

Using Cultural-Regional Arts Scenes to Frame and Understand Out-Of-School Time Arts Programs

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Abstract

A wealth of literature shows positive outcomes and experiences from arts learning, yet youth access to arts education has become significantly more inequitable over the past 30 years. Alongside the growing discourse around arts learning and equity issues, there is a recognized and persistent need for more research. We conducted a critical, qualitative study of out-of-school time (OST) arts organizations across the United States. Our primary research questions were: (1) How do community youth arts organizational leaders, teaching artists, and participants describe the leading ideas and practices in OST youth arts programming? (2) How can OST youth arts work center the cultural, historical, and geographic resources that artists and arts organizations bring to arts programming? We first developed a theoretical framework for understanding arts practices in education and summarize key learning outcomes associated with youth participation in the arts. We then talked with OST arts education experts across the United States to understand how their programs support and center youth in arts learning, particularly Black youth, Indigenous youth, and youth of color (BIPOC youth), youth from low-income backgrounds, and LGBTQIA+ youth. This report offers the concept of “cultural-regional scenes” to describe the critical, qualitative case studies we developed of OST youth arts practice. We describe four unique cultural-regional scenes—the Urban Midwest, the Bay Area, Texas-Mexico Border Towns, and the Indigenous Southwest—and provide examples of youth arts practice in each scene. We conclude with ideas that stretch across scenes and suggest that researchers and practitioners can take up this approach in the study of OST youth arts programs.

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Though a wealth of literature shows positive outcomes and experiences from arts learning (e.g., Bevan et al., 2019; Halverson, 2021), youth access to arts education has become significantly more inequitable over the past 30 years (Bowen & Kisida, 2017). Alongside the growing discourse around arts learning and equity issues, there is a recognized and persistent need for more research. To address this need, we conducted a critical, qualitative study of out-of-school time (OST) arts organizations across the United States. The study was commissioned by the Wallace Foundation to identify promising practices and challenges for youth arts organizations across the United States who work primarily with populations of young people who have been identified as historically marginalized from mainstream institutions.

First, a team of nine university-based scholars worked with arts learning experts from across the country to identify relevant research and practice literature. These experts were included based on their background in studying and/or designing arts-based learning environments focused on the lives of historically marginalized young people. In the literature review, we develop a theoretical framework: creating representations, exploring identity, practicing creativity, and collaborating as an outcome of collective learning. We argue that centering these outcomes can provide an alternative framing for what “good” learning looks like and we conclude by considering how to reframe schooling in terms of learning ecologies. Four central practices of arts-based teaching and learning can serve as the foundation for reform across education in and out of schools (Halverson et al., under review).

Following the literature review, we talked with OST arts education experts across the United States to understand how their programs support and center youth in arts learning, particularly Black youth, Indigenous youth, and youth of color (BIPOC youth), youth from low-income backgrounds, and LGBTQIA+ youth. Specially, we set out to answer two primary questions: (1) How do community youth arts organizational leaders, teaching artists, and participants describe the leading ideas and practices in OST youth arts programming? (2) How can OST youth arts work center the cultural, historical, and geographic resources that artists and arts organizations bring to arts programming? We looked to community youth arts programs for direction around broader OST arts education because, in neglecting to focus on the powerful role the arts play in young peoples’ learning lives, the current policy climate has placed the burden of arts education directly in the hands of OST providers. We developed a series of policy recommendations that can inform how we think about arts education broadly constructed, and how school reform can include the arts as a core part of what it means to educate differently. Our policy recommendations are organized into four categories: (1) Focus on youth and community assets; (2) Expand beyond a program-centric model of funding and design; (3) Support creative professionals; (4) Rethink the design and implementation of assessment systems (Halverson, Saplan & Martin, 2023).

In this report we continue to address issues of equity and access by centering community youth arts as the way to understand the OST youth arts field. We propose that using the concept of cultural-regional scenes is an effective organizing principle to both frame and study how effective OST arts programs function both within organizations and within local communities. Two primary ideas guide our methodology, data collection, findings, and recommendations: (1) Equity-centered scholarship demands an asset-based approach that prioritizes relationships and collective interpretation by communities to tell their own story, define their own success, and envision their own future. The audience is required to not only listen but to acknowledge these voices as authorities. (2) The intersection of culture, geography, and history provides the best lens to understand best practices in OST youth artmaking.

Methods for Studying OST Arts Programs: Comparative Case Study and Cultural Geography

To capture the lived experiences of organizational leaders, teaching artists, and youth arts participants, we sought to develop a comparative case study approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). Comparative case study takes a process-based approach that allows for emergent, iterative design rather than creating a priori boundaries for what constitutes a case which allowed us to center participant voices. Practically, this meant resisting the urge to “bound” cases too soon:

The effort to “bound” a case relies on a problematic notion of culture, place, and community; it also, quite inappropriately, defines out of the realm of study factors that may well be very relevant, such as historical circumstances that date back decades or more (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 8).

We began developing comparative case studies based on regions of the United States where social, cultural, and historical traditions as both determined by regional place and constructing what is possible and what is constrained within a regional place. We took a cultural geography approach to defining “region.” The cultural geography frame has been useful in characterizing what makes towns across America successful, despite their co-location with similarly situated unsuccessful towns (Fallows & Fallows, 2018). For example, data on the geographical histories of patent holders suggests that regional social networks and childhood exposure to innovation are critical for surfacing and sustaining children’s propensities to invent (Bell et al., 2017). Since we were working specifically in the OST youth arts space, we drew on the field of children’s geographies which describes the reciprocal relationship between youth identity development and learning, and the places young people occupy (e.g., Collins, 2007; Mills & Kraftl, 2015). The implications of place and opportunity on youth trajectories more generally are highlighted in an interactive mapping tool developed by researchers and economists at the Census Bureau, Harvard University, and Brown University (<https://opportunityinsights.org>). One major finding of this group is that geographic regions in the United States that have *similar characteristics* (such as household income and race/ethnicity) can produce very *different outcomes* for children who grow up there—pointing to the need to dig into environmental place-based reasons for variability.

Our own work has pointed to the importance of cultural geography in understanding the relationship between artmaking and youth identities, particularly for young people in historically marginalized communities. Erica Halverson’s work has shown that arts organizations in rural communities support a collectivist orientation to productive identity, while arts organizations in large, urban settings encourage young people to take a more individualistic approach to identity development (Halverson et al., 2009). However, characterizing communities as either “urban” or “rural” hides many features of the social, cultural, and historical context embedded in particular regions. Organizations that work with young people living on Tribal lands, for example, have demonstrated the role of Native storytelling and the importance of local environmental issues in young peoples’ artmaking processes (e.g., Barajas-López & Bang, 2018; Gibbons et al., 2011). Likewise, predominantly White, rural communities struggling in the shadow of post-industrial America engage young people in artmaking processes that often focus on cultural preservation and representing a dying set of traditions (Halverson, 2021; Pyles, 2016). Nichole Pinkard’s work on opportunity landscaping has demonstrated how histories of redlining, greenlining, and inequitable use of school assignment practices, school closures, and busing across the city of Chicago has resulted in inequitable access to OST arts opportunities despite the relatively large number of service providers (Pinkard, 2019).

This assessment led us to define cultural geographic region as a useful and significant unit of analysis. This unit is smaller than typical characterizations—research on OST organizations often takes a national lens or divides organizations into urban and rural—but also generates analytic power beyond taking every arts organization as a completely unique place with no chance for theoretical or analytic similarities.

Mapping the “Cultural-Regional Scene”

In keeping with the emergent nature of comparative case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017), as we started talking to participant-collaborators, it quickly became apparent that the concept of “cultural geography” was too academic and did not capture the lived experiences of the arts leaders, teaching artists, and young artists who we spoke to. What emerged instead was the concept of the cultural-regional scene:

The word “scene” very much resonates with me because, you know, the circles I travel with and create in, they’re very much, you know, music, dance, sound related. So I think about, like a scene, like there’s a music scene, or there’s a dance scene, and various places. So that term has a lot of resonance for me.
(Emery Petchauer, Urban Midwest)

As Emery describes, the concept of “scene” is directly related to the community assets that are generated through arts and culture, such as music festivals and longstanding cultural centers, as well as an innate sense of the kind of art that is made by people in a particular place. As a result, we have adopted the term “cultural-regional scene” to describe our case study selection. This selection provides a framework for understanding organizations and arts leaders’ insights and allows our inquiry to better represent the voices and experiences of particular communities.

In other words, defining the scene is not the preliminary frame for the data collection. It is part of the methodology and therefore the data collection and analysis process. We recognize that this challenges traditional notions of representativeness as a metric of validity in qualitative research (e.g., Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014).

Lissa Soep and Maeven McGovern of YR Media in Oakland, CA articulate how the hyper-local influences artmaking and the ways youth act. Soep gives the example of a digital, interactive, media-rich map of one neighborhood in West Oakland undergoing gentrification. The interactive map is designed for users to identify a location and to hear stories from the people there. This project was developed as an effort to teach newcomers to West Oakland about the rich culture that already exists there and has existed there. Soep also describes localized arts practices:

You can imagine that on the music side, there'll be a lot to say about how, what is specific to Oakland, what's like an Oakland sound? What is...how does it borrow from and how has it become part of like a national sound in hip-hop? And, you know, and then what's distinctive about it and how those voices have changed over time.

