P R O P O S A L
Executive Summary
Cultural Districts Program

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What is a Cultural Districts Program?

Municipal cultural district programs provide strategic support to mixed-use neighbourhoods and downtown corridors known for their arts and culture venues, intangible heritage and distinct histories. These areas are often pedestrian-friendly and serve as hyper-local economic and social hubs that invite residents and visitors alike to celebrate their city's character by engaging in joyful and enlightening cultural experiences.

Forward

Hip Hop, both the artform and the broader cultural praxis, creates a good lens for thinking about the City of Toronto's new cultural district program. Hip Hop emanates from the inner city in the early 1970s during the post-industrial era amid economic decline and seismic political shifts, disproportionately impacting racialized inner-city communities. Its unique style grew organically from the ground up. With its emphasis on the drumbeat and elongated break, it created a musical breath for rapping, and other interrelated elements such as breakdancing, graffiti, entrepreneurism, community values and a new urban dialect. It transcended the bounds of artmaking—its breakbeat was a political breath within the margins.

Like all artforms and broad cultural articulations, Hip Hop is certainly not free of contradictions and contentious elements. But both the artform and the broader cultural praxis create a good lens for thinking about cultural district planning. It offers a holistic example of culture—not the kind of capital "C" exclusionary culture defined and often co-opted by the institutional elite but the lower-case "c" culture rooted in place. Equally important, while Hip Hop inarguably finds its origins in a Pan-African orality, aesthetic and place-based meaning-making, it is fundamentally pluralistic and has always space for powerful transmutation and collaboration across identities and environmental contexts. This type of lower case "c" culture contributes to establishing good ground for us to both contest and blur rigid identity silos, allowing an exploration of what it means to be wholly human, co-existing harmoniously with other humans, living beings and the natural environment.

I'm not suggesting race-neutral cultural placemaking and planning. To the contrary, I strongly believe that a racial justice lens must be integrated into all cultural planning schemes. However, I do believe that culture is boundless, extending well beyond racial and other socially constructed identities, opening up liminal spaces for the exploration of untapped cultural freedoms and solidarities. This is especially important amid increased cultural displacement, economic inequities and polarized public discourse contributing to a cultural crisis in cities across North American (Turtle Island).

When the City of Toronto retained my practice to prepare the proposal for its Cultural Districts Program (alongside exceptional subject matter experts within and beyond the institution), I reflected on lessons learned in my early years as a leader in the cultural sector and recent experiences as the principal of a bi-national placemaking practice reconciling fraught Confederate monument sites in the southern U.S.; mass market-driven displacement; cultural erasure of historically marginalized groups; and a lack of civic spaces that bring people together across differences. I am sometimes disheartened by these challenges and hyper-aware of the disproportionate risks for equity-deserving and sovereignty-deserving communities. However, I'm proud that my home city—the city where my Jamaican Canadian mother and my gay Irish Canadian second grade teacher (and second dad) made my pathway possible—is exploring new cultural planning and policy approach. This unprecedented Cultural Districts Program Proposal elucidates evidence-based concepts, tangible frameworks and implementation levers intended to reap the social, economic and environmental benefits of cultural districts while mitigating the growing issue of cultural displacement. It also contains ideas for thinking about cultural planning and placemaking more broadly.

In love for, and service to, my city,

Jay Pitter, Principal Placemaker
Jay Pitter Placemaking
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Acknowledgements

Critical Questions

Critical questions to guide equitable cultural policy and placemaking initiatives and discourse:

Whose culture is considered valuable and worthy of protection?

How do we reconcile the extraction of racialized peoples' cultures while displacing them from the neighbourhoods which they've made socially and economically desirable?

How do we decentre both the privileged gatekeepers of capital "C" institutional culture and the so-called keepers of "authentic culture" across historically marginalized communities so that everyone can contribute to the city's culture?

How do we avoid rigid cultural boundaries that artificially define and restrict living, ongoing cultural expression?

How do we come together across differences to co-create pluralistic cultures that honour all people and the planet?

Process

This proposal was developed through conventional approaches such as a literature review, preliminary survey, campaign shoot and participatory public panels. But we also had quiet conversations with Elders, conducted oral interviews and went on slow walks with community advocates on the frontlines of disrupting cultural displacement. The proposal development process outlined below was ultimately intended to ground the work in ongoing professional humility and reflexivity. We gathered a range of equally valid and diverse (including divergent and skeptical viewpoints) forms of knowledge from individuals with professional and lived experience expertise to push the bounds of cultural planning in a manner that met the urgency of the moment.

