

# CAH Public Art Master Plan Update Preliminary Summary

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**Submitted by Todd W. Bressi and Via Partnership**

**April 24, 2021**

Submitted 21-04-25

## Why This Plan? Why Now?

This report is a preliminary outline of the update of the master plan for the Washington, D.C., Commission on the Arts and Humanities, public art program, which was adopted in 2009.

Since that plan was completed, much has changed in the District, in the Commission and in the practice of public art at large.

- The city has grown, in terms of residential development and workforce, over the last decade; gentrification has expanded into further areas while other areas remain disinvested.
- The Commission has become an independent agency, rather than part of the Deputy Mayor's Office, and its public art activities have focused on grant programs rather than direct commissions.
- CAH is updating its agency strategic plan concurrently with this update process, and this plan recognizes and incorporates the strategic framework that is being developed.
- The Commission's public art funds have shifted from capital dollars to local dollars, creating important constraints on the use of the funding for public art installations, primarily that the funding must be spent in the fiscal year in which it is appropriated.
- More and more city agencies are developing public art capacities of their own to implement agency-focused public art missions; the city's percent for art ordinance is now managed by the Department of General Services. Independent organizations, primarily BIDs and Main Streets, have also begun to develop public art capacity.
- In the country overall, the practice of public art has evolved and expanded to be more diverse and inclusive. Civic practice, social practice and creative placemaking are at the forefront of new ways of working, often driven by artists' vigorous sense of engagement with the world. Concerns about how public art can positively transform the lives of individuals, communities, local cultural ecosystems, and civic dialogue are now in the forefront. Conversations about broad issues such as climate change, equity and gentrification are sharpened in public focus by public artists.

This plan comes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic, the forefronting of racial justice issues and the 2020 election have brought many of the underlying injustices and inequities in our country – access to public services, systemic racism and full and free participation of all people in governance – into sharp relief. The work of the arts and humanities, and public art programs, seems more urgent than ever.

In the District, as elsewhere, the challenges remain real, yet the opportunities have the potential for being more rewarding and impactful than ever before. This update to the CAH public art master plan brings fresh thinking and new tools to the table, in hope that they will enable CAH's public art program to meet this very important moment.

## How this Plan was Created

This plan was developed by the consulting team of Todd Bressi and Via Partnership, who developed CAH's last public art plan in 2009. Suzan Jenkins, CEO of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, and Howard Wellman, a conservator specializing in outdoor sculpture, joined the team as advisors.

The plan was developed through several stages: research, engagement, and a preliminary assessment of findings and recommendations.

## Research

The research process involved an analysis of information from a variety of sources.

- CAH public art and Art Bank grants. We reviewed materials related to the Public Art Building Communities Grant (PABC), MuralsDC, Civic Commissions, Art Bank and Art Exhibition (Curatorial) Grants (AEG). These included grant solicitations and records of grants awarded, including the geographic distribution of projects.
- City plans and initiatives. We reviewed a variety of city plans and initiatives, from the draft comprehensive plan update, to area plans and public realm studies, to departmental plans and policies related to public art and public spaces, to the recent work of the Commemorative Works Committee and the D.C. FACES process.
- D.C. cultural plans and policies. This included CAH's last strategic plan, the Arts and Culture and Urban Design elements of the city's Comprehensive Plan update (which is pending approval), and the D.C. Cultural Plan (which has not been implemented).
- City agency public art activities. We reviewed documentation from public art and placemaking activities organized by DC Department of Transportation (DDOT), DC Department of General Services (DCGS), DC Public Library (DCPL), DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), DC Department of Public Works (DCPW), and DC Department of Office of Planning (DCOP), and interviewed key staff responsible for managing those activities.
- Best practices, portable collection programs. We documented portable collection practices from eight public art agencies across the country with leading practices in this kind of public art activity.
- Best practices, public art grant programs. We collected examples of public art granting programs from public agencies, non-profits and foundations from around the country.
- Best practices, conservation, maintenance and de-accessioning. We compiled memoranda describing model practices in maintenance and conservation, and de-accessioning, based on leading practices in peer agencies across the country.