“Community” can also refer to an understanding of how the local context for artmaking shapes how the OST arts program functions and what it means to participate in the space. In his discussion of the multiple Craftsman’s Artist Guild programs that exist around the world, Bill Strickland emphasizes that the arts are related to the communities where they take place:

Everything is local. You can't run a center in Vancouver from Pittsburgh. People who live in Vancouver have to run the center and invest in the center. So we spend time in each of those communities because one size does not fit all. Every center is customized to the community where it is, including our center in Israel. We have an Arab director, a Jewish chairman and Arab and Jewish children going to school together and speaking all kinds of languages, but they also speak the arts. That's the thing that binds them together.

Our cultural-regional scene studies were designed to capture the richness of the intersection between culture, history, geography, and youth arts practice in the way that Soep and Strickland describe.

Cultural-Regional Scenes: An Approach to Understanding

We adopted the term “cultural-regional scene” to describe our case study selection. This selection mechanism is itself a contribution to our field. It provides a framework for understanding what organizations and arts leaders’ insights are representative of and allows our inquiry to better represent the voices and experiences of particular communities. We recognize that this challenges traditional notions of representativeness as a metric of validity in qualitative research (e.g., Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014).

We do not intend for these insights to be representative of all perspectives of OST youth arts organizations, nor did we aim to create a full map of cultural-regional scenes. Rather, we aim to identify a sampling of cultural geographic regions that capture specific intersections of arts practices and populations living in unique cultural, historical, geographic places. Community youth arts organizations in cultural geographic regions highlight the importance of place, culture, and history in youth artmaking. In some places, the culture itself is marginalized and arts practice functions as a mechanism for positive developmental outcomes. In regions where youth have been minoritized and marginalized from mainstream culture, arts organizations also serve as sites of resistance and opportunities to center youth as positive forces in the community.

Four Unique Cultural-Regional Scenes

The four scenes discussed in this paper are:

1. The Urban Midwest: A large, geographic region of diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic populations with strong network connections among youth-serving organizations.

2. The Bay Area: A small, geographic region of diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic populations with a history of social justice movements through art.

3. Texas-Mexico Border Towns: Predominantly Mexican American population with Spanish as a first language, and geographically close to a national border. Mexican art forms, including murals and collaborative music performance, are common.

4. The Indigenous Southwest: The Navajo Nation crosses the U.S. state boundaries of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Primarily Native American, Indigenous, and Latinx populations with a lot of linguistic diversity, this scene features traditional Indigenous artmaking since time immemorial alongside contemporary art forms.

Core Ideas Across Scenes

While each of these cultural-regional scenes provide a small window into the uniqueness of community youth arts practices, we also aim to show how our approach, and how community youth arts practice, might be used to inform other OST youth arts organizations and policy makers. Three major ideas resonated across scenes that matter more broadly:

- The importance of ecosystems and networks
- A focus on culture as a dynamic concept that reflects the interplay between local history and current popular youth culture
- Learning through the arts is shaped by local and historical perspective

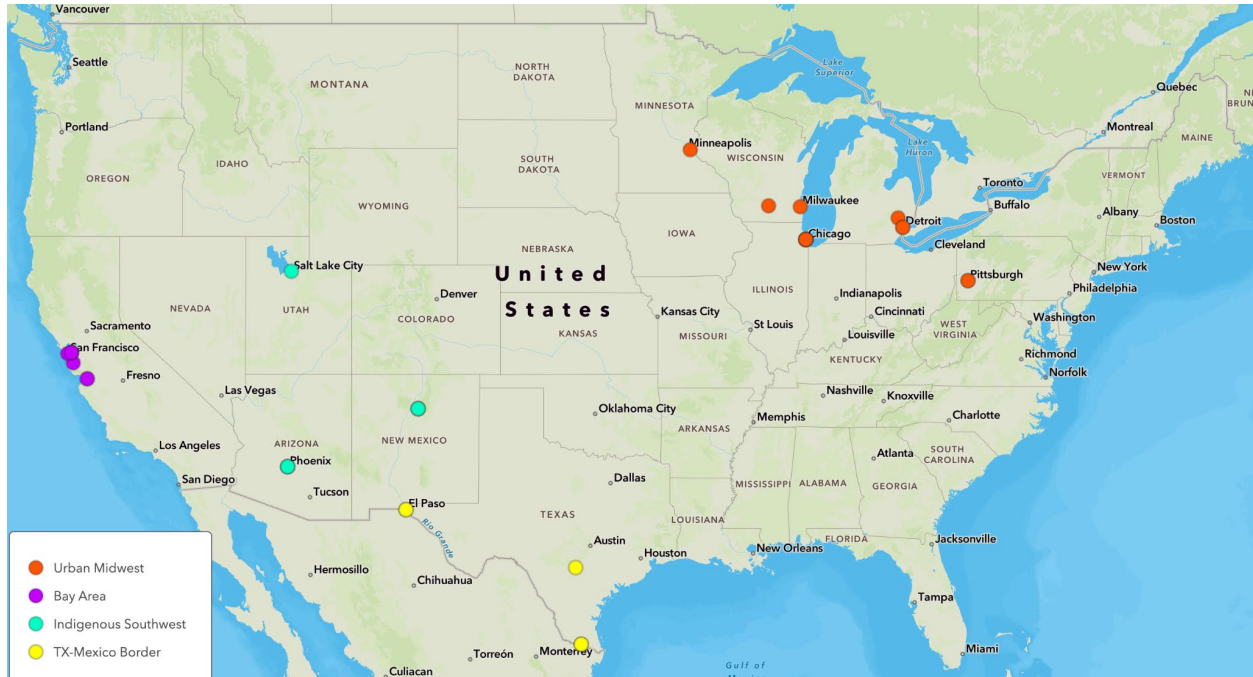
Defining the Cultural-Regional Scenes in This Report

We share the voices from four unique cultural-regional scenes that varied along a series of dimensions that may prove useful for future work: geographic size, general population characteristics, relevant regional history, and OST youth arts history. **Table 1** identifies these

four dimensions and briefly summarizes each scene along this dimension; **Figure 1** shows the locations of the experts we talked to within each scene.

Table 1: Summary of Regional Scene Characteristics

	Size	Population characteristics	Regional history	OST youth arts history
Urban Midwest	Large geographic region	Diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic populations	Urban area populations developed as a result of the Great Migration	Strong network connections among youth-serving organizations
Bay Area	Small geographic region	Diverse racial, ethnical, and linguistic populations	Densely populated urban areas and outlying rural communities based on affordability and location	History of social justice movements through art
Texas-Mexico border	Isolated towns	Predominantly Latinx/Hispanic population with Spanish as first language	Geographically close to a national border and continuous population flow between nations	Not previously described
Indigenous Southwest	The Navajo Nation crosses the U.S. state boundaries of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Both densely populated urban areas and isolated rural communities	Primarily Native American, Indigenous and Latinx populations with a lot of linguistic diversity	100 years of displacement, negotiation, and development that situates Native American lands and U.S. lands in tension with one another	Traditional Indigenous artmaking since time immemorial, grounded in the idea that “there is no Native American monolith” when it comes to artmaking (Native Arts & Cultures, 2021)

Figure 1: Locations of the Experts

In the next four sections, we briefly describe the unique features of each scene, as told to us through the voices of arts leaders, teaching artists, and youth participants within the scene. These brief summaries do not capture the richness or scope of our findings. Full case study reports are available upon request.

1. The Urban Midwest

The overall idea for our collective case studies emerged from our team’s experiences as artists, educators, and activists in what we call the Urban Midwest, a collection of cities marked by geographic location and known for their local government and philanthropic investment in OST programming—Chicago, Detroit/East Lansing, Madison, Milwaukee, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Pittsburgh. We held two focus groups with experts, and we worked with two different community arts organizations. Criteria for expert selection included: recognized as leaders within their local community; having their own arts practice; and having a deep and long-term relationship with the community. Aside from these commonalities, we made selection decisions to interview a group that represented diversity in terms of role (practice, policy, research), geographic location within the Urban Midwest, art form, and BIPOC communities. See **Table 1** for the full list.

Criteria for organization selection for the program-centered focus groups included organizations from urban Midwestern cities, nominated by experts we talked to who know the OST arts landscape of those cities, and directed by and serving representative communities in

those cities (primarily Black and Brown young people), with different foci in visual and performing arts. See **Appendix 1, Tables 1–3**.

The Scene

Our conversations about OST youth arts with the Urban Midwest groups identified the racial and ethnic segregation that resulted from the Great Migration and the impact these trends have had on infrastructure as inextricably linked to their arts practice. Specifically, migration to Midwestern cities driven by industry and factories and subsequent racist policies (e.g., redlining) meant to contain and limit new residents of color have resulted in persistent geographical segregation within cities long after the factories have disappeared. Arts leaders describe how, as a result, young people don't often travel outside of their local community area and certain communities are undervalued and/or viewed through a deficit lens. Mike Cook from the Betty Brinn Children's Museum in Milwaukee reflected "that's what these kids have inherited...they're hard dividing lines that are almost impossible to break." Arts leaders described how it is often within these segregated spaces that "creative work is happening," and that perhaps because of prevalent and systemic issues of inequity and racism, youth arts practice in the Urban Midwest is often "tied to activist communities."