» Literature Review

» City Staff Program and Policy Working Sessions

» Cultural Districts Program Campaign

» Cultural Districts Program Preliminary Survey

» Advisory Group Survey and Working Group Sessions

» 15 Participatory Panels and Micro Engagements

» Informal Engagement

Background and Overview

The City of Toronto is acclaimed as one of the most livable, economically prosperous and culturally diverse cities in the world. Its distinct, vibrant character has historically been informed by an enviable range of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, by neighbourhood-based cultural practices and by places that foster the flourishing of culture. Like most North American (Turtle Island) cities, Toronto is undergoing unprecedented urban growth, which is a stimulus for economic development, technological advancement and the construction of sustainable infrastructure. Increasingly, unrestricted market forces and the lack of adequate municipal finance, planning and development tools are contributing to cultural displacement across many cities, especially in neighbourhoods with high populations of Indigenous Peoples, Black people, other racialized people and equity-deserving groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Historically, in Canada, government-led cultural policies and the funding of arts venues and archives were bound up in notions of resisting Americanization, artistic excellence, civic participation, and capitalism. During that time, there was no substantive connection to hyper-local contexts or equitable analysis pertaining to highly contested concepts such as a singular "national identity" and "artistic excellence." Despite these omissions, these efforts led to vital post-World War II movements making the case for recognizing the inherent and economic value of culture.

In the late 1990s the Creative City concept, predicated on ideas articulated decades earlier, captured the collective imagination of municipal leaders. Like most post-industrial cities searching for new ways to stimulate economic growth, the then-newly amalgamated City of Toronto released its first-ever cultural plan, titled Culture Plan for the Creative City. However, like most cultural plans inspired by this scheme, there was an oversight in terms of addressing culture in a holistic and equitable manner. For many racialized communities, creative expression is not exclusively tethered to professional arts institutions and industries; it is intrinsically tied to the culture of places, practices and people.

By no coincidence, we see that the same racialized people (and other equity-deserving groups) who have invested their life blood into neighbourhoods that were largely excluded from cultural policy and planning schemes are now facing disproportionate risks of cultural displacement across North American (Turtle Island) cities. They have not been historically provided with an adequate amount and range of resources. This impact is felt now more than ever, as predatory development continues to diminish affordable property stock and civic spaces at an alarming rate.

Within Toronto, these issues have been amplified by community advocates across neighbourhoods such as Church-Wellesley, Little Jamaica and Downtown Chinatown. They were heard. In autumn of 2021, City Council directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to undertake broad public engagement with internal and external stakeholders. Following an initial round of preliminary research and ongoing community conversations, Jay Pitter Placemaking was retained to lead the development of this proposal to guide the City of Toronto's first-ever Cultural Districts Program.

Equitable Community Engagement

While there is no singular definition of community engagement, this explanation closely aligns with our approach: "working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices."[1] From families to grassroots groups, not-for-profit organizations and philanthropic leaders, to large institutions and governmental agencies, our team listened to and learned from the invaluable insights shared by a diverse range of community stakeholders. Community engagement initiatives included:

1 Cultural Districts Program Proposal Campaign

15 Collaborative Community Engagements
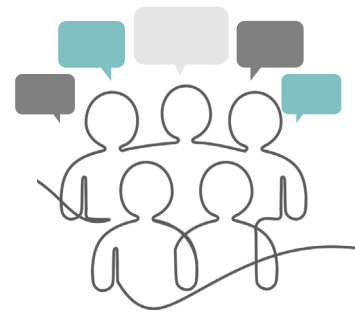
1 Philanthropy Workshop
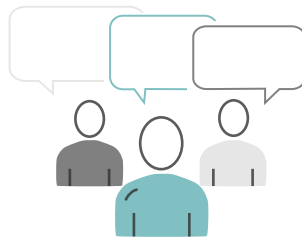
2 Intergenerational Advisory Group Working Sessions

2 Surveys: Public Survey and Intergenerational Advisory Group Survey

As an evidence-based practice, in addition to the community engagement initiatives above, centring unedited first-voice insights from a wide range of stakeholders, the practice gathered precedents related to cultural districts and conducted a correlating academic literature review.

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1   Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011). Principles for Community Engagement: Second Edition. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. Retrieved 25 September, 2020 from https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/pdf/PCE_Report_508_FINAL.pdf

Sample Campaign Images

Credit: Allen, N. (2022) *All Campaign Photos* [photographs]. Toronto, Ontario. https://www.amillionminds.ca/about/

Community Engagement Findings

The most heartening takeaway from the community engagement initiatives, which engaged an incredibly diverse range of stakeholders, was a common ethic of care and justice for all. Survey respondents, panel participants, subject matter expert panelists, campaign participants, workshop participants and the intergenerational advisory group all echoed a shared desire to honour, exchange and preserve each other's culture and secure sense of place across the city. Community engagement stakeholders truly upheld the City of Toronto's motto, "diversity is our strength." The key points emerging from all community engagements are as follows:

+ Community stakeholders highlighted the importance of recognizing that we are conceiving the Cultural District Program on Indigenous lands, stewarded by Indigenous Peoples with rich cultural histories and continued vibrant presence.

+ Community stakeholders raised alarm in multiple sessions about the impact of gentrification and the displacement that can so often follow neighbourhood development, pushing out the very people who poured their sweat equity into building vibrant and desirable cultural communities.

+ Community stakeholders credited the historic and ongoing contributions of social movements—including those related to mutual aid, the environment and queer rights—as key drivers of cultural freedoms and expressions.

+ Community stakeholders also highlighted the need to interrogate power imbalances and promoted the importance of power-sharing, arguing that we need to recognize and disrupt structural powers, including in finance and philanthropy.

