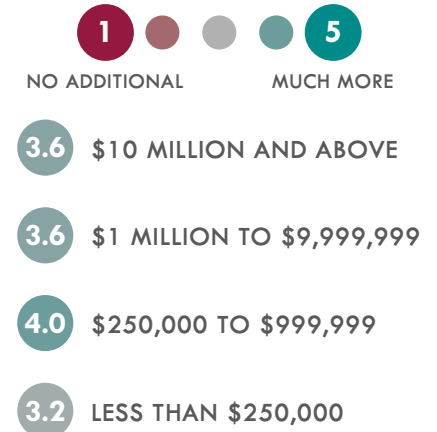
23 Greater Houston Partnership, “Houston Facts 2022” (report, Houston, 2022), 45.

## INCREASED ACCESS TO FUNDING FOR NONPROFITS, ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS

Arts and Culture nonprofits located in the Houston Cultural Districts are eligible for Cultural District Project Grants through the Texas Commission on the Arts. Since the program launched in 2015, 24 organizations in Houston's Cultural Districts have received a total of \$9.1 million in funding, constituting 30.4% of all state funding provided to the Cultural Districts to date.<sup>24</sup> Eligibility criteria requires applicant organizations to have an annual operating budget of at least \$250,000 and 'art' as a central component of their mission. One nonprofit leader in Arts District Houston shared "The Cultural District (TCA) funding has really revolutionized what we're able to do."

60% of nonprofit survey respondents reported increased access to funding as a result of being located in a Cultural District. Organizations with annual operating budgets between \$250,000 and \$1,000,000 reported the most increased access to funding, which suggests that the funding available through the Cultural District Project Grant Program may be most impactful to mid-sized nonprofits. Conversely, small organizations with annual budgets of \$250,000 or less, of which there are 25 across the Houston Cultural Districts, reported the least access to additional funding sources. This may be due to the funding eligibility criteria detailed above.

### CULTURAL DISTRICT NONPROFITS ACCESS TO FUNDING SOURCES



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS

Artists and cultural practitioners regularly engage in activities across the Houston Cultural Districts. On average, the 70+ local artist and cultural practitioners who engaged with this project reported participating in professional opportunities in two to three Districts annually. 59% of respondents reported more than three professional engagements in the Houston Cultural Districts during the last 12 months, and 34% reported six or more engagements. Artist respondents were most likely to have worked in Creator-Focused Districts. 69% of responding artists and cultural practitioners reported immediate sales or income generating activities during Cultural District engagements, and 66% reported the engagement led to future sales or income-generating activities. One artist from Midtown shared, "Having art in my own district helps artists like us have jobs."

### LOCAL ARTIST AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONER PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ENGAGEMENT

■ NEVER ■ 1-2 TIMES ■ 3-5 TIMES ■ 6 OR MORE TIMES ■ NOT SURE

#### ANNUAL FREQUENCY OF CULTURAL DISTRICT ENGAGEMENTS



#### FREQUENCY OF IMMEDIATE SALES



#### FREQUENCY OF FUTURE SALES



<sup>24</sup> TCA. This is a collection of internal information, available upon request, from the Texas Commission on the Arts' Texas Cultural District Program.



## PUBLIC ART EVENTS

Public Art Events are prevalent throughout the Houston Cultural Districts and a common way to engage artists and cultural practitioners and showcase their work. These events include festivals and markets of all sizes and attract visitors to provide revenue-generating opportunities for art vendors and local businesses. We collected data at three public art events across three Houston Cultural Districts between May and June 2023 to better understand the economic benefits of these types of events.

Of the 43 event vendors we polled, the majority were producers of arts and cultural goods or performers. Vendors reported the participation of 54 full-time and 39 part-time employees across their businesses and creative enterprises. Nearly 80% of polled vendors indicated that their business or creative enterprise benefited from participating in the event, and **80% REPORTED THAT ACCESSIBLE, PUBLIC ART EVENTS LIKE THESE ARE ESSENTIAL TO THEIR BUSINESS.** More than \$32,000 in taxable sales was reported across 30 responding vendors. Sales averaged \$1,100 per vendor, with the majority of reported sales between \$600 and \$2400.

### Vendors reported the following benefits as a result of participation in these events:

#### Sales

- "This was my highest revenue event I've ever done, it was so fun!"
- "We learned a lot, sold many books, and made lasting connections."
- "I learned from this and was happy with the sales and the connections I made at this event."

#### Exposure and Promotion

- 80% of polled vendors indicated that this experience was likely to lead to new professional opportunities in the future.
- "I didn't see the patrons who usually attend art events in the Heights - I appreciated the opportunity to reach other folks in town."
- "The event was well publicized and attendance was good. Provided good exposure for artists."
- "I believe there will be aftershow sales from customers who made plans to visit my studio."

#### Community Connections

- 53% of polled vendors "Strongly Agree" that they feel more connected to their community as a result of their participation
- "I really enjoyed the togetherness of the community and the environment made for people to come together and appreciate art of all forms."
- "It was a wonderful experience and interaction with the community for my [performing group]."
- "The connections made with other artists and patrons was definitely a positive impact."

### What would amplify the Houston Cultural District's ability to generate business and employment opportunities and revenue streams for District nonprofits, businesses, artists, and cultural practitioners?