This history of geographic racism seems to also have positive outcomes for youth arts work. Cook, for example, talked about harnessing the "rust belt ethic" of industriousness and the physical "skeletons" of factories in connecting young people to the maker movement and artmaking practices. Rochelle Riley, the director of arts and culture for the City of Detroit, discussed how Motown was the original model of young people as professional artists, and her desire to make that history more accessible and recognized. The conversations about existing infrastructure (e.g., historical redlining, trusted neighborhood spaces, skeletons of industry) and crossing boundaries (e.g., youth not traveling far outside their neighborhood, importance of teaching artists and organizations collaborating with other communities) confirms Chicago-based advisory board member Nichole Pinkard's work identifying "OST deserts" in redlined neighborhoods and the need for neighborhood-centric programming that is grounded in the histories and values of local communities (2019).

Arts leaders also described the existence of connected networks of youth arts providers, especially within each city, that have emerged because of forced racial and geographic isolation. The arts leaders we talked to are used to thinking about problems together, sharing best practices, and distributing/organizing resources collaboratively instead of in competition, typically at a citywide level. Coya Paz, Artistic Director of Free Street and Professor of Theatre at De Paul University, described how networked collaboration increases the flow of information, understanding, and movement throughout communities in the city, including those that "can feel really isolated" where young people tend to stay put. Though the existence of networked communities was discussed as a shared feature, each community of practice is unique. In Detroit, for example, the concept of networked youth arts work is a stated vision for the future, while in Chicago and Pittsburgh there are more existing mechanisms for connecting OST youth arts

leaders, practitioners, and young people, including city initiatives and philanthropic attention, that support communities of practice. In Pittsburgh, a smaller, affordable city with a thriving arts scene and a collaborative community ethos, teaching artist Ally Ricarte called out the importance of collaboration between Black-owned nonprofits, saying, “The city is so small it would be such a big, missed opportunity to not even share in creating more visibility for other Black-led organizations or organizations led by people of color.”

The leaders we talked to described how **teaching artists play a crucial role in this community building because they move across the bounded realities that many young people face**. Teaching artists even stretch across different city networks. Emery Petchauer noted that many artists share their art and performance through localized travel throughout the Midwest, with urban locations as hubs of creative and performance spaces. In that way, the arts practices, languages, and performances are connected, implying a broader community of practice, with teaching artists learning and sharing from each other at this larger geographical level, connected to their own constellations of arts practice and youth work.

Common across the Urban Midwest scene is a fear of “artist drain” out of communities when talented young people leave their community or their city as they become part of the arts workforce:

I don’t want everybody who does something great in Detroit, to feel like, well, it’s time for me to be a success. I’m going to New York. I’m going to L.A. I’m going to New Orleans. I’m going to Austin. I’m going to Seattle. Like, why would anybody want to leave Detroit to do those things? (Rochelle Riley)

Arts leaders suggest that young peoples’ exodus from their home communities stems from a lack of visible pipelines or pathways that connect youth arts programs to employment and leadership in creative industries. In hearing Rochelle Riley’s comments, Monica Haslip offered that, “young people have been tricked into believing that the Motowns of the world are not as valuable as some other places that have been lifted up.” She continues that though OST youth arts leaders aim to train and retain promising teaching artists of color, “it is difficult to invite or engage a young person to get on the path that I’m on, to take my job, because I recognize how much sacrifice I’m asking them to make in order to continue to do this work.”

Potential solutions to artist drain are to provide authentic opportunities, including filling the gaps through authentic leadership opportunities within programs and connecting young people with collaborative design projects and internships with potential future employers.

Youth programming has never really functioned in isolation for us. We see the work that we do as a part of a complex ecosystem where you are at the center of that work, but the engagement is with the whole entire community, and so over the years, we have tried to build these relationships that were interconnected and showing the connection between art education in business. (Monica Haslip)

Riley, as a policy maker and funder, calls out the need for more creative incubators, places for “young people to figure out their space and how to use their talents” and purposely gives one

third of all funding to youth arts, oftentimes with connections to the arts projects funded for adults. Her larger mission is to expand arts leadership in her city with people of color:

You have to teach people to want to do that and show them why it's good when they're young, so that we're not just raising musicians or painters but we're also raising art directors and someone to run the symphony and, you know, somebody to make sure that programming is available in every neighborhood.

Many programs described in our conversations paid teens to participate in programming and one teen we spoke with described their role on the youth hiring committee who selected a teaching artist in the conversation. Yollocalli youth participants described potential pathways and careers in the creative industries afforded by their participation in the Yollocalli community. One young person recounted “a lot of amazing opportunities that I don't think I'll ever be able to experience, if I wasn't in Yollocalli.” Examples of unique opportunities included connecting young people to fundraising events where they found donors for their artmaking practice and a live graffiti art project during an outdoor citywide music festival.

In summary, the Urban Midwest cultural-regional scene can be characterized by:

- Innovative arts practices with young people that have developed because of the Great Migration and resultant redlining
- A networked community of arts providers that shares resources, best practices, and social capital
- Teaching artists who serve as cultural bridges across organizations and communities

2. The Bay Area

In contrast to the Urban Midwest, the Bay Area is a small geographic area with a concentrated urban population and outlying rural communities. Consistent with our initial work in the Urban Midwest, we made selection decisions in order to interview a group that represented diversity in terms of role (practice, policy, research), geographic location within the Bay Area, art form, and BIPOC communities. See **Table 1** for the full list. Criteria for organization selection for the program-centered focus groups included organizations from the Bay Area, nominated by experts we talked to who know the OST arts landscape of those cities, directed by and serving representative communities in those cities, and with different foci in terms of visual and performing arts. See **Appendix 1, Tables 4–5**.

The Scene

Using art as an approach to collective social change is a strong part of the arts scene in the Bay Area and has been for over half a century. Successful organizational practices are influenced by the strong cultural histories within and across the many different non-White communities in the region. A lineage of social justice was a common thread across the experts we talked to, linked to a joint history of racism and cultural oppression, including in the arts, and a desire to (re)establish and celebrate the beauty and joy of non-White arts histories and practices. Tensions

also related to the mix of communities in the area, including potential competition or misunderstandings, resulting in the need for arts spaces as bridges.

The Bay Area is the origin of multiple social justice movements, many of which have used the arts as a means of communication, including the Black Panthers (originating in Oakland, CA in 1966). Non-White populations in the Bay Area have had both shared and unique experiences as non-dominant cultures and communities, resulting in both tensions as well as collaborative action in their “struggle to push back and be seen” in relation to historically White cultural institutions. An example is the San Francisco State student strike in 1968, a collective effort by multiple student organizations of color. These histories have resulted in intergenerational knowledge about how and why to do this work, described as a “cultural lineage” of leaders who have come up in this scene and who are explicitly passing it on to subsequent generations of leadership.

For example, El Teatro Campesino, located in rural San Juan Bautista, CA, was founded on the principles of Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, espousing liberation through critical consciousness creating and performing *actos*, short skits, on flatbed trucks and in union halls. Crystal González Avila, a teaching artist at El Teatro Campesino states, “for me [the work] starts in 1965 and the Delano Grape Strike in California, and I think I like making sure I remember where we come from because it reminds me of what should we be doing as a company and the future of the company.”

The “about us” page for Destiny Arts Center, located in densely populated, urban Oakland, CA, highlights, “We’ve been inspiring and igniting social change through the arts since 1988.” They describe social change as an act of resistance by offering arts programming from traditions other than Western/European artistic canons and through passing these cultural arts practices and knowledge down to a new generation. The experts we talked to were especially interested in reclaiming particular genres of art and sharing them back with young people and communities, establishing both memory and value. Destiny Arts Center highlights its commitment to “connect students to the roots of the forms they are learning. As a community, we are grounded in an Oakland lineage where hip-hop music and street dance are central in the history and culture.” The center offers martial arts, hip-hop, and Afro-Haitian styles, as well as East Bay styles such as turf dancing.

In identifying the histories of social justice as a lens for youth arts work, OST youth arts leaders attend to equity in the design and dissemination of programming. Equity-centered design often starts with identification of and attention to key stakeholders (e.g., Creative Reaction Lab, 2021). Discussions about how to make decisions about equitable strategies for engagement and recruitment in an area with many different communities and cultural histories has meant that leaders need a range of approaches to youth arts work. Whereas the mission of a city museum may be to serve all residents, there is increasing understanding at mainstream institutions about inequities (who is and is not coming through the door, and how barriers such as cost and transportation should be adjusted to invite more and different communities). The Exploratorium, for instance, partners with public schools and Boys and Girls Clubs to operate satellite programs

to serve young people from communities who are less often seen at the museum as a way to design for equity beyond who comes into the museum space.

At YR Media (Oakland, CA) leaders describe their program as not a “neighborhood program” but rather one that draws young people from around the area. They pay their teen participants for their contributions and provide support for transportation, ensuring more equitable inclusion of teens throughout the surrounding area by addressing common barriers. Maeven McGovern, arts executive producer and director of youth outcomes at YR Media said, “We found that that diversity model is something that young people are excited about. They want to meet people who are different, you know, and it’s exciting to make friends who can kind of expand your worldview.” The content produced by teens is reflective of that diversity of voices in the Bay Area and beyond in their national programs.