## Engagement

As the CAH public art program is largely a grant program, broader engagement focused on stakeholders to the program – the artists, curators, organizations and city agencies that conceive of projects and propose them to CAH. Interviews occurred starting in fall 2020, and focus groups occurred in February 2021.

- We distributed questionnaires to several groups of people. The questionnaires had open-ended questions specific to each group that helped us collect information in an efficient and focused way. The responses provided qualitative but not statistically significant data. Questionnaires were distributed to CAH Commission members, MuralsDC artists, Art Bank artists, AEG curators, representatives of Business Improvement District organizations and representatives of Main Street organizations.
- We conducted individual interviews with people in key stakeholder groups: PABC applicants, AEG curators, Civic Commission artists and partners, and other City agency partners.
- We conducted five focus groups with specific groups of stakeholders: Main Streets, Business Improvement District (BIDs), artists (2), and arts and culture organizations.
- We will conduct three virtual open houses at which stakeholders can respond to and make suggestions in regard to the draft plan update, as well as notify recipients of the questionnaires to review the Draft plan update.

## Findings

At the conclusion of the research and engagement phases, the team submitted broad findings and early recommendations to CAH staff and the Commission's Public Art Committee.

## Key Strengths

The consulting team identified the following key strengths:

- Program empowers artists, curators, and organizations to develop projects based on their own ideas and community needs.
- Program works flexibly with city agencies to advise on and implement public art projects.
- Program staff is knowledgeable and respected.
- Program receives substantial funding.
- Art Bank collection is a uniquely significant cultural resource.
- Virtual public programming is well-attended and substantive.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The consulting team identified the following key challenges:

- Public art grants operate within legislative and administrative constraints that limit their programmatic and operating flexibility.
- Some application requirements present barriers for some artists and organizations, particularly those that have fewer resources to undertake the work necessary to apply for a grant.
- Some of the programmatic constraints for grants impact the ability of some stakeholders to propose projects that meet needs and opportunities they identify.
- Public Art and Art Bank collections are not easily accessible to public.

- Many D.C. agencies manage arts programs independently of CAH; this fragmentation of effort does not effectively serve key constituencies.
- There is an uneven diversity in grant applicant pools.
- There is an uneven capacity in external stakeholder groups (artists, organizations, curators) to apply for and manage projects.
- There is an uneven distribution of project and artist awards across the city's eight Wards.

## The Framework for CAH's Public Art Program

The public art program is part of the City's Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and as such, helps to implement CAH's vision and mission. CAH is guided by two overarching statements – the language in the enabling legislation that establishes CAH's scope, and recent statements the Commission has adopted regarding inclusiveness, diversity, equity and access.

### Legislation

The enabling legislation for CAH gives it broad authority in regard to assessing the arts and humanities fields in the city, and undertaking actions that advance those fields:

*The Commission on the Arts and Humanities ("Commission"), shall evaluate and initiate action on matters relating to the arts and humanities and encourage programs and the development of programs that promote progress in the arts and humanities.*

### Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I.D.E.A.)

Over the last year, a CAH task force has developed a framework and specific recommendations for the agency's equity practice.

#### Definitions of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

The framework identifies inclusion, diversity, equity and access as the key considerations in CAH's equity practices, and defines those terms.

#### I.D.E.A. Recommendations

The task force also provided extensive recommendations related to the ways that grant programs should be organized, managed, administered and governed. Those are incorporated by reference into this plan update.

One of the key recommendations is that:

*Applicants must demonstrate how its programming and services will be inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible throughout the District of Columbia, beyond participants with disabilities.*

## Six Lenses for How CAH Public Art Impacts the City

This plan considers CAH's various activities — such as grants, commissions, partnerships, and programming — with three essential questions in mind:

- How is CAH impacting the public art ecosystem – the artists, organizations and curators that create public art?
- How is CAH impacting people's engagement with public art in the city?
- How is CAH advancing equity in the work that it does?

There are **six key lenses** through which CAH can understand how its public art program *interacts* with the city's public art ecosystem and how the program *impacts* the city overall.