+ Community stakeholders asserted the importance of affordable and dignified infrastructure, along with pathways to ownership in creating the foundation for collective cultural prosperity.

Perhaps most vitally, we heard multiple calls that reflect the disability justice ethos of "nothing about us, without us" and the need to centre local knowledge, expertise, and power within all aspects of the Cultural Districts Program.

Cultural Districts
Implementation Plan Toolkit

With extensive experience working within, and in collaboration with the public sector, we understand that far too often aspirational consultant proposals fail to align with the challenging, and sometimes messy, process of implementing a new program or designation. Accordingly, this section highlights key concepts and a tangible cultural policy and placemaking framework to support program implementation.

Cultural Universals: Cultural universals, a concept developed by anthropologist George Murdock, are articulated through multiple matrices and frameworks. What is consistent across frameworks is the recognition of basic needs such as food and shelter alongside the arts, economic prosperity, technology and one of our favourites—humour.

Adaptable and Dynamic Culture: Cultural districts should be predicated on flexibility and movement—not the kind of forced, destabilizing movement associated with cultural displacement, but the kind of movement associated with adaptability. The most livable cities are adaptable, constantly responding to social, economic and environmental change. As such, it is important to celebrate and invest in the historical (and current) character of districts while allowing them to organically grow to embrace new people and cultural expressions.

Meaningfully Acknowledge Indigeneity: When conceiving cultural districts, it's imperative to not only "consult" Indigenous Peoples on a per-project basis, but rather to integrate Indigenous design guidelines within urban planning frameworks, which consider Indigenous Peoples, a wide range of practices and natural ecologies. Like the definition of culture itself, some aspects of Indigenous design cannot fully be articulated through design thinking. In fact, the most powerful aspects of culture are embodied, not explained.

Co-Creation Instead of Engaging "User Groups": Co-creating is imperative for initiating precedent-setting projects that are truly responsive to community concerns, aspirations and power. Co-creation is the process of collectively developing a vision, principles, strategies and evaluation metrics for a program, policy or place. It is a deeply experiential process, which uncovers intangible cultural insights and insider knowledge. Moreover, co-creation processes recognize the value of lived experiences and respectfully reposition community members too often viewed as "clients" or "user groups" to instead being valued contributors.

Co-Stewardship Instead of Top-Down Leadership: A co-stewardship approach can satisfy pragmatic imperatives related to institutional role clarification and accountability while also opening up space for more democratic and sustainable program development. Often applied to environmental initiatives, co-stewardship refers to accepting responsibility for a place, program or policy from an ethic of collective care versus technocratic leadership.

Do Not Empower People; People Are Powerful: As a practice we refrain from asserting that any of our work, and the work carried out by municipalities we collaborate with, empowers people. We respectfully recognize the inherent power of every single human being and community we work with, and we walk alongside them to share our professional expertise, resources and physical space. Also, we as a practice are committed to transforming structural inequities and barriers that diminish individual and community power. We do not empower people; people are powerful.

Equity-Based Placemaking: Placemaking is conventionally defined as a collaborative approach to the design, programming and policy of public and semi-public spaces. It brings community knowledge and vision to the forefront of public realm design processes, historically going beyond the urbanism status quo and hierarchy. Equity-based placemaking builds on pluralism and recognizes power relations within communities and the place-based histories of exclusion and socio-spatial dynamics that shape the character of public spaces. An equity-based placemaking approach explicitly acknowledges that urban planning, design and development are not neutral; they either perpetuate or reduce urban inequities.

Cultural Policy and Placemaking Framework

The following cultural policy and placemaking framework is intended to outline equitable and holistic components that would be helpful for fostering local culture while addressing cultural displacement. The chart is not meant to be comprehensive or prescriptive. It is a framework for **centring Arts and Culture** and **Economic Development and Enterprise** while thinking through other important aspects of culture, such as: **Sports, Leisure and Play**, **Digital Services and Engagement**, **Social Infrastructure and Services**, **Built and Natural Environment** and **Intangible Cultural Heritage**. A **Flexible** bucket should be added to respond to emergent culture and community aspirations.

Arts and Culture	Sports, Leisure and Play	Social Infrastructure and Services	Intangible Cultural Heritage
Economic Development and Enterprise	Digital Services and Engagement	Built and Natural Environment	Flexible Bucket

City of Toronto staff team can map synergies, interdependencies and mutually reinforcing initiatives to increase economic, environmental and social returns on investments. The buckets (or a version of these buckets with a flexible optional bucket to capture emergent cultural expressions or distinct community aspirations) can be used by City staff to build an interdivisional team with the right-sized competencies for the program overall and possibly for assembling subject matter expert sub-teams (including external stakeholders) for each cultural district.