These organizations and leaders are sometimes explicit in centering and celebrating the arts within a primary non-White community or culture, and for those who work with younger children this focus may be even more important as they rely on families for transportation and registration. The Destiny Arts (Oakland, CA) program method highlights the company “participating in, teaching, and preserving dance styles from the African Diaspora for 30 years.” The homepage of the Oakland Public Conservatory of Music describes how the program “centers African American culture in the development of American music and cultural identity.” El Teatro Campesino tells “the stories of the campo [countryside] for the campo.” These programs are open to anyone, but the language and cultural foci center particular communities. Sense of belonging is critical for participation and engagement (National Research Council, 2002), and explicit attention to particular histories and cultures through language and images serve to signal that belonging explicitly. Angela Wellman, founder of the Oakland Public Conservatory of Music, identifies nuances in recruitment strategies, emphasizing that for Black communities around Oakland, successful recruitment utilizes preexisting relationships and established community connections. Like YR Media, however, the spaces remain purposefully inclusive. Focusing in is not seen as separation but rather as an approach that can reap collective benefits. Wellman voiced, “Any kid can come to our school. There’s no like, ‘no you can’t come in, you’re not Black,’ but, you know, Dr. King said when Black folks rise up everything rises up for everybody and so it’s kind of that type of perspective that we have.”

Additionally, founders and teaching artists are themselves often active in social justice work outside of the OST youth arts program. Casey Wong, currently a scholar at the UCLA Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Language points out, “a lot of the folks who engage in youth development work aren’t artists by profession, they’re artists who are, you know, organizers or authors or engaged in some sort of form of work, and because of that they’re able to do some form of sustenance and find different ways to do it.” Similarly, Soep (YR Media) talks about the distributed roles of people on the team, including designers, artists, illustrators, coders, and “people who primarily define themselves as justice workers.” At Destiny Arts, the social justice orientation is often a thread in arts projects and staff support young people to take up their own causes through art. Their 2020 end-of-year performance was a video feature-length piece called

“The Black (W)hole” combining dance, poetry, and film, as a celebration of the lives of six young people who had died in the Oakland area.

In the Bay Area, **diverse communities are reflected in the diversity of culturally relevant youth arts programs.** Experts working in the Bay Area talked a lot about the implications of the diverse populations living in the region on the youth arts scene and emphasized the proximity in which these populations live to one another. Youth arts programs are varied and reflect the racially and ethnically diverse communities, some with explicit intentions to revive and/or sustain cultural arts practices (both historical and contemporary). At the same time, multicultural influences are recognized. Researcher Casey Wong describes a densely populated but relatively small geographic area where communities often live “side-by-side” each with particular ways of life that art “continues to expand and be built around.”

In summary, the Bay Area scene is unique in its:

- Explicit focus on the reciprocal relationship between artmaking and social justice movements
- Multiracial community where arts and cultural practices often live and practice side-by-side

3. Texas-Mexico Border Towns

The Texas-Mexico Border Towns is a collection of isolated, rural towns with predominantly Latinx populations that often move fluidly between the United States and Mexico. Many folks have family members living in the other country. Arts organizations often have their home base in one of the two large cities in the same geographic area: San Antonio, TX and El Paso, TX. However, programs are often held in the towns themselves, and arts leaders describe partnerships with local community members as crucial to success. We made selection decisions in order to interview a group that represented diversity in terms of role (practice, policy, research), geographic location across Texas-Mexico border towns, and art form. Criteria for organization selection for the program-centered focus groups included organizations from the Texas-Mexico border area, nominated by experts we talked to who know the OST arts landscape of in that location, directed by and serving representative communities in those cities, and with different foci in terms of visual and performing arts. See **Appendix 1, Tables 6–7.**

Community youth arts practice in the Texas-Mexico border towns is marked by multicultural regional practices and values, which requires **boundary crossing.** The border is both permeable (families visiting each other on either side, going to church or shopping for the day) and a barrier (immigration border patrol, COVID border closings, visible disruptions of the landscape in the form of rivers and walls) for those living in TX-Mexico border towns. This duality is part of everyday life, and this is reflected in youth arts programs. Art forms include traditional Mexican and South American practices (e.g., Mariachi ensembles, mural painting) and those rooted in Texas (e.g., country music) and contemporary popular western culture (e.g., pop and rock music, digital arts). **Programs are designed to reflect this artistic diversity and**

dualities; they are multicultural, with attention to both unique and blended aspects of Latinx and American heritage.

Border towns also have their own multicultural artistic traditions that have emerged over time. Conjunto Tejano music, for example, is a popular regional style developed along the border around the turn of the century that blends polka and accordion elements from European immigrants with traditional Mexican 12-string acoustic bass guitar. Community youth arts leaders see this as a way to connect with youth and family interests and capitalize on the various expertise of artists in the area. During one focus group, a group of young people first presented a traditional mariachi ensemble performance with traditional instruments and dress, followed by an acoustic rendition of Britney Spears' "Toxic." These fluid transformations across boundaries are noted and supported by the program leadership. Some programs organize field trips to community arts events on both sides of the border to experience differences of style and purpose (examples include spiritual values through connections to church, financial necessity through busking for money, or preserving cultural heritage). Young people are encouraged to explore different art forms and the history and connectedness of forms and styles are often part of the curriculum. A teen from Creative Arts Studio (McAllen, TX) said:

It took me a long time to find what music is my type. When I [was younger and] played the piano I was like, 'Oh, I'm gonna play classical music for my whole life,' right, and I would try a lot of instruments. And then I ended up going to class and I found out that I have a thing for Mexican music, and I truly found myself there. Like, I found out who I am.

Participation in the arts along the border is described as very much family-linked but not necessarily in formal arts spaces. It is often found in trusted community spaces where performances happen, including churches, community centers, or large family gatherings in homes and yards. For youth arts organizations, personal communication with families to build trust is considered critical, using the ways parents and other caregivers already communicate, such as mobile phones and social media, as opposed to more traditional flyers or brochures. And programs are bilingual with instructors that can speak English and Spanish fluently.

Community youth arts work can feel like an isolated endeavor, so **establishing creative hyper-local partnerships between youth arts and city agencies is a necessity**. Community youth arts organizations are often the only one serving a given area, and towns along the border are separated by stretches of sparsely populated areas. To reach more young people, organizations we talked to provided outreach programs and opened additional locations for programming. Teaching artists can be difficult to find because young adults often move out of the area to get higher paying jobs elsewhere in Texas, such as working in the petroleum industry. Organizations are not only far from arts networks and families, but also from national arts and cultural institutions and arts funding organizations. The state of Texas is 50th in the nation for arts-related funding (organizations in our conversations estimated they make do with 25% of what organizations have elsewhere) and so the useful partnerships are considered more limited

and hyper-local, with city universities and government seen as the entities influencing how art is made available in the community.

Limited networks and funding were discussed as very real challenges, but also as drivers of resilience and creativity in serving the community through the arts. Stephen Gates-Ingle, co-founder of Creative Kids Art (El Paso, TX) says, “There has always been creativity on the border because we have always had to be resourceful and resilient to improve quality of life for the communities.” One approach that leaders discussed was finding synergistic ways to partner with civic institutions. Partnerships that could promote the value of community arts were of interest to both city and organizational stakeholders. Historical and cultural separations in “traditional” arts spaces have contributed to “barriers” between Latinx families and arts organizations and there is a recognized need for “relationships to be built.” Approaches to relationship building include engaging in authentic communication and incorporating the arts practices of families and residents of the border towns. Krystal Jones at the City of San Antonio’s Department of Art and Culture talked about the importance of building trust between families and organizations, including city government, and how the city is trying to bring more community to the table when they talk about where to put art and what they want to see represented. These projects often incorporate the art itself into the public infrastructure like a painting on a bridge or a mural in a housing development. This work emphasizes an “art is for everyone” equity focus that the city government is interested in perpetuating, and the telling of stories that communities want to tell.

Augusto Contreras, co-founder and development director for Creative Arts Studio, recently decided to strengthen the relationship between arts and city government by putting himself into the system: “I know the decision making needed to change at the city level, so I ran for [City Council of Hidalgo, TX] office and thank God we won, and now we are making big changes in the city in regards to community culture and arts...because our stories need to be told, because a community that is not telling the story, it doesn’t have an identity.”

Another mechanism for building connections is a **commitment to public art**. Making art accessible is part of not just the community arts scene but the community itself. Art is described as everywhere, through permanent public murals as well as music, theater, and dance performances during frequent and vibrant community festivals and events. El Paso, the largest city in the region, is described as a “city of murals,” tied very much to current phenomenon but also to regional history. Mexican revolution-era muralists, including Diego Rivera, influenced Mexican American artists in the 1960s to utilize city walls to affirm cultural identity and challenge racism. This public art visibly celebrates and centers Mexican history and culture, juxtaposed with more traditional forms of art-seeing, like museums, from which Latinx families can still feel disconnected.

In summary, youth arts work in Texas-Mexico border towns is:

- Saturated with the idea of “boundary crossing” in both cultural connections and art works. Specifically, arts traditions have developed that are unique to the boundary space
- Require hyper-local partnerships due to isolation from larger funding and programming networks
- Marked by a commitment to public art as a mechanism for developing and sharing youth arts practice.