- Grants for nonprofits with annual operating budgets of less than \$250,000
- Grants and grant writing support for artists, and cultural practitioners
- More opportunities to sell and showcase art and cultural goods
- Increased visitorship

# The Houston Cultural Districts attract neighborhood development

“Things like TIRZ and Management Districts work together to promote development, but **the arts are a big part of it... it becomes a magnet**”

—East End Business Owner

“I personally love arts and culture in my neighborhood and think it brings life and beauty to the city. **My only worry is attracting too many people to the area to live.**”

—Arts District Houston Resident

The Houston Cultural Districts and the creative energy generated by their diverse experiences increase neighborhood desirability for existing and potential residents, nonprofits, and businesses, and support the creative reuse of neighborhood real estate assets for arts and cultural activities.

There have been several notable creative reuse development projects throughout the Houston Cultural Districts in recent years. Theater District Houston's creative placemaking strategy plan prioritized the revitalization of existing parts of the community. In 2021, the historic Barbara Jordan Post Office was re-purposed to create a new, state-of-the-art for-profit Arts space for arts, culture, events, and food. Since the project began, the value of the property has doubled to \$86 million from its original \$40 million in 2018.<sup>25</sup> An example in 5th Ward Cultural Arts District demonstrates how values-aligned businesses are attracted to hubs of creativity, innovation, history, and community. Meow Wolf, an out-of-state for-profit arts production company that creates large-scale immersive arts experiences, will open its fifth interactive exhibit titled “The Real Unreal” in 5th Ward Cultural Arts District. The project is scheduled for completion in 2024 and plans to enhance Houston's arts and culture landscape through utilizing community resources. Meow Wolf's “The Real Unreal” will be built within a historic warehouse in the Fifth Ward constructed in 1917, and will include exhibition space for local artists, opportunities for local youth, and create about 127 full-time equivalent jobs.

Despite these creative and values-aligned development projects, many Cultural District participants report mixed feelings about development in their Districts. Overall, surveyed participants report feeling equally excited as they are concerned about the impact of residential and commercial development.

## OVERALL EXCITEMENT & CONCERN ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE

I AM EXCITED ABOUT DEVELOPMENT



I AM CONCERNED ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

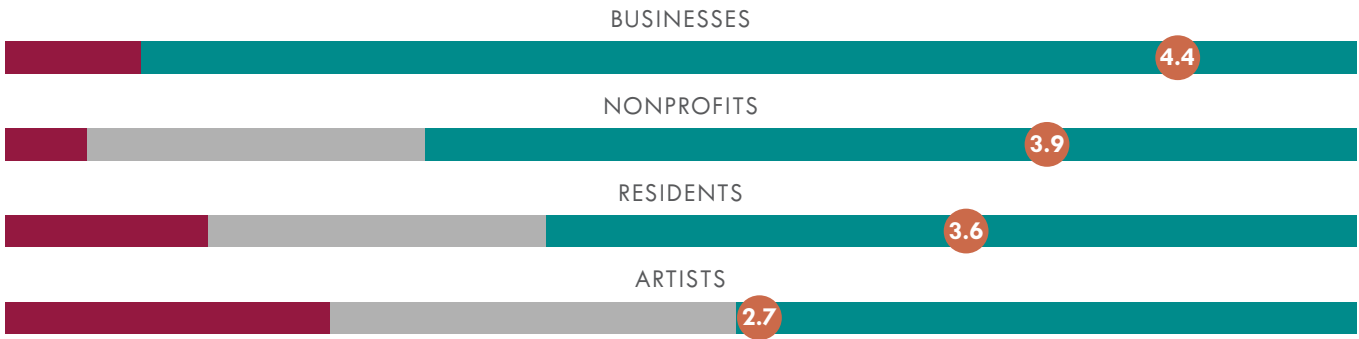


A closer look shows greater variation across participant groups. Business respondents report feeling most excited about development, while residents report feeling the most concerned. Despite this excitement, 60% of responding businesses also report concern about how development would impact their business, a sentiment echoed in our focus groups. Nearly 70% of all nonprofit respondents are excited about development in their District, but response data shows that organizations with annual operating budgets of less than \$1 million are less excited and more concerned than those with larger operating budgets.

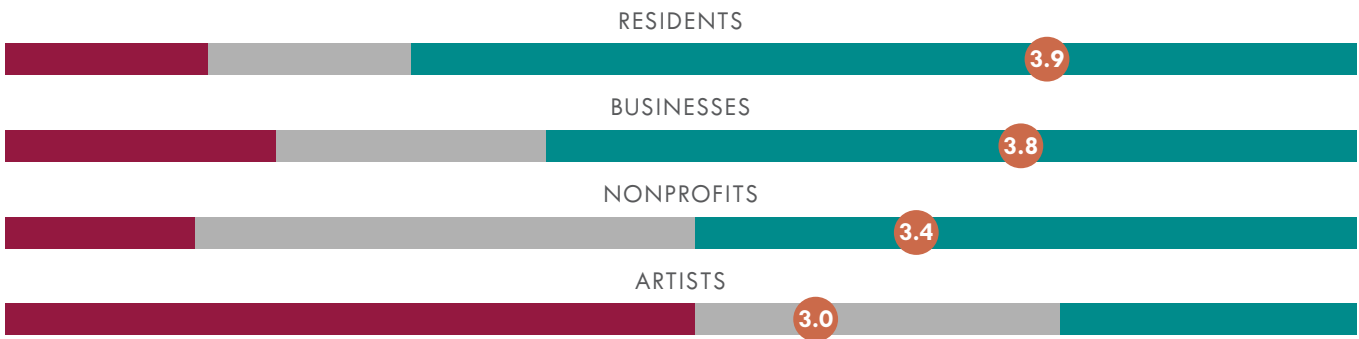
<sup>25</sup> Texas Cultural Trust and TXP, Inc., “2023 State of the Arts Report: The Long-Term Growth of Cultural Districts, Four Case Studies” (report, Austin, Texas, 2023), 3.

