

FREEDOM MAPS

Activating Legacies of Culture, Art,
and Organizing in the U.S. South



Freedom Maps

by Ron Ragin and Maria Cherry Rangel

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1.

INTRODUCTION:

BACKGROUND, APPROACH, AND WHO WE ARE

The U.S. South is the country's most populated region, yet it is also the most underfunded and overlooked. According to the National Center for Responsive Philanthropy, between 2010 and 2014 the South received \$41 in foundation funding per person, compared to the national funding rate of \$451 per person and the New York state rate of \$995 per person.¹

¹Schlegel, Ryan and Peng, Stephanie. As the South Grows: On Fertile Soil. National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. 2017.

Considering that the U.S. South is home to 38.3% of all Americans and 40% of the nation's poor people, these figures represent a stark disinvestment, particularly when coupled with other harsh realities the region faces.

Economic disparities, extractive industries, the deepening severity of the climate crisis, food inequality, mass incarceration, and the opioid epidemic continue to shape life outcomes for Southerners.² Seven of the 10 states with the lowest rates of educational attainment are Southern states.³ Infant mortality is higher in the Black Belt than anywhere else in the nation,⁴ and Black men in the region routinely have mortality rates 50% higher than the national average.

Over one-half of the nation's women live in the U.S. South, yet Southern women face low political representation, increasing threats to their reproductive rights, and a significant wage gap, with Latina women in the South earning the lowest of any racial or ethnic group.⁵ Five of the Southern states do not have a minimum wage.⁶ The absence of banks, particularly in rural areas, has made the region a prime area for predatory lenders.

Struggles with infrastructure, as evidenced by crumbling water and sewage systems in both metro and rural areas, and lack of public transportation, continue to inform the daily lives of Southerners. Disasters resulting from extractive industries and climate change have presented both short- and long-term impacts, and in the process, exposed mass inequities of poverty and racism and led to privatization and displacement of whole communities. Additionally, Southern states accounted for more than half of new HIV diagnoses annually, and eight of the 10 states with the highest rates of new HIV diagnoses are in the South.⁷

²<https://www.census.gov> US Census Bureau, 2017

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_educational_attainment, American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2017

⁴ https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/infant_mortality_rates/infant_mortality.htm, Center for Disease Control, 2017; Barry-Jester, Anna Maria. "Patterns Of Death In The South Still Show The Outlines Of Slavery." April 2017. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/mortality-black-belt/>

⁵ Kaiser Family Foundation. State Health Facts. <https://www.kff.org/statedata/>

⁶ National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-minimum-wage-chart.aspx#Table>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/policies/cdc-hiv-in-the-south-issue-brief.pdf>, Center for Disease Control, 2017 September 2019

⁸ Throughout this report, we use the term "practitioners" as an umbrella to encompass the many ways that people who are deeply engaged in artistic and cultural practices name themselves – e.g., artist, cultural organizer, culture worker, creative, maker, builder, etc.

Battles over the narrative of "What the South is" and "Who Southerners are" remain a critical space of political struggle. The South is a region where legacies of slavery, the Civil War, and the Confederacy still echo in the cultural psyche. The region is strongly associated with mythologies of white supremacy and delusions of grandeur, all the while discounting the brutalities of African enslavement, genocide of Native peoples, and Jim Crow segregation. These contested narratives appear today in struggles around Confederate monument removal, and continue to reinforce and rationalize institutions of racism, as demonstrated by mass incarceration's intense grasp on the region.

But that is not the whole story.

The South is also a place of great opportunity, with a strong legacy of resistance and innovation born, in part, out of necessity. Every day, our ancestors forged new, creative ways to persevere, as do our present-day communities, particularly the most marginalized of us. We recall the history of marronage; united by a vision for freedom, Black and Indigenous communities came together to care for each other and develop new infrastructures and systems of mutual support, despite extreme social, political, and environmental conditions. Generations forward, these practices of self-determination, mutual care, and mobilization resulted in the formation of social aid and pleasure clubs, as a means of gaining economic security. The same principles made possible actions like the Montgomery bus boycott. And even more generations forward, we now see these traditions extended via the practice of solidarity economies, which networks of Southern creatives and cultural practitioners have established to share the resources, equipment, and ideas that keep artistic work going.⁸

