



The Impact of Arts and Culture on Relocation Assistance Programs

Background

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

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

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

This document, the first in the series, invites researchers to develop a research plan to support policy change related to the use of arts and culture in relocation assistance. The proposed research is based on the exemplar Yesler Terrace redevelopment experience in Seattle, which is becoming a model for the integration of arts and culture to support equitable relocation and social cohesion (see sidebar on next page for more details).

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

Specific Research Aim

The overall aim of this envisioned research is to learn from the experience of the Yesler Terrace redevelopment to improve the way relocation assistance policy and practice in the United States is approached and to make it more effective and equitable.

More specifically, we want to gauge the impact of arts and culture strategies used in relocation assistance processes at the Seattle Housing Authority and elsewhere in the United States.

We anticipate this research will inform and inspire institutions to think about how to work with government agencies to better integrate arts and culture strategies into housing and other social programs. The ultimate outcome would be policy change in favor of arts and culture programming in housing and other sectors.

Yesler Terrace Art Master Plan

Starting in 2015 the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) introduced [arts and culture programming](#) as part of the redevelopment of Yesler Terrace (YT), a 30-acre site near downtown Seattle initially developed by the Seattle Housing Authority in the early 1940s as Seattle's first publicly subsidized housing. This revitalized community, known as Yesler, is emerging as a dynamic, vibrant, mixed-income community that honors the neighborhood's history and cultural richness while creating safe, healthy and sustainable affordable housing, new parks and open spaces, increased transportation options, and enhanced economic opportunities.

While SHA staffmembers see arts and culture programming contributing to the evolution of the new community of Yesler, how that community develops into a new neighborhood offers an additional challenge. Formerly a relatively insular neighborhood defined by clear geographic boundaries and low-income representation, Yesler Terrace will soon become a radically different place. One thrust of the SHA's arts and culture work has been to use the arts as a way to build social cohesion, connecting new Yesler neighbors to each other and creating new outlets for residents living in SHA housing to understand their neighborhood as a place for new opportunities and

Key Questions and Information Needs

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



connections, as well as encouraging residents temporarily displaced by redevelopment to return to YT.

As Seattle and other major cities expand at rapid rates to accommodate growing populations, developers must consider not only how to build brick-and-mortar institutions, but how to create new places and communities. This is especially true of providers for low-income housing who must shelter individuals, but also consider the holistic needs of individuals. As housing authorities like SHA consider what it takes to build and sustain cohesive communities, this research and associated activities will help the institution to consider what role the arts can play in the life of residents.

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

Research objectives, initial questions, and information needs:

- Explore the role of arts and culture (both formal program and informal activities) in increasing the effectiveness of relocation of SHA residents.
 - What effects are arts and culture having on quality of relocation?
 - Is there statistical significance between relocation assistance programs that used arts and cultural programming and those that did not in residents' decision to return?
 - If so, do households (or individuals) choose to return to Yesler because of formal programming? Or cultural connection and sense of belonging?
- Explore whether arts and culture (formal program and informal social cohesion) help maintain a sense of community when physical spaces radically change.
- Explore whether there is a case to be made for Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act (and other laws that affect relocation assistance, like McKinney Vento Act) resources to be used to support arts and culture work as a way of boosting effectiveness of relocation programs.
 - How do agencies manage collective versus individual needs that incentivize preservation of communities?
- Develop a digital dashboard to inform and understand what effective redevelopment looks like for SHA.
 - How can a dashboard inform future developments that include arts and culture programming and resources for residents?

Target Audience

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

- Housing authorities across the country
- Local government agencies
- Local arts and culture organizations
- Developers
- Relocation assistance agencies
- HUD regional and federal leadership

Research Methods

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

- A scan of relocation assistance programs across the country and an assessment of arts and cultural approaches of said programs
- In-person, phone call, and/or online surveys of residents who have been relocated to get an understanding of their experience and find out if arts and culture programming influenced their decision to return
- In-depth interviews with a sample of impacted community residents who have been relocated
- Interviews with artists who led artistic or cultural engagement with residents experiencing redevelopment-related displacement or return
- One or two case studies of communities that have undergone redevelopment/relocation programs
- A mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods
- A synthesis study or development of a core outcome set around arts, culture, and creative placemaking with equity as the central pillar

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

Deliverables and Schedule

A team of graduate students at the University of Washington, Seattle, has already taken up a preliminary study on this topic. Their research begins to address the first three research objectives. If you are interested in reviewing these preliminary findings, please reach out to us and we will share with you. We hope that this invitation to explore an important topic encourages researchers to take up some of the unanswered questions, whether as part of their ongoing activities or as the start of a new initiative. For those who would like to explore a partnership with PolicyLink, we envision a process by which prospective researchers work with PolicyLink to sharpen plans for a study and raise the resources for it:

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

Notes

- 1 To advance equity, PolicyLink advocates for groundbreaking policy changes that enable everyone, especially people of color, to be economically secure, live in healthy communities of opportunity, and benefit from a just society. PolicyLink is guided by the belief that the solutions to the nation's challenges lie with those closest to these challenges: when the wisdom, voice, and experience of those traditionally absent from policymaking drive the process, profound policy transformations emerge.
- 2 Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa. *Creative Placemaking*. National Endowment for the Arts. Washington, DC, 2010.

Acknowledgments

PolicyLink would like to thank The Kresge Foundation for supporting this research agenda-setting work that is so crucial to the advancement of the intersectional field of arts, culture, and equitable development.

A number of individuals have contributed to these applied research agendas as advisors, reviewers, and partners. We are especially grateful to the graduate student team at the University of Washington who have already taken on one of these areas of research: Cindy Chen, Taneeka Hansen, Dean Allsopp, Ashley Podplesky, and their faculty advisor, Professor Joaquin Herranz, Jr. Thanks to all of you for contributing your ideas and vision for an equitable society to this effort.

Special thanks to Sarah Yeung for her overall contributions and for drafting the applied research agenda on immigrant food systems and to James Crowder Jr. for co-authoring the agenda on business improvement districts.

Thank you to: Rebecca Chan, Danya Sherman, Jen Song, Brytanee Brown, Professor Erick Guerra, Professor John Arroyo, Michael Berne, Rich Pirog, Vanessa Garcia Polanco, Olivia Rebanal, Maryam Khojasteh, Kevin Huang, and Professor Julian Agyeman for being sources of information for these agendas.

Photo on page 2: "[Streetcar at Yesler Terrace](#)" by [SounderBruce](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

Contact Details

If you would like to discuss this further or have ideas about potential researchers please contact Axel Santana, Associate at PolicyLink, via email (asantana@policylink.org).



Lifting Up What Works®

Headquarters

1438 Webster Street
Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94612
t 510 663-2333
f 510 663-9684

Communications

75 Broad Street
Suite 701
New York, NY 10004
t 212 629-9570

Washington, DC

1301 K Street, NW
Suite 300 W-414
Washington, DC 20005

policylink.org

Facebook: [/PolicyLink](https://www.facebook.com/PolicyLink)

Twitter: [@policylink](https://twitter.com/policylink)