Arts and Culture

- » Large-scale public art installations
- » Arts venues (museums, galleries, theatres)
- » Community arts initiatives
- » Affordable artist studios and work/living spaces
- » Multi-year arts and cultural practices grants
- » Professional development arts opportunities and mentorship initiatives
- » Support for emergent and hybrid cultural art-making and public experimentation

Economic Development and Enterprise

- » Property tax relief, rebates and grants for federally registered charities
- » Affordable culturally responsive co-operative and co-working spaces
- » Affordable and accessible vendor permit processes
- » Bridging programs between financial institutions and Indigenous Peoples, racialized peoples, other equity-deserving groups
- » No-interest loans for Indigenous Peoples, racialized peoples and other equity-deserving groups
- » Residential zoning that supports small and/or seasonal in-home businesses
- » Culturally responsive and inclusive business improvement associations (BIAs)

Sports, Leisure and Play

» Intergenerational play and respite spaces
» Initiatives such as pop-up play and leisure initiatives for workers
» Competitive and non-competitive recreational and play spaces
» Affordable access to life-skill-oriented recreational experiences (swimming lessons)
» All-season play and recreation spaces
» Year-round, flexible sports, recreation and informal play spaces

Digital Services and Engagement

» Digital device lending library
» Democratic, digital community cultural archive
» Promotional municipal online interactive map
» Hybrid (online and offline) cultural districts walking, cycling and rolling tours
» Digital justice policy

Social Infrastructure and Services

» Mutual aid initiatives
» Culturally competent and responsive services (health, mental health, elder care, child care, etc.)
» Street festivals and block parties
» Community-led resilience and emergency action plans
» Sidewalk lending libraries, community fridges and clothing swaps, etc.
» Cultural competency and exchange programs
» School and youth group meal programs
» Community-led safety walks and audits
» Programs to preserve and proliferate Indigenous languages

Built and Natural Environment

» New development with dedicated culturally responsive ground-floor retail
» Accessible public washrooms, water fountains and seating
» Accessible active transportation infrastructure
» Reintegrating native plant species into landscape architecture schemes
» Public plots in parks and other greenspaces for local farmers and growers
» De-paving initiatives
» Daylighting and commemorating invisibilized natural ecologies
» Commemorating collective community contributions in the public realm
» Deeply affordable 99-year leases on municipal public properties used for public good

Intangible Cultural Heritage

» Indigenous Peoples' place-based storytelling
» Ancestral hydro technologies and other sustainable knowledges
» Invisibilized sacred sites
» Cultural and sacred songs
» Traumascapes
» Daily informal rituals and practices
» Cross-cultural community celebrations
» Alchemy and wonder

Flexible Bucket

It is advisable to direct focused investments to three to four primary buckets/categories within the framework (the **Arts and Culture** bucket, the **Economic Development and Enterprise** bucket and one to two others that most reflect hyper-local needs and aspirations), with a goal of leveraging investments and other resources across those primary buckets. This will help achieve optimal impact in a couple of key areas of cultural placemaking (again centring **Arts and Culture** and **Economic Development and Enterprise**) rather than spreading resources too thin across individual cultural initiatives. In addition to optimizing investments, this approach will assist City of Toronto staff to manage expectations while prompting community members to analyze and prioritize key areas for both fostering culture and disrupting cultural displacement in their neighbourhoods. For instance, based on their distinct cultural expressions, demographic and geographic location, one community may prioritize the following two buckets.

Arts and Culture	Sports, Leisure and Play	Social Infrastructure and Services	Intangible Cultural Heritage
Economic Development and Enterprise	Digital Services and Engagement	Built Natural Environment	Flexible Bucket

While another community may prioritize two entirely different buckets, in addition to the non-negotiable Arts and Culture bucket and the non-negotiable Economic Development and Enterprise bucket.

Arts and Culture	Sports, Leisure and Play	Social Infrastructure and Services	Intangible Cultural Heritage
Economic Development and Enterprise	Digital Services and Engagement	Built Natural Environment	Flexible Bucket

This Cultural Policy and Placemaking Framework can also be used as a participatory community engagement tool. For example, separate buckets could be used for mapping the specificities of local culture in relation to the examples provided in each bucket or to create personal cultural collages similar to the one below.

Intangible Cultural Heritage: Community Cultural Collage:

Credit: HA! Designs - ArtbyHeather (2010). Handsome couple... [photography]. w.flickr.com/photos/hadesigns/45184488 photostream/
Credit: City of Toronto (n.d.). Woodbine Theatre [photograph]. City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1488, Series 1230, Item 1142.
Credit: Cantrall, C.L. (2022). census [artifact]. Little Jamaica Presentation. Presented in Toronto, Ontario.

Recommendation
An inclusive and equitable two-stream cultural districts model

<div style="background:teal">**Stream One:** Description and Eligibility Criteria</div>

Toronto has an enviable number of culturally rich neighbourhoods. The potential new Cultural Districts Program is an opportunity to celebrate and recognize a wide range of neighbourhoods while providing in-depth, strategic supports to those neighbourhoods that need it most, which is consistent with equitable placemaking practice, and with equity more broadly. Creating an opportunity for a wide array of culturally rich neighbourhoods to be recognized through the potential new Cultural Districts Program honours our global city's distinct history and growth pattern. Moreover, this approach will ensure that the neighbourhoods at greatest risk for cultural displacement due to systemic exclusion are not stigmatized through this potential new program. Eligibility criteria and benefits for consideration may include, but are not limited to, the following:

Stream One: Formal Recognition and Celebration

+ Collaborative applicants—composed of arts organizations, not-for-profit organizations, Business Improvement Area groups, small businesses, mutual aid and other grassroots groups—may apply with a clearly designated lead organization (not-for-profit).