### I AM EXCITED ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

■ DISAGREE ■ NEUTRAL ■ AGREE 0.0 AVERAGE



### I AM CONCERNED ABOUT DEVELOPMENT



### NONPROFIT RESPONDENT CONCERN & EXCITEMENT ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

■ I AM CONCERNED ABOUT DEVELOPMENT ■ I AM EXCITED ABOUT DEVELOPMENT



Interestingly, only half of surveyed artists report excitement or concern about how development will impact their lives as artists, while nearly 30% report feeling neutral. This may suggest that artists are not positioned to be directly impacted by development in the Cultural Districts. For example, artists already report relatively low economic gains from Cultural District experiences and may not see a connection between increased development activity and personal economic benefit. Similarly, if artists do not reside in the Cultural Districts because they are already unaffordable, then their housing would not be negatively impacted by development within the Cultural Districts.

#### What would amplify this benefit for Cultural District participants?

- Incentives for "appropriate" development projects that align with District priorities and values
- Repurposing available space for Artist use
- Tax breaks for small nonprofit and for-profit arts enterprises

# The Houston Cultural Districts support the financial sustainability and growth of District Nonprofits, Businesses, Artists, and Cultural Practitioners

By attracting visitors and generating business opportunities and activity hubs that stimulate the local economy, the Houston Cultural Districts have the potential to support the financial sustainability and growth of District enterprises, impacting the long-term financial health of their community. With dedicated attention toward data collection across Cultural District participants over time, the Districts will be better positioned to monitor the growth and retention of District offerings.

This longer-term outcome is and will continue to be challenging to measure. The lack of available data by District boundaries necessitates implementing sustained and uniform data collection to more accurately gauge mid- and long-term financial impacts, requiring both resources and expertise. The public data sources that are available by census block group do not adequately capture the mid- or long-term impact of the Cultural Districts. For example, the Cultural Districts do not appear to impact overall District population, and in most Districts, industry employment figures available via the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics do not include all forms of arts and cultural work in an increasingly gig-driven sector.

Better understanding the impact of the Cultural Districts on the financial sustainability of their assets will necessitate more intentional and active monitoring over time. This project established a comprehensive inventory of District assets, as well as expenditure benchmarks for nearly all District nonprofits. These activities will support future data collection and monitoring activities.

Moving forward, the Districts may consider monitoring the rate of growth in nonprofit expenditures by budget size, surveying businesses about annual sales, and inventorying the retention of existing, and development of new nonprofits, businesses, and other assets. This will require targeted data collection conducted by the Districts and potentially increased participation in existing data collection processes such as those offered by SMU Data Arts Cultural Data Profile. Finally, the Houston Cultural Districts may consider taking different approaches to defining and measuring financial sustainability and growth within their Districts to reflect their unique composition and priorities. For example, the Institution-Focused Districts may focus data collection resources on organizational financial health indicators, while Creator-Focused Districts may be more interested in gaining a better understanding of art sales made by independent artists and in galleries.

# Discussion

This report articulates the breadth of District activities and outlines the full range of benefits experienced by diverse District participants. **THE COMMON CALL ACROSS INSTITUTIONS, BUSINESSES, ARTISTS, RESIDENTS, AND VISITORS WAS: WE CAN DO BETTER.** Provide better access to Houstonians and visitors, draw more resources for the arts and culture ecosystem, produce more opportunities to show and sell work, and attract more visitors. Individuals and organizations are benefitting from the Houston Cultural Districts, but there is greater need than what the Cultural Districts are currently providing.

Now that the Cultural Districts have a broad understanding of how District experiences and offerings can and do contribute to Houston's Cultural Vibrancy, Community Cohesion, and Economic Development, it will be necessary to evaluate the role and impact of programs and initiatives produced by the Districts both individually and collectively. By focusing on programmatic and organizational effectiveness, the Districts will build internal capacity and further amplify the benefits experienced by participants. To this aim, the varied strengths and unique features of the seven Districts can be leveraged to meet ecosystem needs. Successful programs produced by a single District, such as artist microgrants and neighborhood artist councils, have the potential to be replicated or scaled across Districts. As the Districts

develop programs and initiatives, there is an opportunity to increase engagement of District businesses and organizations as well as more fully activate cultural assets within and across Districts. Cultivating intentional and ongoing relationships with arts organizations and businesses will support data collection activities and inform program design. While this evaluation focuses heavily on the arts ecosystem, there is an opportunity to build relationships and partnerships with non-arts organizations in the Districts, such as heritage sites, parks, community and faith-based organizations, and educational institutions.