Thinking about this rich legacy of perseverance and innovation, we consider the role that arts and culture has played in the survival of Southern people. We know that we are here because of the rich and varied traditions that shape our home. Our art – songs, dances, stories, crafts, and more – pieces together the maps that previous generations left us, so that we can find our way. Art and cultural practices helped our ancestors survive the violence of empire, colonization, and enslavement. These tools paved the way to freedom, recorded oral histories so we would not forget, laid down magic to shift the tides of power, connected us to each other, transmitted organizing messages and strategies to our people, and gave us enough hope to continue for another day. As **CARLTON TURNER**, Lead Artist / Director of the Mississippi Center for Cultural Production (Sipp Culture), shared:

“I think about stories from [Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon] about the music and singing of freedom songs from the front line. The music itself, the singing, allowed them to have the courage to stare death in the face and not quiver. Not just the singing, the songs and the vibrations allowed the rhythm and the heartbeats to sync into one unit. Many people don’t think about music and art in these ways, as a strategy for reinforcement rather than adornments.”

In conceptualizing this scan, we considered many factors: the hardships, the legacies, the power of our traditions, the ongoing struggle, and the concrete need to apply a deeply intersectional lens to the realities that Southern artists and cultural workers are navigating. We asked ourselves: How do we build an arts and cultural infrastructure that responds to the needs of the formerly incarcerated Black trans woman artist who doesn’t have access to a working computer or stable housing? Or the artist with chronic illness in rural Kentucky’s coal country, who doesn’t have access to a car or public transportation? How do we build arts-integrated movements that respond to the needs of Southerners in this political moment?

Our approach utilized a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to gain an understanding of the past and present state of arts and cultural practice in the South, the mechanisms through which work is happening, and practitioners’ visions of where they want to see the field grow. Methodologies for the project included interviews with Southern artists, culture workers, organizers, and grantmakers; visioning sessions and story circles in communities across the region; and analysis of secondary data that helps shed light on the current infrastructure and supports for cultural and artistic activity in the South.

The following values drove our approach to the scan:

- Center those most affected by injustice and oppressions
- Engage in deep listening as a practice
- Meet people where they are – physically, politically, emotionally
- Do not leave anybody behind, seek out the most marginalized, ensure accessibility, work to redistribute resources
- Center our cultural traditions as core to the work
- Identify opportunities to connect where people are already gathering

The Ford Foundation initially commissioned this research in fall 2017, on a three-month timeline, to guide its internal portfolios as part of an institution-wide effort to learn more about the South. When support toward a public version of the report was no longer aligned with the foundation’s strategy, we remained committed to seeing this project through to completion and publication. We know that this body of work captures important truths about an ecosystem that remains largely misunderstood by the national field, and that the rich wisdom offered by our community of Southern creatives throughout the report carries many lessons for this political moment, and furthermore, deserves to be shared. In 2019, with the support of our new partners, Ignite/Arts Dallas at Southern Methodist University and Alternate ROOTS, we initiated a second stage of research to update the data – a bit outdated by that point – and fill some of the gaps from the first iteration of the report.

During the span of those few years between research periods, the South shifted in some unsurprising but profound ways. White supremacists throughout the region grew even louder and more violent, emboldened by a national leader who espoused their values. Southeast Louisiana lost miles of land, and our streets began to flood with regularity, so that it became a common occurrence to hear of neighbors, colleagues, and friends losing their vehicles to floodwaters, and to become trapped for a period of hours or days in a house or workplace. New legislation was introduced across the region that moved to severely limit access to abortion providers and clinics across the South, as well as legislation that harshly violated the rights and protections of trans folks. The resource gap between rural and metro areas widened and people struggled to get what they needed. And the South became an epicenter for the detention of migrants. Three of the top five states detaining migrants are located in the South, via for-profit detention centers and the cooperation of local sheriffs who fill beds for ICE. Throughout all of this change, our Southern

communities came together to show up for each other, share stories, organize, demand better, and get free. This report is fueled by those movements, and is shared in the spirit of truth telling, demanding better, and getting free.

In both rounds of research, we relied heavily on personal relationships and the Southern networks of which we are members/participants, as well as the generosity of people and organizations to support our timeframe and efforts. Our collaborators’ enthusiasm and encouragement illuminates their shared desire to contribute to and learn from research that centers Southern arts and culture. People want to tell their stories and want to be heard.

