

Boulder Arts Blueprint

Executive Summary



CITY OF BOULDER OFFICE OF
ARTS+CULTURE

Keeping Creativity Central to Boulder's Character

The Boulder Arts Blueprint sets out shared goals that support artists, creative businesses, strong neighborhoods and public cultural life, and connects this vision to practical tools, including policy, funding approaches, programs and partnerships, to help leaders and arts staff put it into action.

Overview

Creativity is central to Boulder's identity, shaping its quality of life, economic vitality and ability to evolve. Beyond being a defining strength in our identity, the arts are a key driver of economic vitality.

- Boulder County has the nation's third-highest concentration of artists per capita.
- The city ranked among the top 10 most arts-vibrant medium-sized cities in the U.S., with creative employment three times the national average.
- In 2022, the nonprofit arts and culture sector generated \$115.1 million in local economic activity.

The arrival of the Sundance Film Festival will further Boulder's future as a creative and economically vital place in the west. Yet Blueprint research reveals that these strengths exist alongside serious pressures: creative employment in Boulder declined in recent years; affordable workspace and rehearsal and performance venues are increasingly difficult to find; and the very conditions that make Boulder a creative place are at risk without intentional investment and action.



Street Wise Arts. Spray paint workshop with Skela.
Photo by Jeff Goldberg.

The Boulder Arts Blueprint is a 10-year plan which builds on this foundation by outlining shared goals to support artists, creative businesses, vibrant neighborhoods and cultural life. Developed over 18 months with input from nearly 2,000 community members, the Blueprint connects vision to action through policies, funding strategies, programs and partnerships.



Vision for the Arts

Creative expression is at the core of Boulder. Creativity energizes and renews Boulder's spirit. It is central to the city's sense of self, to its quality of life, to its global reputation. Here, the arts are supported and seen; here, culture threads the fabric of everyday life. Here, talent is nourished, cultural heritage honored and risk-taking embraced.

Goals

The Boulder Arts Blueprint's **seven goals** provide a coordinated, implementation-ready framework to guide Boulder's cultural sector, pairing clear actions and intended outcomes with shared metrics to support accountability, learning and long-term impact.

Goal: Accessibility and Inclusion

Ensure cultural amenities and creative experiences are widely available and accessible to **all Boulder communities**. Every Boulder community member, regardless of age, ability, income, or background will have access to creative experiences and cultural venues where they live. This goal affirms **arts and culture as a public amenity** that serves all community members. Actions include easing permits, simplifying grants, and developing affordable spaces for arts and culture.

Goal: Entrepreneurship and Workforce

Make resources, programs and training available to build **pathways for creative enterprises and entrepreneurship**. Solidify the creative economy as a viable career path that pays a living wage. Actions include professional development, establishing working rates and encouraging the art market.

Goal: Reputation and Identity

Celebrate arts, **culture and creativity as central to Boulder's identity**, reputation and attractiveness. Boulder is renowned for its creative spirit — a place that attracts generations of makers, writers and dreamers drawn to its **signature "eclectic" vibe**. This identity must be continually honored, renewed and celebrated. Actions include storytelling campaign and poet laureate program.

Goal: Public Art and Public Space

Expand **public art and creative expression across public spaces**. Public spaces are viewed as canvases, stages and playgrounds

for artistic production and cultural events. Public art shapes identity, animates shared spaces and invites people to **engage with public life in meaningful and unexpected ways**. Actions include increased temporary projects and additional funding through private partnerships.

Goal: Nonprofits and Institutions

Amplify the impact of the nonprofit cultural sector to **strengthen sustainability, partnerships and collaboration**. Broadcast and promote the consequential work of nonprofits to entice **greater financial investment** and resource sharing. Sustain nonprofit institutions while enticing greater financial investment and encouraging resource-sharing. Actions include encouraging collaboration, shared administration and dedicated cultural infrastructure in redevelopment.

Goal: Experimentation and Innovation

Incentivize **cutting-edge, innovative and experimental practices**. Boulder champions emerging practices across the changing creative landscape, including the use of technology, artificial intelligence, regenerative practices, contemplative arts and other ideas. Actions include an artist in residence program and artist registry.

Goal: Scenes and Affinities

Recognize and nurture **organic creative communities and "scenes."** Encourage dynamic, informal communities of affinity or practice such as nightlife, Burner, gallery hopping, happy hour, all-ages culture and more. Funding and support for grassroots work and a **nighttime economy**.