4. The Indigenous Southwest

The Indigenous Southwest, as we collectively define it, is a mixture of urban and rural settings with marked differences between the metro areas—Phoenix, Albuquerque/Santa Fe, Salt Lake City—and rural communities which include reservations and pueblos, which have particular artmaking characteristics. It is important to begin this collective case study by acknowledging the collaborative voices that contribute to this work. Halverson’s early work with youth media arts organizations indicated that Indigenous communities take a collective approach to artmaking (Halverson et al., 2009) and that stories about Indigenous artmaking cannot be told without deep engagement from the artmakers themselves (Gibbons et al., 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Our inquiry began with a deep reading of the report *Native Arts and Cultures: Resilience, Reclamation, and Relevance* (2021), which provides three key field recommendations:

- Advance truth-telling about Native peoples, history, and their arts our cultures with a focus on “tell[ing] our own stories” (p. 4)
- Increase Native power in policy making and practice through “build[ing] partnerships with public/semi-public cultural agencies and cultural institutions and associations” (p. 4)
- Advocate for equitable resourcing of Native artists, culture bearers, and the arts and cultures field by resourcing “self-determined cultural production and infrastructure building” (p. 5)

Recognizing that “there is no Native American monolith” (p. 3), we brought these recommendations to bear in a geographic region with some shared history of art forms, engagement with colonized institutions, and sovereignty: the Indigenous peoples within the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. We chose these states in large part because the Navajo Nation extends across these boundaries and therefore has some consistency (<https://www.navajonnsn.gov>).

We made selection decisions in order to interview a group that represented diversity in terms of role (practice, policy, research), geographic location across the Indigenous Southwest, and art form. See **Appendix 1, Table 8** for the full list. Criteria for organization selection for the program-centered focus groups included organizations that serve the Indigenous Southwest, nominated by experts we talked to who know the OST arts landscape of in that location, directed

by and serving representative communities in those cities, and with different foci in terms of visual and performing arts. See **Table 8** for organizations.

In our representation of the Indigenous Southwest scene, we honor the four key principles of critical Indigenous research methodologies: relationality, responsibility, respect, and reciprocity (Brayboy et al., 2012). In relation to the development of ecosystems and networks, OST youth arts programs and organizations all practice and demonstrate respect as a core feature of their artmaking. Native artist, educator, and academic Winoka Yepa describes *hózhó*, “the condition in which health and well-being are in balance, in harmony with each other” (Native Arts & Cultures Foundation, 2021) as a form of interrelated respect for persons, communities, the land, and art and science practices. Yepa is a photographer, a practice she learned from her uncle, and practicing photography is part of her *hózhó*. In her work with young people, their artmaking focuses on storytelling through poetry and writing, dance, and photography. Yepa’s dissertation focuses specifically on her work with Native youth who travel to Santa Fe for school and live in pueblos. She describes these young people as having a “two worlds identity.” This identity involves “being an Indian at home and being a White person at school and that you’re always transitioning between the two.” Artmaking serves as an opportunity for two worlds young people to explore this identity with other like-minded artists and a mentor who gets them, and to experience *hózhó* through their practice.

Programs and artists in the Indigenous Southwest describe art forms as either “traditional” or “modern,” where traditional refers to Indigenous artmaking (e.g., weaving, storytelling) and modern refers to genres from outside Indigenous communities (e.g., modern dance, hip-hop, acrylics painting). Traditional art forms tend to be embedded in Native-run organizations and artist apprenticeships, while modern art forms are more typical in OST arts organizations and formal learning environments that offer arts programs. We can begin to understand how the traditional and the modern fit together through the practice of “relationality” (Brayboy et al., 2012), meaning that knowledge is not owned by any one individual and is thus a process of fostering relationships across researchers, communities, and topics.

Teaching artists identified relationality as a non-negotiable feature of creating and maintaining OST youth arts programs in Native communities. Dance and teaching artist Rulan Tangen described how arts partnerships are built:

So it’s this interesting alchemy of waiting for an invitation and building trust. Building trust often means you meet people where they are. I mean, there’s a couple of different tactics, but what I’ve been encouraged to engage in is meeting people where they’re at.

Specifically, Tangen explains how artmaking in communities is an act of relationality:

But you have got to know who you are and what you’re bringing, and then try to listen for what they’ve got there because honestly, you know they’ve got songs, dance, theater, the equivalent of opera, that’s multi-disciplinary, that links into

history and plant cultivation and all of that. They've had that for millennia before Columbus even stumbled over, so it's presumptuous to drop in anything.

Tangen's stories are focused on relationality between herself as a teaching artist and the communities she aspires to partner with. Relationality can also refer to how arts organizations and teaching artists co-construct meaning with individual youth artists. SpyHop teaching artist Adam Sherlock tells a story that encapsulates this relationship:

Sometimes those intentions to try and be so cognizant of [Native] sovereignty does infantilize and fetishize certain cultures, to the point where that can also be doing a disservice. One girl from the rez down in Four Corners just totally locked into Spy Hop programming. Her mom was up in Salt Lake having brought her to Spy Hop, and was like, "yeah she's really into this stuff, I don't know. She's going to show you some of her drawings." And she heard drawings were all of Studio Ghibli characters and I was like, "Oh, Hayao Miyazaki!" And her eyes lit up. And her mom was like, "Oh good! Someone knows what the hell she's talking about!" So again, if we had infantilized her because she was Native, instead of being like, this is the kind of stuff she's into. And that's the connector for her. [If we focused only on] having a person who looks like her be the one to interface with her she's going to be like, "More people who don't know what I'm talking about." But it's the nerdy culture that our mentors have for a lot of these kids, or the kid that wanted to know about camp. So the more that we silo and box that in to say, "well it's a Native community, so we need to have this person or this person or this person..." Talk to the kids, ask them what the hell they want to do.

Another key feature of the Indigenous Southwest is a commitment to multigenerational artmaking. Most emphasized that making art in community requires elders and young people working and learning alongside one another. In fact, some OST youth arts projects don't work without the connection to community elders. Multigenerational artmaking resonates with the CIRM concept of responsibility, which asks us to consider how our research affects others (Brayboy et al., 2012). The Native Arts & Cultures Mentor Artist Fellowship Program is a great example of responsibility in OST artmaking. Laura Cales described mentor artist Royce Manuel as engaging in acts of responsibility through his work teaching weaving with agave roots to a young artist apprentice:

Royce Manuel, I don't know if you you've heard of him, he's in Arizona. Royce weaves with agave roots, which is a practice that is—you know I don't love using this word—but more or less in danger. There's maybe a handful of practitioners in the world that know how to do this, and so there's this sense of urgency in what Royce is doing, and in the need to pass this on to someone who can really understand it, understand how to harvest it, understand how to work with it, and it's a very complicated weaving practice that he works with. He works with young artists and he just really deeply apprentices. He's deeply rooted in communities in Arizona that're there in Phoenix.

But responsibility is also reflected in how the young artist engages in arts practice alongside a mentor:

One of the reasons their apprenticeship and mentorship was so successful...Royce had mentioned several times that he's been trying for years to teach students and artists this practice and have them come to his home and really learn from him and listen to him, but it was so difficult for him to find someone who was eager to learn and to be enthusiastic and respectful of the time and the energies that he was putting out there into these teachings. And his apprentice Matthew was just fully committed all the time, hundred percent of the time he was ready to learn. He was able to go from the beginning of the apprenticeship just learning how to work with this material to weaving his own objects by the end of it.

Community youth arts practice in the Indigenous Southwest also requires reciprocity, meaning that art works (as well as our own research work) actively gives back to and provides for others. As Tuhiwai Smith explains: "If a person is genuinely working on behalf of the community, then the community will also be part of the whole process, not simply be passive recipients of a grand 'plan' developed outside themselves" (as quoted in Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 440). Reciprocity is what happens in OST youth arts communities when arts leaders, teaching artists, and young people engage in relationality, responsibility, and respect. As artists going into a community, you cannot simply offer your programming and leave. Many teaching artists described the years of work required to even set up a reciprocal partnership. Adam Sherlock told the story of a partnership that did not work because it was clear that reciprocity was not possible between the arts organization and the Tribal community:

When speaking about Indigenous groups and doing arts program programming with them, we actually just stopped our partnership with a project with the Northwestern Shoshone tribe. The reason why is, we do youth programming that is based upon youth voice and authentic youth engagement, so it's what the kids want to do. And this project [asked us] to work with families and full communities, and it's really at the behest of the elders. And there was a lot of tension there, and we had to finally land on this place where I was like, "We're not the right gig man. You guys are the Beatles and we're Jimi Hendrix. This is not a good fit." Everybody's really good at what they do, but this isn't it. And I thought that was really interesting, that is a Tribal-specific goal. We can go and work with the Navajo Nation and those goals are very, very different. And the parents, the elders in those communities say, "we understand that these young people discovering who they are will enrich our community." The elders in the Northwestern band of the Shoshone they said, "we are here for the survival of our tribe, we need to tell these kids how important they are to our community." And I'm like, "whoa, those are two totally different goals."

I don't consider it a failure, I just consider it very, very different. Collectivist goals versus Western individualistic goals. And both are completely valid, but

both are totally different goals that do not match, they do not meet in the middle in the same way, and that was just a realization that we had to come to.

When reciprocity is a core component of OST youth arts programming, everyone's goals are in alignment and that is reflected in how art gets made and in what is produced and by whom.

In summary, the four key characteristics of the of the Indigenous Southwest scene were:

- **A mixture of urban and rural settings** with marked differences between the metro areas—Phoenix, Albuquerque/Santa Fe, Salt Lake City—and rural communities which includes reservations and pueblos. We see a similar mix in some of our other scenes (see the Bay Area case study), though the rural communities in the Indigenous Southwest are typically reservations and pueblos and have particular artmaking characteristics.
- **A collage of organizational forms.** OST youth arts looks a range of ways across the scene including OST youth arts organizations run non-Indigenously; Indigenous organizations with arts programs (both local and national); formal learning organizations (schools, museums, libraries) with OST Programs; and independent teaching artists and apprenticeships, both supported by external funding and integral to reservations and pueblos.
- Programs and artists describe **art forms as either “traditional” or “modern,”** where traditional refers to Indigenous artmaking (e.g., weaving, storytelling) and modern refers to genres from outside Indigenous communities. Traditional art forms tend to be embedded in Native-run organizations and artist apprenticeships while modern art forms are more typical in OST arts organizations and formal learning environments that offer arts programs.

