



Fostering culture to create welcoming and vibrant public spaces

Dr. Joy Bailey-Bryant, the keynote speaker at the 2023 Equity Summit, discussed the role of culture in creating vibrant public spaces and building equitable communities. Dr. Bailey-Bryant is an international leader for her work with communities around arts, culture, and storytelling. She has specialized in developing identity museums—particularly those focusing on Black history and culture, such as the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.—and in creating environments in which people can tell and interpret their own stories.

The keynote focused on the role of arts and culture in democratizing public and private space, and the responsibility planners have to ensure that residents are not displaced. It also touched on the importance of creating opportunities for A&C to thrive. Her remarks provided a guiding framework to examine how public space, private development, and museums—rather than being imposed by stakeholders with limited awareness to true community needs—can be more welcoming, inclusive, and representative of long-established surrounding communities.

Key discussion points



1 “Arts and culture make public space more ... public!”: Events, art, and human interaction truly bring our public spaces to life and foster a sense of culture and community. Diversifying programming and representation in our public spaces can help attract people of all backgrounds, improve our communities, and make people feel welcome.

“When we talk about equitable delivery, it’s equity across all lenses ... Think about who you want to enjoy this space.”

— Dr. Joy Bailey-Bryant,
LordCultural US

2 Consider who decides, who pays, and who benefits: When working to make public spaces more accessible and collaborative, it is critical to think about the true community influence and impact. Which residents are involved in the decision-making process? Who will be most affected by the decisions made, and who is benefitting? Reflecting on these three questions can help identify potential gaps in your approach and help you focus your efforts to better serve the needs of the community.



3 “Creative place-making” and “creative place-keeping”: Place-keeping is essential to promote and preserve culture: Traditional placemaking efforts typically involve external actors entering communities to facilitate change. However, place-keeping is dependent on the people and culture that already exist in a community. It is a unique vehicle that can be used to not only generate and build culture, but also to preserve current identity, keep residents in their homes, and improve their quality of life.

“Culture is what makes a place a place ... it makes a place real”

— Dr. Joy Bailey-Bryant,
LordCultural US



Questions to ask

1

How can you apply the self-reflection questions offered by Dr. Bailey-Bryant to your work? Who decides; who pays; and who benefits? When answering the question “who pays?” consider the non-monetary costs, burdens, or harms that may be suffered by communities. What are key moments in your work where you might pause and reflect on those questions? Are there additional questions your community should consider?

2

How can you help ensure that necessary voices are included, and in the “room”? Are there barriers that prevent community members from participating? If so, how can those barriers be removed? Does your community need to reset the “table”? How can you build trust with community members to encourage engagement and collaboration?

3

Community cultural preservation, storytelling, and place-keeping efforts may be happening informally and outside “official,” government-sanctioned processes. How can the government get out of the way and create more space for community-led change?

What to do next

Planners and policymakers

- ☐ Explore and learn more about the cultural history and heritage of your state, region, and local community. Read about past and current community cultures, the impact of historic or continuing displacement, and changing community identity—and discuss it with local culture bearers and leaders.
- ☐ Visit a cultural site or attend an event with cultural significance to a community different from your own. Reflect on how this location or event may be meaningful within your own work.
- ☐ Consider how your work can help to support efforts that promote the active care and maintenance of the culture and the people who currently live there. Which place-keeping initiatives currently exist within your community to protect culture?
- ☐ Share your reflections and experiences with your neighbors, coworkers, and others in your network. Encourage them to think about how A&C can help to create welcoming and inclusive public spaces.

Recommended reading



SGA's Equity Forum: “Upending Cultural Displacement” was full of valuable insight from visionary leaders on the deep relationship between cultural displacement and smart growth, as well as effective strategies for preserving and protecting neighborhood culture during investment and neighborhood change. [Read more>>](#)

What If We Built Our Cities Around Places? The place-making guide from Project for Public Spaces explores the fundamental principles and benefits of placemaking, while providing advice on how to strengthen the connection between people and their shared places. [Learn more>>](#)

Places of Belonging in AAPI America: Tending Our Roots is a growing online collection of creative place-making projects in Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities across America. It features stories about making places of belonging in AAPI America. [Learn more>>](#)

State Departments of Transportation Artists-in-Residence: Artist-in-residencies (AIR) have proven effective in rethinking design challenges, increasing community buy-in, fostering deeper community engagement, augmenting planning goals, building relationships with traditionally underserved constituents, and improving outdated processes in routine work. [Learn more>>](#)