Throughout this process, the Cultural Districts have intentionally prioritized a "bottom-up" process that holds space for intentional listening and elevates the needs of their communities. As they articulate a shared vision for the future of their collaboration, the Districts will be in a position to, if resourced appropriately, take coordinated actions that strategically address common needs. As umbrellas for so many creative individuals, entities, and experiences, the Houston Cultural Districts are uniquely positioned to safeguard the arts and cultural ecosystems of their Districts and instigate outsized benefits across the sector.



Son Kiss'd Dane Theater at Jam Park; Photo by Doogieroux



Sip and Stroll Art Tour; Photo by VivaLaMarxPhotography



Midtown Park

APPENDIX A:

# Cultural District Profiles

## 5th Ward Cultural Arts District

POPULATION: 5,117

The 5th Ward Cultural Arts District received formal designation from Texas Commission for the Arts in September 2020 and is dedicated to celebrating and sharing the neighborhood's 150+ year-old heritage, improving quality of life, providing opportunities for community engagement, and inviting and nurturing new artists and community groups.

Houston's Historic 5th Ward community is one large masterpiece. It is a place where art is a way of living, from its food, music, and social sculpture; to its historic buildings and gathering spaces like the Historic Deluxe Theater. The 5th Ward Cultural Arts District is a living cultural arts district and a center of African American history and culture that supports its diversity as it grows. Lyons Avenue is the main vein that runs through this Historic Black community, reminding us of what was and inspiring us to dream of what can be.

The 5th Ward Cultural Arts District uses a myriad of strategies to preserve and build on the cultural legacies of 5th Ward's past while looking to art as a means of celebrating its diversity and navigating future challenges. With a keen focus on community, culture, and creativity, the 5th Ward CAD believes and promotes the idea that "There is no art without people."

### HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOLADES:

The DeLuxe Theatre was an art deco movie house from 1941 to 1969 and turned into an art gallery by John and Dominique de Menil in the early 1970s before sitting vacant for more than 40 years. This storied historical site was renovated and reopened as a 125-seat proscenium theater in 2015. The theater's rebirth has helped catalyze development along the Lyons Avenue corridor, which has now attracted \$100 million in development, according to Kathy Flanagan Payton, president and CEO of 5th Ward CRC.

Memory Builds the Monument, an artist-led documentation project sharing the rich history of the Greater Fifth Ward, was a semifinalist for the NAACP Image Awards and world premiere at the 2022 SXSW Film Festival in Austin. The film has been screened at 14 film festivals and awarded best documentary four times.

Lyons Avenue Renaissance Festival, produced by the 5th Ward Cultural Arts District, is a free community festival that has celebrated the history, art, culture, and current revitalization of Houston's 5th Ward for more than a decade. Using the allure of music, dance and other art forms to engage the community, this annual celebration showcases positive changes and new developments in the area.

### QUOTES

*"[Art and culture in the 5th Ward is] very important. That's how it's always been, even before I was born. My family has been in the neighborhood for around 150 years."*

*—5th Ward Resident*



Poet Outspoken Bean at Juneteenth Festival at DeLUXE Theater; Photo by Annie Mulligan



DeLUXE Kids musical theater program; Photo by Keba Sharber



Luxe Fashion Show at DeLUXE Theater



Make Music Day; Photo by Pinnacle Pictures



Sip and Stroll Art Tour; Photo by VivaLaMarxPhotography



Veronica Avila & Ruth Sosa Bailey, Photo by j-andrade-visual-arts

## Arts District Houston

**POPULATION:** 7,586

Arts District Houston embodies the city's up-and-coming creative economy, touting the highest concentration of working artists in the state. The District strives to retain top artistic talent and provide access to new artists, cultural industries, and organizations while enhancing the livability of the surrounding neighborhood. Arts District Houston is dedicated to serving artists and the greater community through artist-centered public art projects and initiatives that build capacity, audiences, and shared resources for district artists, businesses, and nonprofits and creates new opportunities to showcase the diversity of Houston-area artists.

Arts District Houston is home to 370 studio spaces for local artists, designers, and makers where visitors can see firsthand how art gets made. This colorful artist-centered community is situated along the Washington Avenue Corridor and encompasses two of the city's oldest neighborhoods. The area is bound by two of Houston's bayous and dotted with murals, public art spaces, creative businesses, restaurants, artist studios, and reimagined industrial spaces, notably the iconic repurposed rice silos and old Union Pacific rail line that run through it.

### HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOLADES

MECA, Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts, is a nonprofit founded in 1979 that serves as a vital cultural hub for Houston's most underserved communities. MECA began in 1977, growing from the St. Joseph's Fun 'n Food Fest, which was the city's first city-wide celebration for cultural groups that lived in the inner city. Now, MECA is a community-based nonprofit BIPOC organization committed to the healthy development of under-served and underrepresented families through arts and cultural programming, the promotion of academic excellence, support services, and community building. In the years following its incorporation, the organization moved to the historic Dow School in 1993 and began rehabilitation of the site in 2008.

Bayou Buffalo Partnership restored and repurposed a former drinking water reservoir built in 1926 into a multi-purpose arts and event space. The Cistern, the interior of the reservoir, and the Waterworks, a grassy field that sits atop the Cistern overlooking the city skyline, are public spaces dedicated to arts and culture. The Cistern largely serves as a space for tours, performances, and art installations, while the Waterworks serves as a performance and events space.