A commitment to **multigenerational artmaking.** Most experts emphasized that making art in community requires elders and young people working and learning alongside one another. In fact, some OST youth arts projects don't work without the connection to community elders.

Core Ideas That Emerged Across Scenes

While each of these mini-reports of cultural-regional scenes provide a small window into the uniqueness of community youth arts practices, we also aim to show how our approach, and how community youth arts practice, might be used to inform other OST youth arts organizations and policymakers. Here we briefly offer ideas that resonate across scenes and a few thoughts on why they matter more broadly.

1. The Importance of Ecosystems and Networks

Youth programming has never really functioned in isolation for us. We see the work that we do as a part of a complex ecosystem where youth are at the center of that work, but the engagement is with the whole entire community and so over the years we have tried to build these relationships that were interconnected. —Monica Haslip, founder and director of Little Black Pearl, Chicago, IL

Recent work highlights the importance of ecosystem-level understanding and support to address systemic inequities of educational opportunity and participation (Akiva et al., 2020; Hect & Crowley, 2019; National Research Council, 2015; Pinkard, 2019). Leveraging existing resources through asset mapping and community conversations about infrastructure and offerings (e.g., Erete et al., 2020; Pinkard et al., 2021), brokering connections across spaces, including school (Ching et al., 2015) working closely with families (Tzou et al., 2019; Roque, 2016), and recruiting caring adults from the community as mentors and youth advocates (Barron et al., 2014; Pinkard et al., 2021) can be incredibly influential for youth engagement, persistence, and identity development. Experts we talked to from practice, policy, and research agree. Conversations about understanding what works in youth arts programs again and again jumped up a level to discuss the broader context of the community a program is situated within.

2. Understanding How Things Fit and Where You Fit In

Understanding, mutuality, and reciprocity between programs and the local ecosystem they are operating within is considered a critical foundation necessary for successful and sustained programming. Regardless of whether the experts we talked to were part of the communities they served or coming in from outside, successful youth arts providers understand how their program and organization fit with the community they serve. In non-dominant communities who have had their time wasted, ideas appropriated, or violence enacted upon them by organizations and outsiders in the past, this work towards understanding is non-negotiable. Kristy Sandoval, creative director of El Teatro Campesino (San Juan Batista, CA) described the importance of, “making sure that there’s the respect and connection to the communities that you’re looking to engage.” The experts we talked to take an active and nuanced approach to understanding that did not assume a community deficit, that led with being humble about what they have to offer, and that prioritized listening and learning. Coya Paz Brownrigg, researcher at DePaul University and founder of Free Street Theater (Chicago, IL) describes,

Instead of getting to know the city, [some organizations] are like, “Oh, I see a problem I want to fix it,” without understanding that there's an ecology already of people who have been trying to make change...they don't really put in the effort to get to know the city. Obviously, I don't think these people are excellent practitioners of community-based arts if they're not taking the time to get to know the community and identify what's really happening before trying to start something.

Questions to guide understanding fall along such dimensions as population demographics, history, values, existing youth and arts services, and infrastructure, including: Who lives in the areas we serve (or are looking to serve)? Who are the trusted community stakeholders supporting young people? What are the arts practices in this community? What are the values of the culture in respect to the arts and the development of young people? Beth Hagenlocker, the co-founder of the Detroit Creativity Project (Detroit, MI) reflects, “It breaks my heart when I see a nonprofit go into an area where there’s already a nonprofit doing the same thing. You know, it’s like, you

guys are competing. You know, why not build on each other.” This work of understanding is an ongoing effort that recognizes the constant reality of change (e.g., shifts in organizational leadership or demographic fluctuations such as incoming immigrant groups or gentrification). Successful understanding also means being able to pivot or disconnect when there is a mismatch between the goals of the organization and the community, seen as a sign of respect as opposed to failure. Adam Sherlock, director of community partnerships and learning design at Spy Hop (Salt Lake City, Utah) shared a story about such a recognition,

So, when you’re talking about even just the creation of art and the [Spy Hop] goal of, like, helping a young person individualize and really empower their own individual voice. And then you say, “Indigenous communities,” those are not always the same thing, like a lot of times, that is a round hole in a square peg. And you just need to understand that even for an arts organization that has been around for 21 years it was a huge blind spot. Right? And we kept coming in and being like we’ve got all these great projects, and I think elders were like, “These kids are really important to us, they don’t really know about our heritage and you’re wasting our time.”

A focus on the importance of understanding communities is also happening at the policy level. Mac Howison, program officer for creative learning at the Heinz Endowments (Pittsburgh, PA) talked about engaging with local researchers in “ecosystem analysis” (Akiva, 2019) that informed criterion values for a funding program. The Arizona Arts Commission (Phoenix, AZ) uses demographic data on race and ethnicity to ensure that their grants distribution equitably reflects the local populations instead of being satisfied with internal measures, such as increasing applications from people of color.

3. Establishing Connections and Leveraging Infrastructure

Moving beyond *understanding* the community ecosystem is the importance of *leveraging and connecting* the various components. Pinkard’s framework of a healthy learning ecosystem (2019) highlights links between stakeholders (e.g., young people, parents, caring adults, educators, community members), soft infrastructure (e.g., expectations of and opportunities for stakeholder groups), and hard infrastructure (e.g., community hub locations, transportation systems). There was universal agreement about the benefits of actively developing partnerships with individuals and organizations invested in young people and leveraging other infrastructural assets in communities.

Having various strategies for family communication and ways for parents to participate (e.g., audience member at a performance, collaborator in a program) was considered beneficial for both parents and young people. Teaching artists at Destiny Arts (Oakland, CA) reflect on care for parents in the space, “We focus on youth, like that’s our focus but if the parents, when they come through, you know, Brian’s making sure the parents are, like, taken care of and that they’re you know you know filling in the safe space as well.” Angela Wellman, founder of the

Oakland Public Conservatory of Music, describes a link between parent engagement and sustained participation,

It is important to build community and be intentional about encompassing the hook, the family. We say we don't recruit students; we recruit families. Like if a parent comes in to pick up their kid they're invited to come sit in circle as a close ... everybody is part of a room ... so like to adapt the room to philosophy. I think that is where we have gotten the most support, and, you know, our attrition rates—all of the things—when we connect with the family, it's made a difference.

While the importance of parent engagement was agreed upon, the position families take up were discussed as both opportunities (parents as partners in recruitment and brokering) and as barriers (potential gatekeepers of continued pursuit of arts). Family-oriented recruitment utilizes existing trusted relationships to build new ones. Practitioners emphasized that recruitment often happens through families and “word of mouth” in the community; “families bring other families.” Researchers pointed out the benefits of making opportunities visible, helping parents navigate the landscape to find programs that fit with their families, including accessibility (cost, language, proximity to home, work, school) and quality, emphasizing the importance of communication and outreach. Parent engagement and communication was also a way to advocate for the value of OST arts participation. Teens at Yollocalli (Chicago, IL) whose parents discouraged their pursuit of the arts in favor of something with more future earning potential, described how this shifted when parents learned more about the authentic program features, such as getting paid for their time and developing formal portfolios and resumes.

Another key component of the ecosystem is *other youth and arts service providers*. Local and regional collaborations can generate new services and know-how that support the greater learning ecosystem (Akiva et al, 2019; Montgomery, 2020). Stephen Gates-Ingle, the co-founder of Creative Kids (El Paso, TX) described a distributed responsibility of “using each other as partners to strengthen what we can do to create that net to hold our kids up and community and then holding people and organizations accountable to collaborate.” Networking helps avoid participant hoarding and unnecessary competition (Brietbart & Krepes 2007) and sharing knowledge about educator roles and other organizations (Barron et al., 2014; Akiva et al, 2009) helps broker new experiences for youth as they develop interests or age out of programs (Ching et al., 2015). Many experts we talked to describe local organizations as brokering partners, extending opportunities for young people to broaden or specialize their work. Jennifer Steel, director of 826 Chicago (Chicago, IL) points out the value of a strategic partnership network rather than “us all trying to be everything for every student across the city...I've seen how it benefits our young people when we know each other, and then we can say [to a young person] like, ‘Oh, I know this person at this program, you should go talk to them and that helps us and students feel safe.’” Other brokering examples include establishing places to display artwork or hold performances in the community, connecting young people to fundraising events where they found donors for their art making practice, building projects in connection with city and community events, and bringing in local artists. Kim Sheridan, associate professor of educational

psychology at George Mason University (Fairfax) points out that these partnerships look different depending on the local landscape. Her projects in Washington, D.C. included relationships with the mayor's office and the National Academy of Sciences while her partners in Detroit were smaller community-focused arts organizations, maker spaces, and social organizations, like Mardi Gras Productions,

This Mardi Gras Productions, which was like an East Caribbean parade company like that, he had a small business where he liked parades and did all the costumes and the kids [in my program] like did some work learning those costumes and building on that and then went in like Detroit Maker Faire would use the costumes and put on parades and technology and music stuff that they had built into that.