These lenses largely focus on the **constituencies** that the program serves (artists/curators, arts/community organizations, city agencies, residents, workers, visitors) as well as on the **visual context** for the program (urban design/planning and artistic legacy).

An additional lens, **equity** (or Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access) cuts across all of these topics and is now a high priority for CAH.

These lenses are the starting point for thinking about the impacts, goals, and strategies for CAH's public art programs. By keeping these lenses in mind, CAH can keep an empathic mind towards the needs of its stakeholder groups and proactively identify opportunities for collaborations and catalytic initiatives.

### The Six Lenses

#### Artists

Artists (and curators, through the Art Exhibitions Grant program) are a key focus for CAH. A primary goal of many of CAH's public art grant programs is to support DC-based artists in developing their careers and having access to opportunities to make and present public art, though this is not always explicit in individual programs or grant goals.

#### Arts and Community Organizations

Arts and Community organizations are key components of the City's public art ecosystem, and therefore a second key focus of for CAH, as they implement many of the projects for which the agency makes public art grants. These organizations typically include BIDs, Main Streets, arts organizations, and community development organizations. Though these organizations are distributed throughout the city, their capacity to undertake public art projects varies, and there are many neighborhoods that do not have access to this infrastructure for developing public art projects.

#### City Agencies

Many DC government agencies have embraced public art as a way of doing business. Many of them have organized public art activities on their own as ways to help them advance their missions and achieve their goals. Others have entered into partnerships with CAH or sought out CAH guidance on a variety of issues, including the planning of commemorative works in the City. Continued collaboration with DC agencies is critical to amplify CAH efforts and to ensure public art is helping city agencies achieve their goals.

## Public Audiences

Public audiences are an important focus for CAH public art programs; CAH's mission includes supporting the residents and workers in the city by providing access to artistic experiences, opportunities for creative expression and access to economic well-being, and enhancing quality of life. In practice, city residents and workers benefit from public art to the degree that they can participate in the creation of public art and that they can experience the artwork commissioned through CAH grants or acquired through Art Bank.

## Urban Design and Planning

Traditionally, there is a great synergy between the location of permanent public artworks and the visual / spatial form of a city. The District of Columbia has very strong urban design traditions and the city's comprehensive plan and many small area plans provide a framework for connecting public art to planning and urban design strategies. (The comprehensive plan has yet to be approved by City Council, but its recommendations are shaping a number of planning and research projects.) These plans are valuable resource for identifying public art locations that are visible, integrated with the public life of the City, and vetted with some level of consensus about their viability for public art.

## Artistic Legacies

The works that CAH commissions and acquires constitute an artistic legacy for the city and hold great value, both artistically and emotionally, for the people who experience them. The Art Bank collection alone is a remarkable timeline of the key movements and leading practitioners of regional visual art for the last half century. At its best, the permanent and temporary public art projects that have been commissioned offer the same kind of retrospective of regional visual art traditions, all for the public to see. The art that CAH commissions and collects should build on this legacy, recognizing the diversity of aesthetic traditions and visual arts genres that are reflected in the creative life of the city.

## Equity

Equity considerations are thread throughout the discussions of these six lenses, in regard to how public art *interacts* with and *impacts* stakeholders and the city overall. Equity is a complex topic that can mean different things to different people. These are the specific equity issues we discerned through our research:

- Expanding access to CAH public art resources for artists, organizations and communities through various grants and acquisition opportunities
- Addressing issues that present challenges for artists and organizations who are applying for CAH resources
- Access for the public to CAH public art resources through equitable and accessible distribution of artworks throughout all city neighborhoods
- Representation of diverse cultural voices in the public art projects that are supported and in the decision-making processes behind program design and grant-making
- Having an information base that will allow CAH to prioritize its equity efforts in regard to public art and measure progress towards its goals

## Outcomes and Goals for Public Art

In order to move forward, the CAH public art program must be able to articulate where it wants to head. The first step is to articulate **outcomes** and **goals** for the CAH public art program.