+ 80% of organizations/groups identified in the collaborative applicant group must establish flexible but clear cultural district boundaries based on settlement patterns, small business, organizations delivering cultural universal services and intangible cultural heritage.

+ Collaborative applicants must both define and demonstrate a long-standing history of a particular cultural expression or type—arts venues and creative industries, green districts, culinary, districts, technology etc.—within a demarcated yet flexible geographic area.

+ Collaborative applicants must indicate how Indigeneity—people, places and practices—will respectfully be acknowledged within the potential new cultural district.

> Benefits: Successful Stream One applicants may receive benefits such as a formal Cultural Districts Program recognition on the City of Toronto's website, a one-time $5,000 payment to host a celebratory community gathering to mark the designation milestone and an opportunity to participate on a Cultural Districts Program community co-learning circle.

<div style="background:teal">**Stream Two:** Description and Eligibility Criteria</div>

Stream Two: Formal Recognition, Celebration and Anti-Displacement

+ Collaborative applicants representing Indigenous, racialized or other equity-deserving groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ communities—composed of arts organizations, not-for-profit organizations, Business Improvement Area groups, small businesses, mutual aid
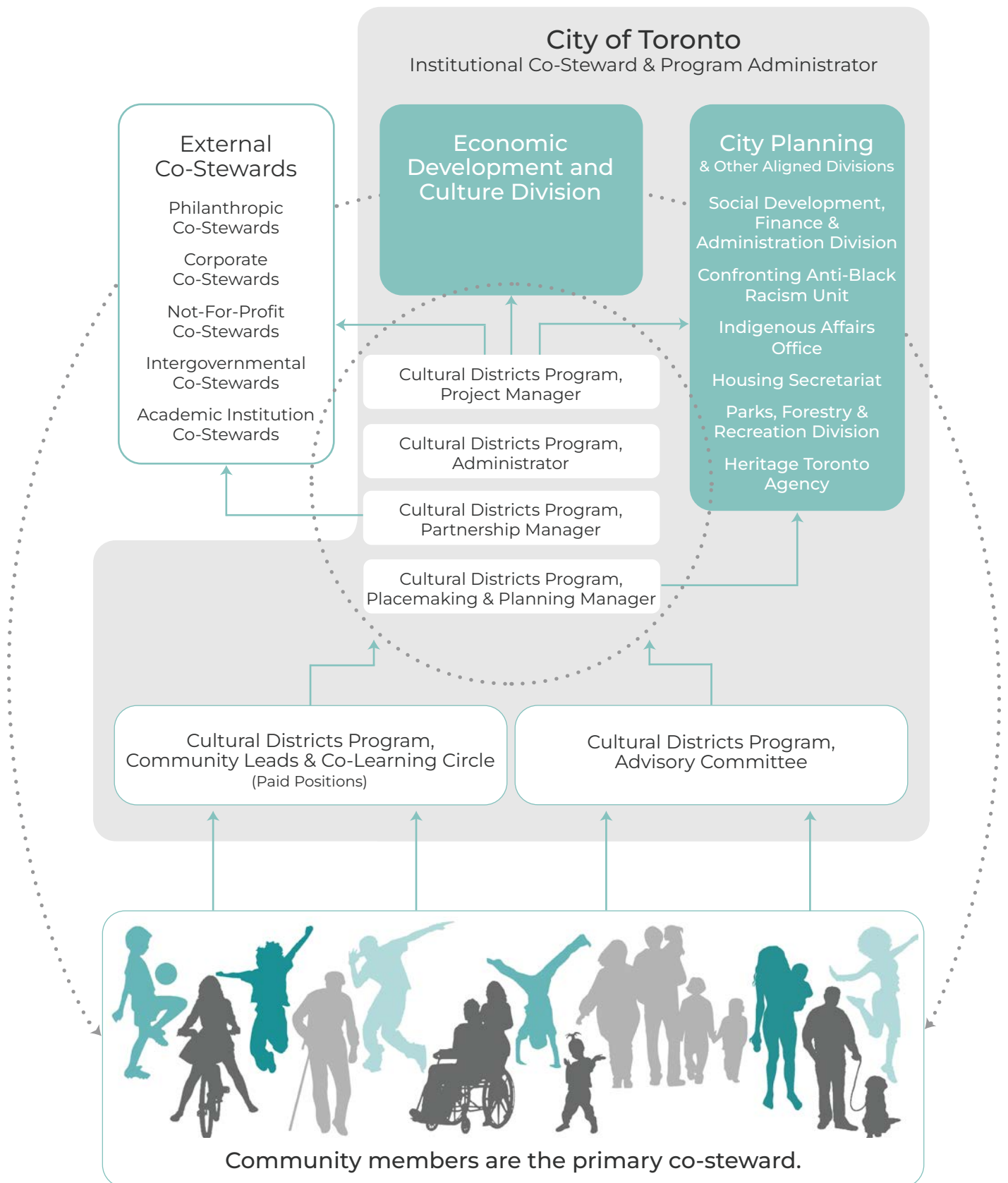
and other grassroots groups—may apply with a clearly designated lead organization (not-for-profit).