### QUOTES

*"When people know that arts are an essential part of their community, they're more likely to visit the spaces that showcase art in their neighborhoods."*

—Arts District Houston Business Owner

*"We love having the studios to visit and purchase from local artists. Also, the various events that are held at the studios brings our community together."*

—Arts District Houston Resident

## East End Houston Cultural Arts District

**POPULATION:** 14,969

East End Houston Cultural Arts District is located in Houston's oldest neighborhood, east of downtown. It is a vibrant District that is rich in diversity and most noted for its vast array of murals and urban art. The art, ranging in theme from cultural celebration to political commentary, can be seen painted on the side of bus stops, fences along the road, and community centers around the East End, illuminating the district as a hub of creativity.

East End Houston Cultural Arts District showcases public art, Hispanic culture, and other forms of artistry, showcasing its diversity. The neighborhood boasts one of the largest collections of outdoor murals in the city of Houston and is home to more than arts and culture institutions, artist studios, showrooms, and design and fabrication shops. East End is rich in historical sites and structures that connect the community to its heritage, as well as culinary traditions that offer visitors a taste of the best food Houston has to offer.

### HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOLADES:

Esplanade at Navigation is a Public Plaza located in the heart of the East End Houston Cultural Arts District. It was honored by Urban Land Institute with an award for public spaces that exemplify best practices in design, economic viability, marketing, and management. The Esplanade is the location of the annual East End Street Fest, weekly markets, and a variety of festivals and events throughout the year.

The Talento Bilingue de Houston (TBH) was founded in 1977 as the "Teatro Bilingue de Houston" (Bilingual Theater of Houston). It has evolved into a Latino Cultural Arts Center that offers a year-round series of performing arts and exhibits, as well as educational programming. The center has built collaborations with various theatre groups, arts organizations, environmental groups, educational institutions, businesses, and marketing groups. It has also garnered partnerships with the Houston Grand Opera and Opera in the Heights, which has expanded cultural programming and exposed audiences to world-class talent. The facility houses a 240-seat theater, professional dance studio, rehearsal room, gallery space, commercial kitchen, and administrative offices.

### QUOTES

*"The arts provide a back bone for community and cultural preservation and celebration that is crucial in the efforts to retain a strong sense of history within a place, particularly the east end, at a time when that is at threat amidst rapid development."*

*—East End Resident*







Xin Chao Houston by Caroline Truong 2020, Arts Micro Grant Project



Wild Wonderland, a Mosaic by Dixie Friend Gay located in Midtown Park



Mistletoe Market 2017 in Bagby Park

## Midtown Houston Cultural Arts and Entertainment District

**POPULATION:** 10,968

Midtown Houston Cultural Arts and Entertainment District is home to a wide variety of arts and cultural experiences, from music venues and public art to historic architecture and museum collections. Nestled between Downtown Houston and The Houston Medical Center, Midtown is part of Houston's Bike Trail System with numerous dedicated bicycle lanes that encourage new forms of transportation and provides a blueprint for smart, sustainable development in Houston. This pedestrian-friendly, "new urban" community is home to over 140 restaurants, bars, and coffee shops within walking distance and hosts quality cultural arts-based programming, projects, and events that combine nature, visual arts, and sustainable development.

Midtown Houston promotes and celebrates local artists by providing a competitive annual grant program that provides funds for art projects and keeps artists engaged in the community. Midtown has multiple flagship organizations, including The Ensemble Theatre, nationally recognized with new plays every season, and Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston: MATCH. The District contains Midtown Park, also known as "art park," which fuses art with nature in five vivid large-scale public art pieces. Midtown Houston is a place that celebrates the remarkable creative community that nurtures some of the city's most inspired talents.

### HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOLADES:

Midtown Park has been awarded multiple awards for its integration of nature into large-scale public art installations. Most recently, in 2022, Midtown Park received the Honor of Urban Design, awarded by the American Society of Landscape Architects. In 2020, the park was awarded Americas Awards for Excellence by the Urban Land Institute.

Midtown is the first Certified Silver Greenroads project in the state of Texas. The Bagby Street Greenroads project supports the needs of automobiles and pedestrians by making a pedestrian-friendly and environmentally sustainable roadway. The project incorporated traffic-calming measures so that cars would move more slowly and ambient traffic noises would be reduced. In addition to this, the project incorporated various sustainable decisions in the creation and final vision of the project. Now, Bagby Street has rain gardens that capture 35% of rainwater for secondary use as well as reduce overall stormwater runoff volume. The project used specialized fly ash in concrete reconstruction, which prevents 300 tons of Carbon Dioxide from entering the air. In addition, the project used stabilizing materials underneath the new builds to reduce the need for maintenance and use of taxpayer dollars.

### QUOTES

*"Having a variety of entertainment and cultural options makes life all the more enjoyable and awe inspiring ... it's the main reason we moved into the city."*

*—Midtown Resident*

## Houston Museum District

**POPULATION:** 5,136

The Houston Museum District is one of the country's largest concentrations of cultural institutions. The District is home to 19 museums, arts, and cultural organizations within a nine-square-mile area. The Museum District includes a diverse range of institutions that provide a variety of revolving exhibitions, art collections, performances, film series, and hands-on activities. The Houston Museum District enhances Houston's creative and cultural life, adds to the vibrancy and quality of life of its community, and serves as a catalyst that supports the city's economy.

