

art & the public purpose ★★★★★
A NEW FRAMEWORK
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America needs a bold new investment in culture, a policy recognizing that culture holds the key to a future we can believe in. This Framework calls on Congress and the Obama Administration to support art's public purpose to mend our social fabric, promote freedom of expression and a vibrant, inclusive national dialogue, and revitalize both education and commerce with the creativity that has always been the wellspring of our energy and success.

Culture matters. As Wynton Marsalis said, "Songs, dances, writings allow us to speak to one another across generations. They gave us an understanding of our commonality long before the DNA told us we are all part of one glorious procession." Culture can be a powerful economic driver, the catalyst to transform failed schools, a means to restore faith in America's world role. Art enriches, beautifies, expresses and entertains, all good reasons to invest in artistic creativity. But the crises we face demand new capacities for creativity, understanding, innovation, and mutual responsibility. Artists' work offers a proven way to cultivate imagination and empathy, essential to national recovery and sustainable community.

President Obama speaks of our urgent need to "unleash the creativity and innovation that still make this nation the envy of the world." This country needs all our talents. The creative economy generates jobs and quality-of-life. Teaching artists cultivate imagination and problem-solving. Working in public service for public goals, artists' skills at invention, improvisation, and inspiration are essential to success. And yet, the United States government does not support our national culture with a coherent cultural policy and the investment that can bring it to life.

This can change. At every moment of crisis and opportunity, artists and cultural organizers have been eager to use their gifts in the service of democratic public purpose. During the 1930s New Deal, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) created more than 8.5 million jobs building roads, bridges and parks, painting murals, creating living theater, teaching school, preserving musical heritage, and much more. Today is no different. Calling for a 2009 summer of service, First Lady Michelle Obama said that "ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things when given the proper tools." We don't ask for special privileges, just the proper tools and the opportunity to do our part, on equal footing and in partnership with all Americans.

This Framework offers five concepts that hold the key to cultural recovery and its role in national recovery. Actualizing them will require our best thinking; we are ready to offer program plans, implementation advice, to roll up our sleeves and help in every way. Now is the time.

1. **Use creativity for the common good.** Recovery means building a new foundation for economic growth, improving infrastructure, aligning us in public purpose, then sustaining these gains. Artists and cultural organizers already contribute to every community, urban and rural, educating the whole student, cultivating resilience through public art projects, bringing the healing power of dance, drama and story to senior centers, hospitals and prisons, and more. They innovate, inspire and engage. In health, education, social services, employment and training, environment, transportation, community development, energy, international relations—every aspect of our democracy—our public sector can be more effective by infusing its work with the power of culture, forging partnerships with artists and organizations. National policy should mandate that every agency recognize cultural action as a valid instrument of the public good.

2. **Engage all of us.** To succeed, our national goals need everyone. Our cultural landscape is a rich and varied tapestry of heritage and new creation. The right to culture—to honor those who came before, express ourselves and take part in community life—is a core human right. Our national policy should mandate equal opportunity to contribute to and benefit from cultural life, whether our families are indigenous to this land, have lived here for many decades or just arrived; whether we live in cities or the countryside; regardless of color, creed, orientation or physical ability. The way we support, protect and promote culture should reflect our best, our national commitment to equity, fairness and inclusion.
3. **Build on cultural memory.** Every community’s cultural fabric is made of shared places, customs, values and creative acts. The stronger it is, the more likely that kids will stay in school, businesses will thrive, neighbors will celebrate and learn from each other. When we forget this, we pay a price. How would our cities be different if policy-makers had considered the cultural lives of the neighborhoods leveled to make way for new stadiums, performing arts complexes and freeways? Cultural policy should be modeled on laws assessing environmental impacts, considering the human and cultural cost of public actions before approving plans. Instead of winners and losers, we should strive for partnerships between community members, the public sector and entrepreneurs.
4. **Put artists to work to support cultural recovery.** We need a “new WPA,” a public service jobs program addressing all our national goals—clean energy, excellent education, sound economy, good health and more. It should include putting artists and creative organizers to work for the common good using every art form and way of working: providing well-rounded education, sustaining and caring for the ill, engaging elders in creativity, rebuilding community infrastructure to reflect our best. Seventy-five years ago, the WPA supported five arts programs as part of FDR’s program to recover from the Great Depression. It worked. Today, jobs are still the engine of prosperity; when tied to public purpose, no investment brings greater impact.
5. **Stand for free expression, supporting democratic media.** Real democracy requires inclusive public conversation, respecting diverse voices, providing the proper tools for an open society. We are long overdue to address media monopolies, using regulation to defend free expression. To earn the world’s respect, national policy should stand for free cultural exchange and free speech, including robust public media and universal, affordable high-speed Internet access. Neither government nor corporations should have the right to control expression, exploit others or restrict devices or infrastructure for the widest possible information transmission. Artists, like all who work for a living, should benefit from the fruits of their labors.

These five simple principles, grounded in time-honored values of creativity, equality, responsiveness, hard work and freedom, can bring our cultural policy in line with all that is most resilient, resourceful and inspiring in our culture.



This new Framework was developed by the Cultural Policy Working Group created on May 12th, 2009 at a White House Briefing on Art, Community, Social Justice, National Recovery. All of the founding endorsers took part in that meeting:

- ♦ **Arnold Aprill**, Founding and Creative Director, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE)
- ♦ **Caron Atlas**, Arts & Democracy Project of State Voices

- ♦ **Prof. Judith F. Baca**, UCLA Cesar E. Chavez Department of Chicana/o Studies, UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures, Founder/Artistic Director of SPARC and the UCLA/SPARC Cesar Chavez Digital/Mural Lab
- ♦ **Biko Baker**, The League of Young Voters
- ♦ **Denise M. Brown**, Arts/Culture and Philanthropy
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- ♦ **William Cleveland**, Musician, Author, Director, Center for the Study of Art and Community
- ♦ **Dudley Cocke**, Roadside Theater/Appalshop
- ♦ **Milly Hawk Daniel**, PolicyLink
- ♦ **Amalia Deloney**, Board Member, Main Street Project
- ♦ **Diane Fraher**, American Indian Artists Inc. (AMERINDA)
- ♦ **Arlene Goldbard**, Writer, Speaker, Consultant
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- ♦ **Gayle Isa**, Executive Director, Asian Arts Initiative
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- ♦ **Joe Lambert**, Center for Digital Storytelling
- ♦ **Liz Lerman**, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange
- ♦ **Rick Lowe**, Artist, Founder of Project Row Houses
- ♦ **Meghan McDermott**, Executive Director, Global Action Project
- ♦ **Michelle Miller**, Manager of Popular Media Organizing, Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
- ♦ **Alyce Myatt**, Media and Philanthropy
- ♦ **Michael D. Nolan**, Director, National Campaign to Hire Artists to Work in Schools and Communities
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- ♦ **Nick Rabkin**, co-author, *Putting the Arts in the Picture: Reframing Education in the 21st Century*
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