+ 80% of organizations/groups, representing Indigenous, racialized or other equity-deserving groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ communities, identified in the collaborative applicant group must establish clear, yet porous, cultural district boundaries based on settlement patterns, small business, organizations delivering cultural universal services and intangible cultural heritage.

+ Collaborative applicants, representing Indigenous, racialized or other equity-deserving groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ communities, must both define and demonstrate a long-standing history of a particular cultural expression or type—arts venues and creative industries, green districts, culinary, districts, technology etc.—within a demarcated yet flexible geographic area.

+ Collaborative applicants, representing Indigenous, racialized or other equity-deserving groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ communities, must demonstrate cultural displacement—people, places and practices—tethered to both a historical and systemic pattern of discrimination.

+ Collaborative applicants, representing Indigenous, racialized or other equity-deserving groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ communities, must have a vision for not only mitigating short-term cultural displacement—people, places and practices—but also for long-term equitable placemaking and/or place-keeping, contributing a sustained sense of place and social stability. For example, an applicant applying for funding to waive vendor fees for a group of Indigenous or racialized farmers or artists should collaborate with the municipality to identify a long-term, year-round space for this cultural, economic development activity.

+ Collaborative applicants must indicate how Indigeneity—people, places and practices—will respectfully be acknowledged within the potential new cultural district.

Benefits: Successful Stream Two applicants may receive benefits such as a formal Cultural Districts Program recognition on the City of Toronto's website, a one-time $5,000 payment to host a celebratory community gathering to mark the designation milestone, a $200,000 anti-displacement investment, an anti-displacement policy strategy, a cultural universals/social support strategy, accessible City-owned property (99-year lease or below market value sale) and an opportunity to participate on a Cultural Districts Program community co-learning circle.

It is recommended that the City of Toronto designate 12 Stream One and 6 Stream Two cultural districts within the next three years. Also, cultural districts have tended to focus on downtown neighbourhoods and tourist destinations. As such, it is important to develop culturally and spatially responsive guidelines for celebrating and supporting suburban cultural districts.

Program Delivery Model

City of Toronto
Institutional Co-Steward & Program Administrator

External Co-Stewards

Philanthropic Co-Stewards

Corporate Co-Stewards

Not-For-Profit Co-Stewards

Intergovernmental Co-Stewards

Academic Institution Co-Stewards

Economic Development and Culture Division

City Planning
& Other Aligned Divisions

Social Development, Finance & Administration Division

Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit

Indigenous Affairs Office

Housing Secretariat

Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division

Heritage Toronto Agency

Cultural Districts Program, Project Manager

Cultural Districts Program, Administrator

Cultural Districts Program, Partnership Manager

Cultural Districts Program, Placemaking & Planning Manager

Cultural Districts Program, Community Leads & Co-Learning Circle (Paid Positions)

Cultural Districts Program, Advisory Committee

Community members are the primary co-steward.

Principles for Ground-up, Holistic and Comprehensive Cultural Districts

Typically, proposals end with recommendations but we don't do conventional. Therefore, to end as unconventionally as we began, we unpack key principles, which are then tethered to correlating implementation levers. These implementation levers are grouped in the following four categories: Community Engagement and Co-Creation, Resource Development and Alignment, Policy Transformation Strategy, and Project Management and Administration. It is advisable that actions embedded in each key implementation lever category be completed (along with other City of Toronto inputs) within 18 months. More than ever, it is crucial to move away from proposals and platitudes to bold action.

1. **Begin by acknowledging the Indigeneity of all places, the people, land and practices.** All cultural districts, formal and informal, are established atop of Indigenous lands. This must be meaningfully recognized throughout all phases and components of the new potential Cultural Districts Program. Also, acknowledge layers of complex—both beautiful and fraught—histories, policies and contributions that have defined our nation and city.

2. **Public property must be leveraged for public good.** Public property and ownership are non-negotiable levers for change. While grant programs reap substantive results, they will not disrupt cultural displacement nor will they address histories of spatialized discrimination and market forces preventing some groups, primarily Indigenous Peoples and Black people, from acquiring capital assets, which generate economic prosperity, stability and greater sense of place.

3. **Build on exceptional Economic Development and Culture initiatives** by embracing a cultural policy and placemaking approach recognizing a broader range of people, practices and places that define hyper-local culture. Intentionally deepen culturally competent support to Indigenous Peoples, racialized people and people from other equity-deserving groups by increasing arts grants, brokering large-scale public art installation opportunities, fostering greater Business Improvement Area participation and ensuring that small business investments respond to the realities of non-traditional, culturally oriented business owners.

4. **Recognize the boundlessness of culture.** Together with communities, establish program boundaries that have enough definition to make strategic place-based investments to achieve optimal hyper-local impact while being porous enough to respond to the community's aspirations and growth.