To learn more about the Boulder Arts Blueprint, visit bldr.fyi/arts-blueprint

Goal 1

Accessibility and Inclusion

Every Boulder community member, regardless of age, ability, income, or background, will have access to creative experiences where they live.



What does this mean?

- Art and culture programs are available in neighborhoods across the city
- It's easier to find, attend, and participate in arts and cultural events
- Language, cost, and distance are no longer barriers to creativity

How do we work towards the goal?

- **Permits, Policy & Access**— Simplifying grants, easing permits, expanding eligibility, translating materials
- **Spaces for Arts & Culture**— Activating vacant storefronts, building community facilities, connecting culture to streets and transit
- **Neighborhood Arts & Community Culture**— Neighborhood grants, arts ambassadors, programs for all ages close to home

How will we know that we are successful?

- It takes less time and costs less money to put on creative events or art projects
- More art appears in everyday places like stores, streets, bus stops, parks
- People find it easier to access arts and culture close to home
- More cultural spaces are created or improved across all neighborhoods



CRAFT Festival (Community Roots Art Festival)



VIVA Theater



Boulder Children's Chorale

Goal 2

Entrepreneurship and Workforce

Solidify the creative economy as a viable career path that pays a living wage.



What does this mean?

- Artists and creative workers have real pathways to stable, fairly paid careers in Boulder
- Creative businesses get the tools, training, and space they need to grow
- Boulder's creative economy shows up in the data and in the city's identity

How do we work towards the goal?

- **Creative Spaces & Places to Work** — Shared workspaces, studios, and production spaces so artists can work more affordably in Boulder
- **Creative Jobs & Fair Pay** — Job training, paid apprenticeships, more ways to sell creative work, clear standards for fair pay
- **Growing Creative Businesses** — Grants, loans, business training, and growth support in commercial areas and innovation hubs
- **Visibility for Creative Work** — Local branding, storytelling, and research that shows creative careers are real, living-wage jobs

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Office of Arts and Culture meetup



East Window Gallery

Goal 3

Reputation and Identity

Celebrate arts, culture, and creativity as central to Boulder's identity, reputation, and attractiveness.



What does this mean?

- Boulder's creative identity is told through inclusive voices and stories honoring histories that have been overlooked
- Local artists and organizations are featured regularly in city communications
- The city's creative story is shared locally, regionally, and nationally

How do we work towards the goal?

- **Promoting Boulder's Creative Identity** — Local and national campaigns, tourism partnerships, and positioning Boulder as a creative destination
- **Consistent Storytelling Across the City** — Aligning arts messaging across departments, partners, and nonprofits
- **Celebrating & Preserving Creative Stories** — Highlighting local artists and preserving Boulder's cultural history through public archives

How will we know that we are successful?

- More artists and creative groups are featured in city communications
- A greater diversity of voices and stories is told
- Social media engagement with arts content grows
- More Boulder creatives appear in national stories, events, and campaigns



Street Wise Arts



Future Arts Foundation

Goal 4

Public Art and Public Space

Expand public art and creative expression across public spaces. Public spaces are viewed as canvases, stages, and playgrounds for artistic production and cultural events.



What does this mean?

- Public art shows up in more neighborhoods, especially those with less past investment
- Temporary installations, performances, and interactive experiences are part of everyday Boulder life
- It's easier and faster for artists to bring their work into shared public spaces

How do we work towards the goal?

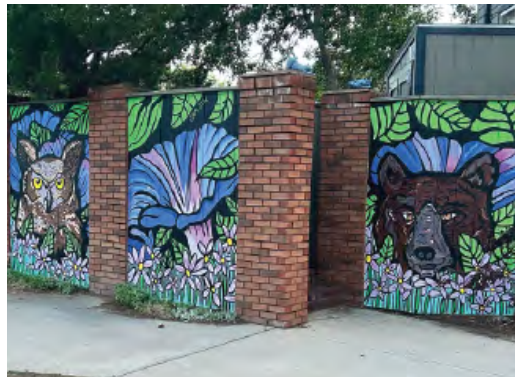
- **Easier Permits & Flexible Options** — Simplified permits, support for short-term projects, and more ways for developers to contribute to public art
- **Stronger Support & Care for Public Art** — Trained community stewards, artist-in-residence programs, better care for existing artworks
- **Public Art in Everyday City Spaces** — Bringing temporary and permanent art into streets, buildings, and city projects
- **Creative, Interactive Public Art** — Hands-on and participatory public art that builds community connection

How will we know that we are successful?