In addition to parents and other providers, *leveraging existing infrastructural groundwork* and supports to increase reach (e.g., systems, locations, transportation, technology and communication) is a third way successful programs make connections within the ecosystem (Penuel, 2019; Star, 1996).

Several experts talked about the critical link between OST youth arts programs and schools, leveraged for access and recruitment, programming space, and family communication. Affordances of trusted physical spaces with ties to local communities were also highlighted. Kris Sorensen, founder and executive director of In Progress (St. Paul, MN), looks for assets in the community where “a base of people come together to create a sense of home” as locations for potential partnership, such as a subsidized housing development that was resource-rich, including a Boys and Girls Club and emergency medical services. Some community-based youth arts organizations start in residential spaces. Monica Haslip founded Little Black Pearl (Chicago, IL) as an arts community center in her greystone home on the South Side of Chicago in 1994. The organization has since moved into its own space and expanded services to engage the community in the arts through a public cafe, community auditorium space, and a public high school. These opportunities for arts participation crossing physical locations (or merging boundaries within one space, like Little Black Pearl) not only strengthens programs but also has the potential to reframe identities, giving kids a chance to shine in one place and have that reflected in others. Julia Chigamba, teaching artist at Destiny Arts (Oakland, CA) shared,

And some of [the students], they cause problems in the classroom, the teachers don't even have time to deal with them, but when they see them dancing they say, Miss Julia we didn't know! They're beautiful! These kids are beautiful! They don't listen, but look at that, we didn't know they have that moment, they have their other side.

Rochelle Riley, director of arts and culture in the City of Detroit reflected on a need for *more* local infrastructure, including arts incubators, that can support the young people after they age out of youth arts programs and keep them in the city, “We could be missing amazing artists and amazing, you know, workers in the space of creativity because we just don't have incubators, we don't have places for them to go and learn and grow and be nurtured.”

4. Long-Term Commitment to Community Through the Arts

Experts agreed that this work of understanding, building relationships, and leveraging infrastructure in a community takes a significant investment of time, some suggesting five to eight years. Sorenson (In Progress, St. Paul, MN) who works with Indigenous communities, noted that the expectation was for her, “to be here for a long time because we're tired of people coming in and out.” The time is considered worth it, in service of building relationships that last—including from one generation to the next. Cristal González Avila, a teaching artist at El Teatro Campesino (San Juan Bautista, CA), reflected “a lot—so much—is discovered [at El Teatro] so I’m hoping that that the work that we do with our youth continues to be a ripple effect for the generations to come.”

Many experts, including Staycee Pearl, founder of Pearl Arts (Pittsburgh, PA), articulated that while they serve young people their organizations were “first in service to the community.” Michael Johnson, founding director of Kids Dance Outreach (Indianapolis, IN) reflected, “We know that we are making a difference in the children’s lives, which extends to the school community, which extends to their family life, to our greater community as cities at large.” Removing the boundary between the art young people make in a program and the community in which they live connects more people to the practice and product, showcasing both young people and the arts as integral to a community, with a focus on joy and creativity. Howison (Heinz Endowments, Pittsburgh, PA) describes a citywide youth arts initiative as, “mutually beneficial. It tends to promote...it’s almost like tourist industry stuff that says, Pittsburgh’s doing great things, but it also helps than the stuff that’s happening here, kind of feeling a sense of ownership and pride.” For policy representatives from civic leadership, bringing the community into discussions about where to put art and what should be represented was of great interest, with the idea that public art can tell stories and share value across communities, potentially broadening understanding of the value of the arts. Free or low-cost performance events invite a cross-section of the community, including and beyond families, and often performances and installations are coordinated with local community events and/or utilize local community spaces. Pearl (Pearl Arts, Pittsburgh, PA) reflects that through social events and performances “we try to address how dance can enlighten people, no matter when in their lives.” Participants at BCAT (Buffalo, NY) exhibit their art on the walls of a national cancer research hospital. Gina Burkhardt, BCAT director, describes the mutually beneficial implications, “Our agreement with anyone who hangs our kids’ art is that they have to have a reception for the kids and their parents to honor them, so that the community and the parents see the art and come together to celebrate.”

5. A Focus on Culture as a Dynamic Concept That Reflects the Interplay Between History and Youth Culture

I hope to inspire [young people] by creating new ways to express themselves and giving them exercises that they might have not thought of before at the Teatro because we create stories that are about us. A sense of validation for who they are, where they come from, and reminding them that they are that. Our narrative is important and it's up to us to reclaim it, an alternative narrative. We hear a very specific set narrative in schools and

books, so that the Teatro becomes a space, a place where we could dive deeper into that and question with a creative lens. —Cristal González Avila, teaching artist, El Teatro Campesino, San Juan Batista, CA

A key finding in literature on arts-based programming is that through the process of creative self-expression in artmaking, youth reflect on, imagine, make meaning of, and even create their identities (e.g., Halverson et al., 2009; Heath, 2000). Identity is dynamic and multidimensional, and explorations through the arts have been identified as especially productive for populations who feel marginalized, affording multiple pathways for positive development and representation of possible selves (Halverson, 2005, 2010; Martineau & Ritskes, 2014; Van Steenis, 2020), opportunities to challenge stereotyped identity constructions (Lazzari et al., 2005; Fleetwood, 2005), and express new ways of knowing doing and being (Cox, 2014; Martineau & Ritskes, 2014; Barajas-López & Bang, 2018).

Nasir and Cook (2009) describe how the intersection of material, ideational, and relational resources within learning experiences support the development of practice-linked identities. Across our discussions, some experts talked about the importance of physical artifacts, but more often they focused on embedding arts practice and ways of being in the youth arts space to cultural and community histories as well as the individual and collective experiences of the teaching artists and young people in the room. Practice at the intersection of these ideational and relational resources was seen as allowing both new connections and various threads for exploration and knowledge and identity building.

6. Cultural and Historical Connections with Arts and Communities

Meg Escudé, a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley who served as the director of youth and community programs at the Exploratorium (San Francisco, CA) for over 7 years, talks about the importance of youth arts programs, “paying attention to the historical and cultural context of the disciplines you work with.”

Making explicit connections between arts practice and materials and cultural and genealogical history (Barajas-López et al, 2018; McDonald, 2016; Tzou et al, 2019) is one approach. Destiny Arts (Oakland, CA) designs each lesson around time for practice and time to learn about the history of the practice, with a commitment to “participating in, teaching, and preserving dance styles from the African Diaspora for 30 years.” Angela Wellman founded the Oakland Public Conservatory of Music (Oakland, CA) to provide, “music education that Black kids were not getting, you know, certainly what is their birthright. Particularly since Black music is at the core of American musical culture and identity.” Yorel Lashley, founder of Drum Power (Madison, WI) shared,

I think it’s important to just talk more about the issue of cultural connection. For example, I teach [young people] art that has a very deep ancient lineage in African and West African culture and particularly the Kingdom of old Mali. And so when I’m showing the children or a rhythm or something, I’m talking about what I learned from my teacher. And then I’m talking about how this relates to the Kingdom of old Mali and

Sundiata Keita [first ruler of the Mali Empire in the 13th century C.E] and you know, all this history. And that's a powerful thing. And I think the idea of lineage has been an issue of deprivation, especially for Black and Brown folks and young people, rather than an area of reclamation, so I think they actually feel very powerfully, "Wow, it's cool to be connected to all this stuff."

Storytelling was frequently employed to make connections, leveraging how artmaking affords the creation of counternarratives, stories about personal and community identity which oppose stereotypical and deficit expectations (Halverson, 2010). Rochelle Riley, the director of arts and culture for the City of Detroit, discussed how Motown was the original model of young people as professional artists, and she had a desire to make that history more accessible and recognized for the young people in her community, something to keep alive and celebrate. El Teatro Campesino (San Juan Bautista, CA) ground their programming (including the songs and dances performed and the pedagogical approach to theater) in the cultural history of the rural migrant "campesino" but also to Central American Indigenous practices: "It goes back to our roots, where we come from." Their Christmas pageant, performed annually since 1971, adapted an 18th-century liturgical drama to include elements of traditional Aztec song and dance. A young person in the program described it as "not only just a show, its history, it's a story being told" that is important to "keep reminding people." Crystal González Avila, a teaching artist at El Teatro Campesino described the "methods to approaching Teatro at El Campesino: *mito*, the myth, *estoria*, the story, *el corrido*, the ballad, and then the *actos* (the acts)," as a structure that comes with "a certain type of acting style attached to it." When one of the young participants of El Teatro shared during the focus group that her school theater teacher told her was overacting, the teaching artist reflected about the El Campesino method, "It is highly physical. Yes, Viola, we're going to get that feedback and we say, "It's okay, Teatro's in our DNA."

Use of native language is another way that programs center culture. At El Teatro Campesino (San Juan Bautista, CA), songs and dialogue are performed in Spanish to connect with the community audience. Even if the actors are not always Spanish speaking, many of their ancestors were. Programs in Texas border towns often include bilingual instruction with teaching artists who speak English and Spanish. In Indigenous communities, elders are often in favor of language revitalization, and Spy Hop (Salt Lake City, UT) builds on this value by creating projects where young people interview the elders in their community, supporting youth-directed language and culture archival media pieces.

It was clear through our work with OST arts leaders, teaching artists, policymakers, and young people that scenes are simultaneously grounded in history and of the present moment. History shapes the kinds of interactions and artmaking practices that are possible; artmaking also shapes the history of a given scene. At the same time, the co-evolution of history and practice is not stagnant. Youth, popular culture, as well as current political climates, shape the kind of art that OST youth arts programs make and the kinds of goals they set for themselves and their collaborators.