Throughout the scan, practitioners repeatedly remarked on the elongation of time in Southern communities, as well as the importance of honoring process, establishing trust, and building authentic (not transactional) relationships. As such, while our priority was to center practitioners facing the deepest marginalization, and whose realities most need to be shared, our timeframes did not always sync with their on-the-ground realities. These individuals often take longer to reach, as they typically hold multiple roles in the community, are stretched thin, and are often putting out fires. We believe that who we could reach through the scan reflects both comfort and precarity.

Given these constraints, we know this report has gaps for the following practitioners and data:

- Asian and Pacific Islander practitioners
- Practitioners based in Virginia
- Data on support from community foundations, local arts councils, individual donors, and corporations

In addition, we tried to find balance between the nonprofit arts and cultural landscape, on which our quantitative research primarily focuses, and the fact that much of the creative work happening throughout the South occurs in other formations. Our interviews and vision circles particularly focused on work that could be described as community-based. We know that there are vibrant communities of artists and cultural workers who operate in a variety of forms and contexts outside of these arenas – from for-profit businesses (e.g., galleries, studios, clubs, festivals), to larger-budget institutions, to unincorporated collectives, to front porches. Our research suggests that the organizations that receive the majority of funds mirror national trends; they tend to be larger-budget and center Western European-derived fine art forms and to have audiences that are mostly white, urban, and formally educated. Further research is needed to shed light on

how these dynamics specifically play out in the South and how broader creative and artistic practices intersect and diverge with the nonprofit arts ecosystem.

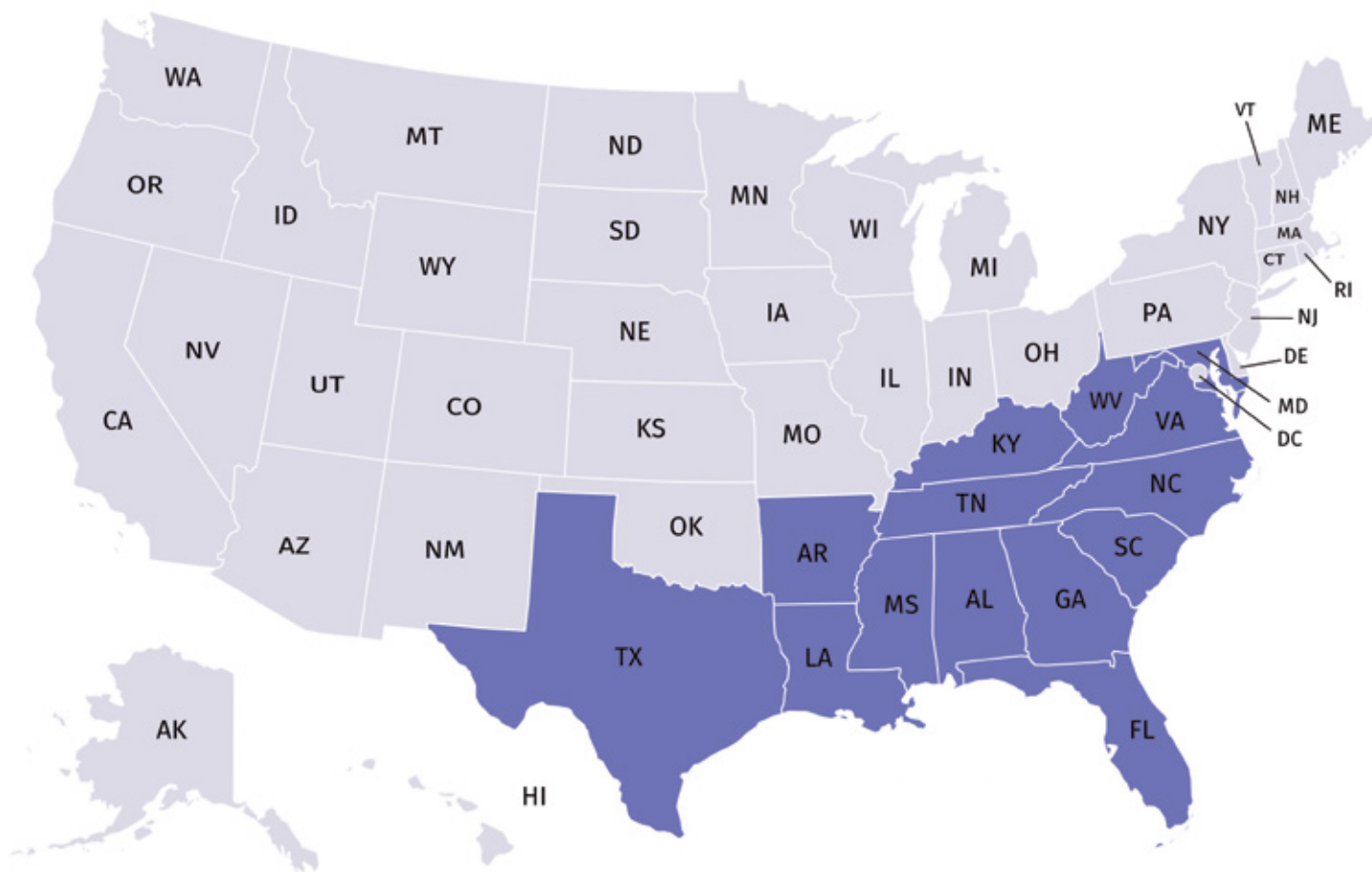
It is impossible for any scan to fully represent the breadth of cultural work happening in the South or any other geographic region. Our findings reveal impressions, rather than a complete picture, and identify areas for further inquiry and exploration.