Outcomes describe the broad, overall impacts that CAH public art activities should have when this plan is implemented. That is, how will CAH impact the way that public art is created in the District? How will CAH impact the way that people will experience public art? We have identified five key outcomes, which are discussed below:

- A More Equitable Public Art Landscape
- A Strong Public Art Ecosystem
- A Vibrant Public Realm
- Strengthened Cultural, Economic and Social Fabric in Communities
- A More Fully Engaged Public

Following the description of each outcome, there is a series of goals specific to that outcome, highlighted in blue text. These are the specific objectives that CAH should work towards in order to achieve the broader outcomes it seeks.

These outcomes and goals would be implemented through strategies and actions, which are described in the next section.

### Outcome: A More Equitable Public Art Landscape

CAH has prioritized the goal of creating a more equitable arts and humanities landscape in the District. An equity task force has generated recommendations related to grants programs, grants management, administration, and governance. CAH is already asking grant applicants to demonstrate how its programming and services will be inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible throughout the District of Columbia, beyond participants with disabilities.

Based on feedback from public art stakeholders, CAH can create a more equitable public art landscape by focusing on four key areas: the breadth of participation in its resources; the geographic distribution of its resources; the cultural representation in its resources; and the way that decisions are made. CAH should base its equity strategies on knowledge contributed by its stakeholders as well as data collected on its activities.

#### Goals

- CAH has data that enables the agency to strategically prioritize the investment of resources to promote equity.
- Public art resources are more accessible to artists, curators, organizations, and audiences.
- Public art projects are distributed more equitably throughout all the wards of the city.
- The public art collection reflects narratives, histories, and cultural practices of diverse communities.
- Stakeholders participate in decisions that affect them.



## Outcome: A Strong Public Art Ecosystem

CAH interacts with a wide range of artists, arts professionals, organizations, and city agencies that create public art in the District, what is sometimes called the public art ecosystem. As CAH works primarily through grants, CAH relies on these stakeholders to propose projects and ultimately implement them. CAH's effectiveness is enhanced by the wide range of ideas that these stakeholders bring to the table, but it is limited by capacity that these organizations have. Therefore, CAH should ensure that it is building the breadth and depth of stakeholders who have the capacity to create public art, especially so that public art can address the needs of the full diversity of this community.

### Goals

- Public art projects fully express the range of creative voices of the city.
- Public art projects reflect a wide range of contemporary public art practices.
- A larger and more diverse group of DC-based artists:
  - have the knowledge and resources to develop and execute successful public art projects
  - have the resources and access to space to make and present new work.
  - contribute to the CAH public art collection.
  - have the credentials and skills that will lead to a growing career as an artist.
- More DC-based curators:
  - have the knowledge and resources to develop and execute successful public art projects.
  - have the knowledge and resources to develop and present exhibitions in public space.
- More arts and community organizations throughout DC can lead and develop public art projects.
- More DC agencies have the knowledge and access to artists they need to successfully commission public art.
- Entities commissioning public art have a broad understanding of public art best practices and have integrated them into their work.
- Artists, curators, organizations, and agencies contribute what they know best to public art initiatives.

## Outcome: A Vibrant Public Realm

Washington, D.C.'s public realm is many-layered, ranging from grand civic places to streetscapes, parks and spaces that people experience in their everyday lives. Several city agencies (DC OP) have a strong focus on building a vibrant public realm, and several city plans, such as the urban design element of the Comprehensive Plan (pending approval) and area plans, provide detailed guidance on public realm goals and opportunities.

CAH should focus on the everyday public realm – from downtown streetscapes to neighborhood corridors, from community parks to pocket spaces, from Metro station plazas

to neighborhood squares. It should strengthen its collaborations with agencies, such as DDOT, DPR and DDOT, that plan for and manage the public realm.

#### Goals

- Community- and agency-initiated public space investments are enhanced through public art planning and implementation strategies.
- CAH public art and placemaking efforts align with approved urban design and planning strategies.
- CAH public art and placemaking efforts enhance public spaces otherwise identified by communities as significant assets.
- CAH public art investments support community-identified needs for public realm enhancements.

