

Public Art & RAC: Strategy Report

Building on *Public Art & RAC: A Historical Primer*, this report summarizes Phase 3 of RAC’s investigation into public art wherein Justice + Joy worked with RAC staff and commissioners to develop a strategy for RAC’s role in public art in the region through gaining a better understanding of the region’s public art ecosystem, as well as how RAC’s interests and skills align with the ecosystems’ opportunity areas. Phase 3 involved research, surveying, capacity-building and strategy workshops that helped assess the best role for RAC to play in public art in the region.

From interviews with public art administrators from the peer cities of Pittsburgh and Indianapolis, we gleaned that peer cities have similar ecosystems with similar challenges and assets to St. Louis. In most ecosystem roles where St. Louis experiences a dearth, these peer cities do as well. One key difference, however, is that Pittsburgh and Indianapolis both have dedicated technical assistance providers and educational resources for public art, which has allowed their public art environments to grow. To build a healthy public art ecosystem, interviewees highlighted the importance of prioritizing collaboration and creating clarity around roles and responsibilities within the ecosystem, and creating a balanced mix of local and non-local contributors, and a diverse set of makers locally.

To build out the database, J+J developed a survey shared with public art stakeholders identified by RAC. Key takeaways from the survey-led ecosystem review include the following: there are many advocates for public art in the region, yet they are not coordinated; many stakeholders inhabit multiple roles, with few stakeholders focused on singular roles; no stakeholder serves as a convener, an important feature of many public art ecosystems; fewer entities exist in the resource/structural quadrant, highlighting a need for more resources and structural support for public art as a regional practice; St. Louis lacks professional maintenance providers; the region could benefit from increased capacity in professional public art curation; and there is an opportunity for upskilling and developing more knowledge and training in public art for practitioners in various roles.

RAC staff and commissioners devised the following collective vision for RAC’s role in public art in the region during the September 2023 Strategy Workshop:

OUTCOMES OF PUBLIC ART		
<p>Belonging</p> <p>Public art in St. Louis contributes to a sense of belonging for all residents by crafting a sense of place through public aesthetic and narrative that reflects residents’ lived realities and interests, facilitating healing, connection and joy.</p>	<p>Unity</p> <p>Public art in St. Louis fosters unity by engaging regional stakeholders in collaboration to improve the public realm.</p>	<p>Equitable Economic Growth</p> <p>Public art in St. Louis facilitates equitable economic growth by creating attractions, excitement and a sense of unique local identity throughout diverse parts of the region, and with a prescient understanding of how arts interact with the economic forces of development.</p>

ROLES FOR RAC TO PLAY	
<p>Funder</p> <p>As RAC continues to focus on its core work of grantmaking, it can support public art through funding opportunities. RAC can integrate its values around public art into its grantmaking approach.</p>	<p>Communicator</p> <p>In the role of communicator, RAC may focus on sharing public art content and resources. RAC might share with the community public art best practice, information regarding public art education and professional development, public art opportunities, information about public art in the region, and more.</p>

For RAC, public art has the power to create a region of belonging, unity and a place of equitable economic growth. As RAC steps into its roles as a public art funder and communicator, other partners will be vital to create a thriving and coordinated ecosystem.