7. Attention to Learning Through the Arts Is Always Present, But Shaped by Perspective

We aimed to focus on the arts-specific nature of the programs and practices we studied. As a result, conversations about how young people learn through the arts was a prevalent theme and the nuances of how each scene's perspective shapes what is meant by learning through the arts emerged through these discussions.

Finally, we hope that researchers take up our cultural-regional perspective as a critical qualitative inquiry model that honors and is shaped by local expertise. Our methodological approach is itself a contribution to the field of OST youth arts work. Following the critical qualitative inquiry tradition, we recommend engaging participants as collaborators to shape how the work is framed, what questions are asked, and how findings are presented (see Tunstall et al., 2022 for detailed methodological approach).

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Appendix 1: Study Participants in Each Region

A. Urban Midwest

Table 1. Focus Group Participants

Name	Role and Organization	Location
Bianca Baldrige	Associate Professor of Educational Policy Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison. Author of <i>Reclaiming Community: Race and the Uncertain Future of Youth Work</i>	Madison, WI
Emery Petchauer	Associate Professor, Dept. of Teacher Education and Dept. of English, Michigan State University. Beatmaker, turntablist, DJ, crate digger	Pontiac, MI
Beth Hagenlocker	Co-founder, Detroit Creativity Project	Detroit, MI
Coya Paz Brownrigg	Co-founder and Artistic Director, Free Street Theater. Associate Professor, The Theatre School at DePaul University. With Chloe Jonston, co-author of <i>Ensemble-Made Chicago: A Guide to Devised Theater</i>	Chicago, IL
Jennifer Steele	Executive Director, 826 CHI; founder of ChiTeen Lit Fest and Revolving Door Arts; author	Chicago, IL
Mike Cook	Director of Museum Experience, Betty Brinn Children’s Museum	Milwaukee, WI
Kristine Sorensen	Founder and Executive Director, In Progress. Teaching artist since 1987; developed several program models in digital arts learning	St. Paul, MN
Monica Haslip	Founder and Executive Director, Little Black Pearl	Chicago, IL
Vanessa Sanchez	Director of Education and Yollocalli Arts Reach, National Museum of Mexican Art; Co-Chair of Chicago Youth Voices Network; Board Vice President for Villapalooza the Little Village Music Fest. Artist and collaborator in the Instituto Grafico de Chicago Print Collective and the Chicago Artists Creating Transformation (ACT) Collective	Chicago, IL
Rochelle Riley	Director, City of Detroit City of Detroit Arts, Culture, and Entrepreneurship Office. Co-chair Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s Black Leadership Advisory Council	Detroit, MI

Table 2: Urban Midwest 1:1 Conversations

Jackie Taylor	Founder and CEO	Black Ensemble Theatre	Chicago, IL
Yorel Lashley	Founder and President	Drum Power	Madison, WI
Mac Howison	Program Officer for Creative Learning	Heinz Endowments	Pittsburgh, PA
Bill Strickland	Founder, President, & CEO	Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild	Pittsburgh, PA

Table 3. Teaching Artists and Youth in Program-Centered Focus Groups

Yollocalli Arts Reach (Chicago, IL)	
Yollocalli comes from the Aztec language Nahuatl: yolotl (heart) + kalli (house). Yollocalli Arts Reach is an award winning and nationally recognized youth and teen program of the National Museum of Mexican Art. It is housed in a separate space from the museum, serving as an open community center. Yollocalli provides free access to a computer lab, radio production studio, a large art library, and a creative, supportive staff who are always around to help, encourage, and inspire. Yollocalli aims to strengthen students’ creative and cultural capital by engaging them with their own cultural discourses through artmaking.	
Vanessa Sanchez	Director
Hananne Hanafi	Deputy Director
Alejandro Colunga	Programs Coordinator and Youth Artist
Todd Diederich	Teaching Artist
Elizabeth Reyes	Teaching Artist
Emmanuel Ramirez	Youth Artist
Itzel Rodriguez	Youth Artist

PearlArts Studios (Pittsburgh, PA)	
PearlArts is the creative parent organization for Staycee Pearl Dance Project and Soy Sos and Tuff Sound Recording. Their goals are to interpret and mirror culture and community through dance and dance-centered multimedia experiences. They produce programming around compelling concepts and themes often inspired by social/political world issues. The Dance Project also provides movement and multimedia education for youth through classes, workshops, and partnerships with schools and local organizations.	
Staycee Pearl	Co-Artistic Director and Founder
Jessica Marino Mitcham	Teaching Artist
LaTrea Rembert	Teaching Artist
Katie Kulasa	Teaching Artist
Ally Ricarte	Teaching Artist

B. Bay Area

Table 4. Bay Area Experts Focus Group

Name	Role and Organization	Location
Casey Wong	Postdoctoral Scholar, Stanford Graduate School of Education; UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools; Research Associate at the Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Language	Bay Area
Meg Escudé	PhD student, Former Director of Community Youth Programs University of California, Berkeley in the School of Education, Exploratorium	San Francisco, CA
Angela Wellman	Founding Director, Oakland Public Conservatory of Music	Oakland, CA
Indi McCasey	Executive Director, Arts Education Alliance of the Bay Area	Bay Area
Christy Sandoval	General Manager and Education Director, El Teatro Campesino	San Juan Bautista, CA
Lissa Soep	Special Projects Producer, YR Media	Oakland, CA
Maven McGovern	Arts Executive Producer/Director of Youth Outcomes, YR Media	Oakland, CA

Table 5. Teaching Artists and Youth in Program-Centered Focus Groups

Destiny Arts Center (Oakland, CA) Destiny Arts Center believes that art and movement give young people a vehicle for self and community expression. Founded by Black and Queer dance and martial artists in 1988, Destiny uses movement-based arts to uplift youth voice, supporting pathways for young people to express themselves, advocate for justice and equity, fight against the systemic racism that continues to impact Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and build a community where everyone feels seen, valued, and free.	
Bryan Massengale	Arts Center Coordinator
Rashidi Omari	Director, Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company and Teaching Artist
Julia Chigamba	Teaching Artist
Salé Ramos	Teaching Artist
El Teatro Campesino (San Juan Bautista, CA) Since its inception, El Teatro Campesino and its founder and artistic director, Luis Valdez, have set the standard for Latino theatrical production in the United States. Founded in 1965 on the Delano Grape Strike picket lines of Cesar Chavez’s United Farmworkers Union, the company created and performed “actos” or short skits on flatbed trucks and in union halls. They believe theater is a creator of vibrant community and community is a creator of vibrant theater, thus, through community arts programming they strive to create spaces where participants of all ages and experience levels can participate in positive, life-affirming arts and culture.	
Cristal González Avila	Teaching Artist and Company Member
Camila Zenteno Ramos	Youth Artist
Vanessa Rocha	Youth Artist

C. Texas-Mexico Border Towns

Table 6: Texas-Mexico Border Towns Experts Focus Group

Krystal Jones	Marketing, Film & Music Administrator	City of San Antonio’s Department of Arts & Culture	San Antonio, TX
Andrea Gates-Ingle	Executive Director and Co-Founder	Creative Kids	El Paso, TX
Stephen Gates-Ingle	Creative Director and co-founder	Creative Kids	El Paso, TX
Augusto Contreras	Development Director	Creative Arts Studios	McAllen, TX
Claudia Saldana Corral	Research Associate	University of TX El Paso Ethnography of Languages, Literacies, and Learning Lab	El Paso, TX

Table 7. Teaching Artists and Youth in Program-Centered Focus Groups

<p>Creative Arts Studio (McAllen, TX) Creative Arts Studio is a collective of local artists empowering communities through fine arts education. They seek to inspire talent for community development, as well as ignite the power of the arts to promote social change, growth in understanding, and advancement in human consciousness. The musicians, performers, painters, singers, actors, filmmakers, dancers; artists who have decided to invest their efforts into this program, wish to pass on their knowledge to all students in South Texas communities.</p>	
Anna Tirado	Artistic Director
Amado Caballero	Teaching Artist
Mayeli Hernandez	Youth Artist
Nikssa Cuellar	Youth Artist
Vanesa Calvillo	Youth Artist
Viviana Calvillo	Youth Artist
Lynda Ledezma	Youth Artist

D. Indigenous Southwest**Table 8: Indigenous Southwest Experts Focus Group**

Rulan Tangen	Teaching Artist and Founding Artistic Director	Dancing Earth	Santa Fe, NM
Gabriel Carrion-Gonzales	Artistic Associate	NDI New Mexico	Santa Fe, NM
Adam Sherlock	Director of Community Partnerships and Learning Design	Spy Hop	Salt Lake City, UT
Anna Needham	Artist Programs Coordinator	Arizona Commission on the Arts	Phoenix, AZ
Claudio Dicochea	Organizational Programs Manager	Arizona Commission on the Arts	Phoenix, AZ
Elisa Radcliff	Arts Learning Manager	Arizona Commission on the Arts	Phoenix, AZ
Greg Cajete	Founder	American Indian Arts Institute	Santa Fe, NM
Winoka Yepa	Senior Manager of Museum Education	IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts	Santa Fe, NM
Laura Cales Matalka, Chickasaw Nation	Program Manager	Native Arts and Cultures Foundation	Portland, OR