### **Outcome: Strengthened Cultural, Economic and Social Fabric in Communities**

Public art can have a transformative impact on the cultural, economic, and social fabric of a community. This means working in ways that support participatory processes and community building outcomes, along with traditional artistic outputs.

#### Goals

- Projects that seek community-building outcomes (such as heightened civic engagement and participation, strengthening community networks and resilience, and cultivation of people's creative and civic voices) are supported.
- Service organizations receive support to engage with artists to address social, equity and climate issues.

### **Outcome: A More Fully Engaged Public**

CAH's mission includes supporting people who live in, in and/or visit the city by providing access to artistic experiences and opportunities for creative expression. Focus on how the public is involved in the creation of public art and how people have access to the public art collection.

#### Goals

- Public art is a vital part of the creative life for everyone in the city.
- More people are connected to the processes of creating public art.
- More people have access to the artworks that have been created and acquired.

## Strategies for CAH Public Art

### Programmatic Strategies

CAH's public art program is organized primarily as a grant-making organization. This follows logically from CAH's role as a state arts agency but is a shift from a decade ago when CAH's public art program also viewed itself as a commissioning entity. CAH also invests in the arts ecosystem through direct purchases for Art Bank and provides some programming through its series "CAH in the Community," which primarily focuses on field development and discussion of the artworks in its collection.

The outcomes and goals described above suggest that CAH should consider developing a more robust and carefully integrated toolkit of strategies. Though grants and acquisitions would remain the core strategies, incremental and proactive expansion of Direct Commissions, Partnerships and Programs would help to expand CAH's public art program's ability to achieve the outcomes described earlier.

### Community-Based Grants

For most of the past decade, the main tool that CAH has used to fund public art installations is grants, primarily the Public Art Building Communities grants. This grant program is unique in that it allows for artists and community applications to seek project that address their own priorities; however, the reach of these grants has been constrained by extensive application requirements, compressed time frames and the capacity of artists and communities to work as grant recipients. CAH should consider updating its grant programs, adding new grant categories, and adjusting its processes to better meet stakeholder needs. Recent addition of Art Exhibition Grant program (Curatorial) has added a new dimension to community driven grant opportunities

### Direct Commissions

Over the last decade, CAH has rarely undertaken direct commissions of public art, and generally only at the request of other City agencies. However, direct commissions could be useful to help CAH move towards several of the outcomes it is seeking – such as filling gaps that are not being addressed by other stakeholders and providing carefully targeted opportunities for new artists to enter public art practice. CAH should consider developing a strategy for specific and targeted use of its capability to commission artworks on its own.

### Acquisitions

Since 1986, CAH has been creating an unparalleled civic art collection through Art Bank and Public Art Commissions. These acquisitions reflect important artistic movements that have supported generation of artists, built a record of the DC's creative history, and offer access to the arts for people who work in or visit City office buildings. CAH should continue this strategy, focusing on ensuring that acquisitions reflect the full creative voice of the city, implementing sound collection management practices, and providing broader public access to the collection.

### Partnerships

Over the past decade, many City agencies have recognized that public art can be an important tool for them in achieving their missions. CAH has entered into partnerships initiated by other City agencies primarily through its Civic Commissions Program and MuralsDC

program. Other City agencies have sought CAH's help because they value its access to artists and its project management capabilities. At the same time, many City agencies, such as DCOP, DDOT and DCPL have initiated public art initiatives on their own and in partnership with CAH, and DPR is considering doing so. Additionally, DGS manages public art commissions resulting from the City's Percent for Art program.

Together, these many projects and programs offer city residents, workers, and visitors a wide variety of public art experiences. However, they have evolved in a fragmented way, making it difficult for artists and arts organizations to find opportunities, has created inefficiencies in project management, and stratified the documentation of projects making it difficult for public art audiences to understand where work is located and who commissioned it.

CAH should work with city agencies in continued public art partnerships, initiating new collaborations when they can help achieve the outcomes outlined here. CAH should place itself in a position of field leadership; linking resources effectively; providing resources to ensure that public art best practices are followed; and inspiring efforts to mobilize the most innovative public art practices in the city.