5. **The ethic and practice of care are integral to culture.** This is rooted in the belief that every human being has inherent value, regardless of race, class, income, educational attainment or any other identifier or metric that has been used to create social hierarchies. It also means that every cultural asset and practice we co-create should be responsive to those who face the most violence and vulnerabilities.

6. **All great places and spaces are co-stewarded.** The success of cultural districts (and all equitable places and spaces) is predicated on an ethic of co-creation, collective care and power sharing both within and outside of municipalities. A co-stewardship model that centres local experts in a manner that engages them in all phases of the program, fairly compensates them for labour and underscores their scope of influence is paramount. It is also important to meaningfully collaborate and pool resources internally across City of Toronto divisions, and with philanthropic, corporate, academic, intergovernmental leaders and others.

7. **Interrogate conventional ideas about power.** An equitable cultural district program should not be designed with the intent to empower individuals from equity-deserving and sovereignty-deserving groups. While individuals from these communities navigate historical trauma and continued discrimination, their cultural practices, mutual aid networks and artforms are immensely powerful. Rather than seeking to empower people, extend space, resources and respect so that individuals and communities can co-create the Cultural District Program and realize their full power. Also, ensure that individuals with considerable social power and individuals with very little social power do not become gatekeepers or the arbiter of so-called "authentic culture" within communities.

8. **Use an intersectionality lens when designing for access.** Consider how multiple aspects of individual and collective identities either create access or barriers to all supports, investments and policies related to the Cultural Districts Program.

9. **Honour natural ecosystems as both sovereign and an extension of urban culture.** Cultural landscapes and histories are intertwined with ecological landscapes and histories. Moreover, urban intensification reduces energy consumption, which in turn supports sustainability goals. Ecosystem management, green economies, land-based cultural practices, and resilient design and development are integral components of both tangible and intangible culture.

10. **Unlock new policies to co-create new possibilities.** The factors driving cultural displacement, and increasing class and cultural stratification, are fundamentally systemic. Equitable policy transformation pertaining to public property, amenity spaces and support for creative expression (accompanied by correlating investments) is the singular, most effective tool for making bold and sustainable cultural change.

Culture can't be fully defined or institutionalized; that's a good thing. Municipalities have a responsibility to provide their constituents with financial resources, places, spaces, and services related to housing, safety, public health, civic life and environmental protection and resilience. However, to achieve greater levels of equity and prosperity, cities have to cede power and create space for culture to organically emerge from the ground-up, magically transmutate and stretch itself across the urban landscape.

Implementation Levers (Excerpt)

3. Policy Transformation Strategy

☐ 3.1 Conduct a joint, in-depth policy review audit with Economic Development and Culture, and City Planning to highlight policy gaps and enablers related to goals of the Cultural Districts Program.

<div align="right">`Principle(s): 3, 6, 8, 10`</div>

☐ 3.2 Identify unofficial policies[2], both within and outside of the City of Toronto, that shape attitudes embedded in institutions that create invisible barriers.

<div align="right">`Principle(s): 7, 10`</div>

☐ 3.3 Create a Cultural Districts Program policy champion and reviewer circle.

<div align="right">`Principle(s): 6, 10`</div>

☐ 3.4 Highlight two-three most impactful, equitable policy changes that can be made to support the goals of a Cultural Districts Program.

<div align="right">`Principle(s): 10`</div>

☐ 3.5 Create a program strand to support "culturally responsive businesses"[3] led by Indigenous Peoples, racialized people and other equity-deserving groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ people, that provide local communities with culturally responsive and appropriate services, products and food while also creating safe(r) space for informal cultural expressions, mutual aid and celebration.

<div align="right">`Principle(s): 2, 4, 5, 6, 10`</div>

☐ 3.6 Conduct an equity review of the current permitting process (vendor, park access, etc.) and identify ways of addressing existing barriers, raising awareness of the process and providing more support to increase access for Indigenous Peoples, racialized people and other equity-deserving groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ people.

<div align="right">`Principle(s): 2, 3, 6, 7, 10`</div>

☐ 3.7 Build a database of related, equitable policy transformation processes to help build the case for transformation.

<div align="right">`Principle(s): 10`</div>

☐ 3.8 Together with City of Toronto's Intergovernmental Affairs division, co-develop a policy transformation strategy for engaging provincial and federal partners.

<div align="right">`Principle(s): 10`</div>

☐ 3.9 Expedite the current Community Benefit Charge strategy work between Economic Development and Culture, City Planning and external consultants to address the Section 37 gap.

<div align="right">`Principle(s): 10`</div>

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2 The University of Kansas (1994-2022). Community Tool Box. Section 1. Changing Policies: An Overview. https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/changing-policies/overview/main

3 A term coined by Jay Pitter Placemaking to describe businesses that provide local communities with culturally responsive and appropriate services, products and food while also creating safe(r) space for informal cultural expressions, mutual aid and celebration.

Imagine...