- More public art is created, especially in neighborhoods that have less
- It's easier and faster for an artist to create a piece of public art
- More artworks are repaired and maintained
- More funding flows from the city, developers, and community groups to public art



Jasmine Baetz,
El Movimiento Sigue



Sam Cikauskas, *Creative Neighborhoods*



Adam Kuby, *Fifty-Five Degrees*

Goal 5

Nonprofits and Institutions

Amplify the impact of Boulder's nonprofit cultural sector to strengthen sustainability, partnerships, and collaboration.



What does this mean?

- Nearly 300 arts, culture, and humanities organizations call the Boulder area home and they're stronger together
- Funding is more meaningful, more accessible, and more aligned with community impact
- Small and emerging organizations get real support, not just large institutions

How do we work towards the goal?

- **Nonprofit & Sector Infrastructure** — Simplified grant structures, peer learning, shared services, and more and stronger cultural venues
- **Shared Storytelling & Data** — Reports and tools that show the full impact of Boulder's cultural sector
- **Grantmaking & Investment Strategy** — Funding aligned with public impact, innovation, collaboration, and climate awareness
- **Storytelling, Identity & Visibility** — An annual cultural report, public gatherings, and coordinated regional partnerships

How will we know that we are successful?

- Arts organizations are more stable and sustainable, with adequate venues and facilities
- More nonprofits work together, share resources, and try new ideas
- Grant money is more meaningful and impactful
- More arts organizations record and share data from grant programs



Motus Theater



Groundworks Art Lab



Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra

Goal 6

Experimentation and Innovation

Incentivize cutting-edge, innovative, and experimental practices. Boulder is a living lab.



What does this mean?

- Artists explore big questions like technology, climate, wellness, social change — in Boulder’s public spaces
- Young people and emerging voices help drive Boulder’s creative future
- Risk-taking is supported, not penalized by high costs and red tape

How do we work towards the goal?

- **Public Testing & Creative Experimentation** — Small accessible grants and public events to test new ideas in welcoming spaces
- **Cross-Sector Research & Innovation** — Artists embedded in city departments, tech firms, climate groups, and wellness centers
- **Youth & Emerging Creative Leadership** — Youth-led labs and programs so young people influence Boulder’s creative future
- **Creative Visibility & Trend Awareness** — Partnerships and tools that track and highlight emerging creative practices and new media

How will we know that we are successful?

- More artists and creative groups are featured in city communications
- A greater diversity of voices and stories is told
- Social media engagement with arts content grows
- More Boulder creatives appear in national stories, events, and campaigns



3rd Law Dance/Theater



Matthew Mazzotta, “Harm to Table”

Arts and Culture Infrastructure in Boulder

Investing in cultural spaces, funding and supportive policies is essential to keeping Boulder's arts community strong and ensuring creativity remains part of the city's future.

This focus area supports artists and cultural organizations by ensuring they have the spaces and resources needed to create, teach, perform and connect with the community. It also prioritizes policies, funding and planning efforts that help sustain a thriving arts and culture sector.

How do we work towards the goal?

- **Affordability:** Evaluate city-owned properties for cultural uses and support temporary creative uses in vacant storefronts and other underutilized spaces.
- **Entrepreneurship and Workforce:** Expand access to shared maker and production spaces and support opportunities for artists to live and work in Boulder.
- **Nonprofits and Institutions:** Preserve existing cultural facilities, support new arts venues, and explore opportunities to expand cultural spaces.
- **Experimentation and Innovation:** Create more access to flexible, low-cost spaces where artists and organizations can test ideas, present work and build audiences.
- **Scenes and Affinities:** Support emerging creative communities by encouraging informal cultural spaces and short-term leasing opportunities for artists and collectives.

How will we know that we are successful?

- More artists and organizations can find, use, and keep affordable space in Boulder.
- Fewer creative projects are delayed, canceled or moved elsewhere because of space limitations.
- Arts and culture are included in redevelopment plans, economic development strategies and city property decisions.
- New funding tools and partnerships help support cultural facilities and creative spaces.

Comprehensive Plan Alignment

The 2026 Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan elevates arts and culture as a dedicated Focus Area, calling for investment in art in public places, venues, facilities, and programs that reflect Boulder's creative spirit. It affirms that Boulder's creative sector is a defining strength of the community and a key driver of economic vitality, reinforcing that arts and culture are essential civic infrastructure.