### **Programs**

CAH has begun programming, through its "CAH in the Community" series, that addresses two key general topics – access to the collection and access to grants (programs have offered the public with innovative insight into the collection, primarily Art Bank, and technical support on completing grant applications). There are opportunities to build in this, not only through future broad public programming, but also through efforts that are targeted either through their subject area or their approach (tours, workshops, trainings, best practice guides, networking resources, one-on-one consultations). Like new commissions, programming should be specifically and strategically targeted towards the goals outlined above.

### **Administrative Strategies**

Finally, CAH should continue working on administrative initiatives that would undergird the strategies described above. Key among these are:

### **Funding**

CAH's public art programs are currently funded through annual local funds, which must be spent in the fiscal year in which they are appropriated. Since almost all public art installation projects, whether developed through grant processes or direct commissions, take more than a year to complete, this requirement fundamentally constrains CAH's ability to support new public art projects. CAH should explore the following strategies for the funding of new public art installation projects:

- exploring how public art grant programs can be broken into smaller grants that could be applied for and obtained over multiple years,
- exploring funding mechanisms to allow for multi-year public art project implementation from planning, fabrication to installation,
- exploring a funding mechanism for public art installation projects, with the goal of obtaining funding to support city-sponsored public art commissions that address specific gaps, such as those related to equity, and
- seeking external grants to support special initiatives with more flexible funding.

## Staffing

CAH's public art staff has been organized to manage a variety of grant programs and to manage a growing collection of Art Bank and public art projects. The recommendations in this plan will add additional professional capacity; some of the key needs will be for managing direct public art commissions, for increased public engagement, and for enhanced conservation and management work. This additional capacity could be provided through new staff, consulting support, or some combination of those strategies.

## Data

Several of the equity goals identified in this plan would address imbalances in access to and distribution of CAH and public art grant resources. To develop specific strategies to address these goals, CAH should have sound information about its applicants, its grants, and the distribution of projects throughout the city. This can be achieved by:

- building a more robust and accessible database about its public art grants.

## Collection Management, Maintenance, Conservation

CAH maintains an extraordinary collection of public artworks that it has funded through PABC and other grant programs, as well as two-dimensional and three-dimensional portable artworks that have been acquired through Art Bank.

CAH staff have been developing collection management recommendations and laying the groundwork for a more robust maintenance and conservation protocol for the permanent public art collection.

CAH can strengthen its collection management, maintenance, and conservation practices by:

- adopting the collection management protocols that staff has prepared for Art Bank, after making slight modifications (particularly related to de-accessioning) that would enable them to apply to the public art collection as well,
- supporting the creation of a conservation and maintenance plan and providing resources to implement it on an annual basis, and
- clarifying maintenance responsibility for CAH grant-funded and accessioned artworks on private property.

## Communications

The CAH Public Art Collection and Art Bank Collection are vital cultural assets. CAH staff should work with CAH communications staff as well as with agency partners and grantees to develop both overarching and project-specific communications plans. Key strategies include:

- Work with the CAH communications team to create and maintain an enhanced identity for the Public Art Program and Art Bank Collection. This identity should clearly identify CAH as funder, commissioning entity, or acquiring entity for works that are part of the Public Art Collection and the Art Bank Collection and should be used consistently in all program materials and traditional and social media. This applies to print materials, press releases, website, social media, and identification labels.
- CAH public art and communications staff should also look for ways to expand access to the Public Art and Art Bank collections, including strengthening and expanding

online platforms. Both the CAH website as well as social media platforms can make experiences with the collection more interactive and create depth to the overall content and context of the work.

- CAH staff, working with CAH communications staff, should also develop a communications strategy for each grant round and commissioned projects, and, when appropriate, for other projects. The strategy should include messaging opportunities from grant announcement to award to the unveiling of the artwork or the exhibition. The strategy should identify target audiences, messages, and vehicles for communication. The communications strategy should also identify how to leverage the communications efforts of grantees and project partners.

Submitted 21-04-25