The Museum District institutions include Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Houston Zoo; Houston Museum of Natural Science; Children's Museum Houston; Asia Society Texas Center; Buffalo Soldiers National Museum; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; Czech Center Museum Houston; DiverseWorks; The Health Museum; Holocaust Museum Houston; Houston Center for Contemporary Craft; Houston Center for Photography; Houston Museum of African American Culture; The Jung Center; Lawndale Art Center; The Menil Collection; Moody Center for the Arts; and Rothko Chapel.

### HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOLADES

10 of the 19 Museum District's unique institutions are free and open to the public, providing accessible cultural experiences to audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

The Rothko Chapel is an intimate sanctuary that is intended to be a place of spiritual growth and dialogue for people of all beliefs. It was dedicated in 1971, and in 2001, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The plaza of the Chapel houses Barnett Newman's majestic sculpture "Broken Obelisk," which stands in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Over 100,000 people visit the Chapel annually from across the globe.

### QUOTES

*"I moved to the Museum District to live near the various museums, I maintain memberships and actively enjoy them."*

**—Museum District Resident**

*"The Museum District adds richness, education, spirituality, interesting and fun activities available no place else in Houston."*

**—Museum District Visitor**



The Butterfly Project (Loft), Holocaust Museum Houston;  
Photo by Dave Rossman



Rothko Chapel; Photo by Christian Heeb



The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Beck Building, Interior;  
Photo by Allyson Huntsman



Lynn Wyatt Square



Theatre Under the Stars, Spring Awakening at Hobby Center; Photo by Melissa Taylor



## Houston Theater District

**POPULATION:** 1,427

The Houston Theater District is a cultural and entertainment epicenter located in downtown Houston. The District features seven world-acclaimed performing arts organizations and presents work by 30 small- and mid-size companies across four venues: Jones Hall, Wortham Theater Center, Alley Theatre, and Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. Houston is one of only five cities in the United States that boasts permanent, professional resident companies in all of the major performing arts disciplines. Houston's Theater District spans approximately 20 blocks and houses nearly 21,000 seats combined.

Theatre District institutions include Houston Ballet, Houston Grand Opera, Houston Symphony, Alley Theatre, Theatre Under The Stars, Performing Arts Houston, and Da Camera Society of Texas. In addition, Houston Theater District is home to POST, a hub for culture, food, and recreation featuring a Skylawn, community programming, office space, food hall, and new premier concert venue.

### HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOLADES:

The Theatre District will soon be home to Lynn Wyatt Square, opening in September 2023. This \$26.5 million, decade-long project will become the Theater District's "front lawn" and a part of every audience member's evening. This 1.5-acre green space showcases a shaded performance lawn for free programming, a water feature, gardens, and multimedia features including sound towers, video screens, and mini-murals by local artists Anat Ronen and Jessica Guerra.<sup>26</sup>

The Houston Grand Opera is the only opera company in the world to win a Grammy, a Tony, and an Emmy. It has received one Tony Award, two Grammy Awards, and two Emmy Awards.

In 2007, Da Camera of Houston was awarded the CMAAclaim Award from Chamber Music America for its significant contribution to the cultural life of its region.

The Alley Theater is Texas' oldest professional theater company and is the third-oldest continually operating theater in the United States. In 1996, the Alley Theatre won the Regional Theatre Tony Award. The theater is still considered to be one of the most respected and prominent theater companies in the United States outside of New York City.

### QUOTES

*"Engaging programs ... a great way to broaden one's horizon."*

—Theatre District Visitor

*"Excellent is an understatement. 1st performance that brought me to tears. Bravo!"*

—Theatre District Visitor

*"It was a perfect experience! Easy parking, something to eat at the show, outstanding performance! Couldn't be better!"*

—Theatre District Visitor

<sup>26</sup> Gray, Chris, "\$26.5 million Lynn Wyatt Square to serve as Houston Theater District's 'front lawn'," Houston Landing, June 20, 2023, <https://houstonlanding.org/26-5-million-lynn-wyatt-square-to-serve-as-houston-theater-districts-front-lawn/>.



Naomi Carrier takes photo of John Biggers mural at University Museum; Photo by Alex Barber



George Floyd Mural; Photo by Alex Barber



Spoken 3rd Word: A Third Ward Poetry Showcase; Photo by Wando Okongwu

## Third Ward Cultural Arts District

**POPULATION:** 17,533

The Third Ward Cultural Arts District exists to preserve, protect, inspire, and share the artistic and cultural legacy of the Historic Third Ward with current and future generations of artists and creatives through innovative arts and cultural engagement. The Third Ward Cultural Arts District, officially created by the Texas Commission on the Arts in September 2020 and managed by Project Row Houses, supports Third Ward residents by activating spaces of healing and creating a haven for the artists most in need of a place to feel safe to create and thrive. However, the district's beginnings as an epicenter of Black culture was established with the creation of the Trinity United Methodist Church in 1848, which was a congregation created for and by enslaved people, as well as its 1879 Juneteenth celebrations at Emancipation Park. The Third Ward used to be a larger district, but it was physically cut in half with the construction of Highway 288, in addition to other infrastructure projects. The Cultural District creates opportunities for visitors from across town and across the globe to participate in this work and connect with the community. In this moment, the power of art and culture to heal communities and give a voice to the silenced is of the highest importance.

### HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOLADES:

Emancipation Park is not only the oldest park in Houston but also in Texas. During segregation, it was the only public park open to African Americans. Now the park is recognized as a UNESCO Slave Route Project site. The site, purchased in 1890 by free African Americans, was to be the home of Juneteenth events in celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Juneteenth celebration is still being held today with this past year's festivities bringing in over 5,000 people to the Third Ward.

Eldorado Ballroom is a legendary stage that featured the likes of Ray Charles, James Brown, Etta James, Ike and Tina Turner, and Count Basie for almost 30 years from the 1940s-1970s. In past years, the site garnered much attention for the area by receiving an official Texas Historical Marker and the beginning of a total renovation by Project Row Houses.

The Historic Negro Hospital is a place of great historical significance, as it served as the second hospital opened to the African American population of Houston. From its creation, another monumental institution was founded, the first nursing school for Black nurses in Houston.

Project Row Houses (PRH) is a community platform that enriches lives through art with an emphasis on cultural identity and its impact on the urban landscape. Recognized by its reception of awards throughout the globe, PRH has transformed eight restored shotgun houses — elevating architectural style to art form — to serve as studios for visiting artists related to African American themes. A row behind the art studio houses single mothers. PRH's site encompasses five city blocks in the Third Ward and houses 39 structures that serve as home base to a variety of community-enriching initiatives, art programs, and neighborhood development activities.

### QUOTES

*"Through collaboration with artists and arts communities, arts and culture in our District allows us to reach broader audiences, access shared resources, and evolve our communities with input from the residents."*

**—Third Ward Nonprofit Leader**

*"Having arts+cultural programming in our neighborhood allows us to play the role of a very important resource for the artists and community members participating."*

**—Third Ward Business Owner**

*"It adds balance to life and emotional well-being of a person and community."*

**—Third Ward Resident**

# Methodology

## LITERATURE AND MATERIALS REVIEW:

### REVIEWED MATERIALS AND LITERATURE INCLUDE:

- Research publications and case studies in the areas of Cultural Districts, Urban Regeneration, Creative Placemaking, Placekeeping, and Cultural Tourism. National and international sources included publications by: National Endowment for the Arts, AHRC Cultural Value Project, Americans for the Arts, Social Impact of the Arts Project, Urban Institute, Global Cultural Districts Network, and The Kresge Foundation.
- Reports and case studies pertaining to the impact of the Texas Cultural District Program, the Houston Cultural Districts, and arts and culture in Houston broadly. Sources included publications by: Texas Cultural Trust, Texans for the Arts, Greater Houston Partnership, Houston Arts Alliance, Travel Texas, Houston First, Americans for the Arts, and the Arts and Culture Production Satellite Account produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis and National Endowment for the Arts.
- Marketing and operational materials from each Cultural District, such as asset lists, grant reports, and strategic plans.

## THEORY OF CHANGE DEVELOPMENT:

One-on-one interviews and an outcomes-mapping workshop with Cultural District leaders, followed by four focus groups composed of artists and cultural practitioners, arts and culture nonprofit representatives, for-profit business owners, and District residents. Thematic analysis of these early, exploratory discussions informed a “bottom-up” inductively-designed outcomes framework which served as a basis for the outcome evaluation.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES EVALUATION:

This evaluation was conducted parallel to a Collective Visioning process. Given the breadth and concentration of activities within the project timeline, it was necessary to conduct a needs assessment and outcomes evaluation simultaneously, and at times within the same evaluation activities.

The aim of the needs assessment was to build a foundational understanding of the needs of the Houston arts and cultural ecosystem to inform and guide Visioning activities attended by 100 arts and cultural community members from August to November of 2023. The essential context born from these activities is synthesized later in this introduction.

The outcomes evaluation is the primary subject of this report and employs an assets-based approach to understanding the collective value of the Houston Cultural Districts to the city of Houston. The guiding question of the outcomes evaluation is:

*“How are creators, institutions, businesses, residents and visitors currently benefiting from the Houston Cultural Districts?”*

## SEVERAL CHALLENGES EMERGED THROUGHOUT THE OUTCOMES EVALUATION PROCESS:

- (1) The Houston Cultural Districts do not adhere to common geographic boundaries (such as census tracts, zip codes, or block groups), limiting the use of public data sources and their accuracy as applied to the Cultural Districts.
- (2) At the beginning of this project, there was no inventory of District assets and activities, nor centralized data sources across Districts (whether collected by the Districts themselves, the city, or some other external source). This necessitated strategic data collection and the creative use of existing partial data sources.
- (3) The Covid pandemic greatly impacted the arts and cultural sector, and several data sources used in this evaluation include financial and employment data from 2020 and 2021. This important context both informed and limited our ability to conduct longitudinal financial trend analysis and benchmarking within the scope of this evaluation.