We can't stress strongly enough that no two cultural districts should look, feel or be supported in the exact same way. This rendering is for illustrative purposes only, intended to help highlight key aspects of what may be integrated in cultural districts. The first illustration is meant to depict a ground-up, messy, deeply collaborative process, which in our view is as important as the completed illustration (for reference only) that follows it.
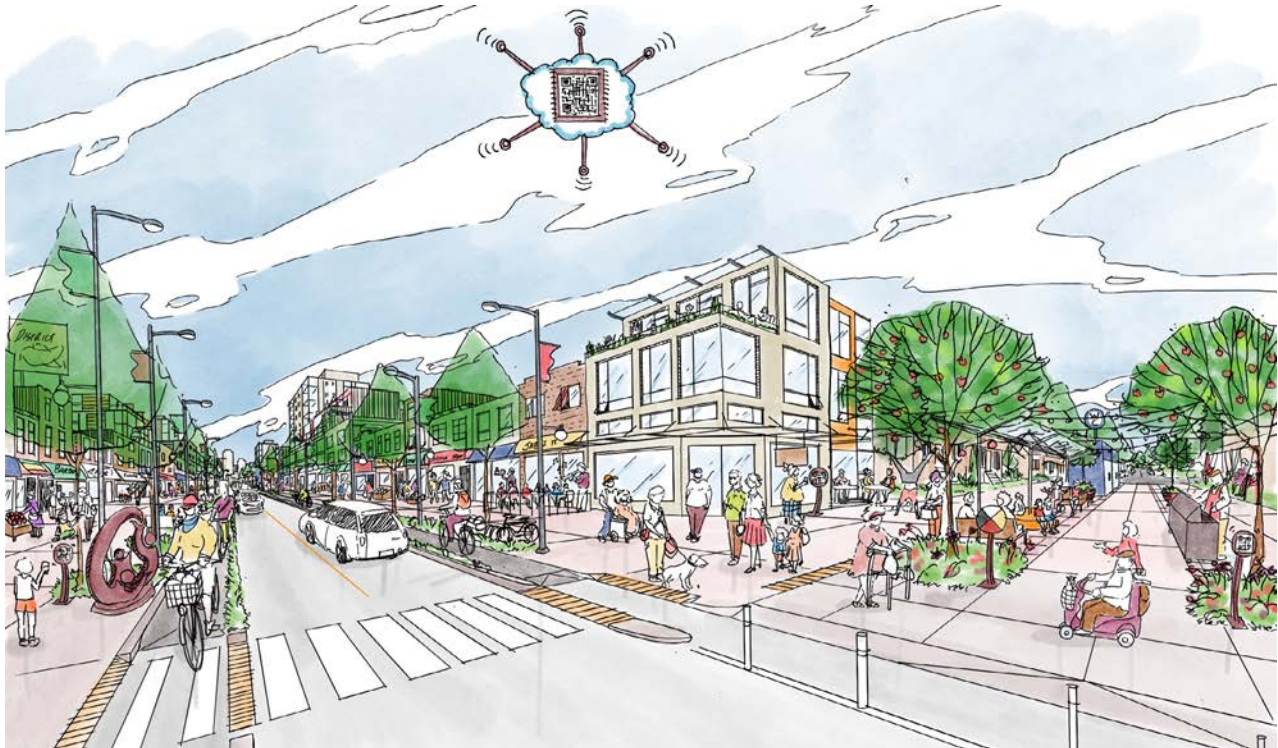
Concept by Jay Pitter and Illustrated by Sam Mohamad-Khany

- » Daylighting Indigeneity—people, place names and practices
- » Subtle, integrated culturally reflective design interventions
- » Safe and accessible sidewalk and plaza surfaces
- » Green (and whenever possible) edible streetscapes and growing spaces
- » Policies that promote public care and accountability versus criminalization
- » Accessible and comfortable seating, water fountains and public washrooms
- » Flexible cultural plaza for a diverse range of vendors and all season outdoor activities
- » Active transportation infrastructure
- » Traffic calming design interventions

- » Street art created by local artists
- » Cultural hub to support economic development initiatives, capacity-building opportunities & cross-cultural connections
- » Generous sidewalk widths to accommodate lingering, patios, informal play and performances
- » Small to mid-scale culturally responsive amenity and service spaces
- » Digital streetscapes that promote cultural and environmental exploration
- » City of Toronto cultural districts promotional page
- » Online community cultural archives
- » Free Wi-Fi and access to other digital necessities
- » Multifarious affordable housing typologies

What do you imagine?

Jay Pitter Placemaking is an award-winning, bi-national practice mitigating growing divides in cities across North America. The practice leads institutional city-building projects focused on public space design and policy, mobility equity, cultural planning, gender-responsive design, transformative public engagement and healing fraught sites. Additionally, Jay Pitter, Principal Placemaker, shapes urgent urbanism discourse through media platforms such as the Los Angeles Times and Canadian Architect. Ms. Pitter is a sought-after speaker who has delivered keynotes for organizations such as United Nations Women and the Canadian Urban Transit Association, and is also an urban planning lecturer who has engaged students at Cornell University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Princeton University and numerous other post-secondary institutions. Guided by Ms. Pitter's expertise, which is located at the nexus of urban design and social justice, the team translates community insights into the built environment and urban policy.

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