## DATA COLLECTION

### COMMUNITY SURVEY & NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Survey distributed throughout the Houston Cultural District community
- Completed by a convenience sample of 70 artists and cultural practitioners, 35 representatives of arts and culture nonprofits, 10 for-profit business representatives, 40 residents, and 69 visitors

### OUTCOMES OF PUBLIC ART EVENTS:

- Survey distributed to and completed by 43 event vendors across three District public art events from April to June 2023

### VISITOR REFLECTIONS:

- Thematic analysis of visitor reflections
- Postcard stations at three public art events prompted 120 visitors to draw or write an open-ended reflection
- 300 open-ended visitor survey responses collected from three Theatre District organizations



The Menil Collection's African Arts galleries; Photo by Allyson Hunstman

## ADDITIONAL DATA SOURCES

- A working inventory of Cultural District assets were compiled using Cultural District operational and marketing materials, as well as internet and map-based research.
- American Community Survey (ACS)<sup>27</sup> and Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD)<sup>28</sup> provided Employment and Population data by block group (mapped to the block groups that most closely align with the boundaries of each Cultural District using GIS software).
- SMU DataArts Cultural Data Profile (CDP)<sup>29</sup> is a 5-year dataset from 2018-2022 and consists of annual survey responses from about 80% of District nonprofits in the areas of programming, audience, and finance. Only 50% of District organizations completed the survey in 2022, in which cases, data from the most recent fiscal year available was used for analysis unless otherwise noted.
- GuideStar<sup>30</sup> was used to source Forms 990 and basic financial and organizational information for the 20% District nonprofits which were not represented in the CDP dataset.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "American Community Survey, Total Population, Table B01003," generated by Jana Fredricks, using [data.census.gov](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2015.B01003?q=Population+Total), <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2015.B01003?q=Population+Total>.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics," generated by Jana Fredricks, using [data.census.gov](https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/), <https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/>.

<sup>29</sup> SMU DataArts, "The Cultural Data Profile, 2018-2022," generated by Jana Fredricks, using [culturaldata.org](https://culturaldata.org/what-we-do/for-arts-cultural-organizations/the-cultural-data-profile/), <https://culturaldata.org/what-we-do/for-arts-cultural-organizations/the-cultural-data-profile/>.

<sup>30</sup> "GuideStar," Candid, accessed October 13, 2023, <https://www.guidestar.org/>.

# Report Definitions

**CULTURAL DISTRICT PARTICIPANTS** are the individuals and entities that directly engage with, contribute to, or benefit from arts and cultural activities, offerings, and experiences within the Houston Cultural Districts. They are grouped as follows throughout this report:

- **ARTISTS AND CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS:** A diverse array of Artists and Cultural Practitioners spanning disciplines, expressions, mediums, and geographies regularly contribute to arts and cultural experiences, offerings, and activities in the Houston Cultural Districts. This term is used expansively and incorporates formal and informal creative and cultural practices of all types.
- **ARTS AND CULTURE NONPROFITS:** There are 84 Arts and Culture Nonprofit organizations permanently operating at a location in one of the Houston Cultural Districts. This includes the Houston Zoo, Houston Museum Natural Science, and several other science or humanities-focused museums which are sometimes excluded from the “Arts and Culture” nomenclature. Many District Nonprofits regularly host, present, and exhibit work created by organizations, collectives, and individuals from across the greater Houston region, nation, and world — for the purpose of this report, and as a proposed ongoing monitoring practice, these activities are captured as a core component of Nonprofit programming described in detail on page 13. Arts and Culture Nonprofits have been grouped by annual operating budget in some sections of this report.
- **NON-ARTS NONPROFITS:** The Houston Cultural Districts contain many Non-Arts Nonprofits including heritage sites, community spaces, service organizations, universities, and hospitals, some of which are included below as Assets of the Houston Cultural Districts. The level of collaboration and connection between the Cultural Districts and Non-Arts Nonprofits varies across Districts, but regardless presents a promising avenue for relationship-building and intentional engagement as the Houston Cultural Districts build capacity and visibility.
- **BUSINESSES:** Businesses participants can be organized into two categories:
  - **FOR-PROFIT ARTS BUSINESSES:** There are four For-Profit Arts Businesses operating in the Houston Cultural Districts. These include, but are not limited to, galleries, artist studios, recording studios, for-profit theaters, and art supply stores.
  - **NON-ARTS BUSINESSES:** Non-Arts Businesses that directly participate in or benefit from Cultural District offerings. These include, but are not limited to, visitor-driven industries such as retail, non-arts entertainment attractions, food and beverage, accommodations, and residential and commercial development.
- **RESIDENTS:** Individuals who currently live, or formerly lived in a Houston Cultural District.
- **LOCAL VISITORS:** Cultural District Visitors who live within 30 miles of the city of Houston.
- **NON-LOCAL VISITORS OR CULTURAL TOURISTS:** Cultural District Visitors who live more than 30 miles outside the city of Houston and seek out arts and culture as a part of their travel experience.

Participant groups are interconnected and often overlap. For example, one focus group attendee was both an artist and employed at an arts nonprofit. This project most heavily engaged artists and cultural practitioners, arts and culture nonprofits, for-profit arts businesses, residents, and visitors. Engagement was driven by existing relationships between Cultural District networks and participant groups. As Cultural District programming expands and strategic inter-District connectivity grows, deeper engagement of non-arts nonprofits and businesses could yield interesting insights for evaluation.



GONZO247 Mural under Harrisburg Bridge



Lynn Wyatt Square



I Love HOU by Donkeyboy Photo by Annie Mulligan







Lady D at Jam Park Stage Photo by D Williams

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