A NOTE ON GEOGRAPHY

There are many definitions of the South, and people are likely to disagree about what states should be included. We respect Southern self-determination and acknowledge that multiple factors inform debates around these identifications. For this scan, our definition of the South included the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi,

North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. Our 14-state region most closely aligns with Alternate ROOTS' definition of the South, as well as the organization's description of "communities of place, tradition, or spirit," which nods to the shared legacies that unite Southerners.

South Region for the Cultural Scan



The U.S. Census' South definition also aligns somewhat closely with ours, except Oklahoma, which we've included in the Midwest, and Delaware and D.C., which we've included in the Northeast. It is important to note that there

is variation in the South definition in some of the secondary data sets we analyzed. These variations are indicated throughout the report where relevant.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



María Cherry Rangel is the daughter of Moroccan and Mexican agricultural workers and musicians who worked the land of many Southern states. Cherry is a New Orleans-based cultural strategist, resource organizer, and equity coach focused on interrupting systemic bias in philanthropy and supporting grassroots ecosystems. Cherry's advocacy has ensured that millions of dollars have been redirected to communities of color and LGBTQ communities. As Director of Strategic Initiatives for Foundation for Louisiana (FFL), Cherry utilizes her expertise in organizational growth, arts and culture, racial justice, and LGBTQ organizing to inform FFL's future. As Co-Founder/Director of Mangos With Chili (2006-16), she developed the work of over 150 QTPOC [Queer and Trans People of Color] artists, launched 80+ productions via national tours and local seasons of programming, initiated dialogue around racism in arts funding and practice, and ushered in a new era of possibility for QTPOC-centered arts and culture. She was a 2018-19 Intercultural Leadership Institute Fellow and shares her expertise on QTPOC art and culture and Southern arts and culture nationally. She wrote her first arts grant at the age of 15 in support of her father's application to be a master folklife artist, and after that success, hasn't stopped.

Ron Ragin is a performing artist, researcher, strategist, and coach. He has worked in the field of cultural philanthropy for more than 10 years. He was the inaugural program officer for the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, where he helped develop new grantmaking programs at the intersection of arts and social change. Prior to that, he was Program Officer in the Performing Arts Program at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and a Senior Research Analyst at the Center for Effective Philanthropy. Alongside his research and philanthropic efforts, Ron sustains a vibrant interdisciplinary performance practice. His work integrates music of the African Diaspora, embodied ancestral memory, improvisational creative processes, liberation aesthetics, and the development and maintenance of spiritual technologies. He has received support from Alternate ROOTS, MAP Fund, New England Foundation for the Arts, and Theatre Communications Group, among others. Ron grew up in Perry, Georgia, and received his earliest musical training at the Saint James Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. He can throw down on some biscuits, makes a mean red velvet cake, and lives in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The research and writing of this report was deeply personal, and we've chosen to embrace this fact by using the first person throughout the text. As queer/prismatic/nonbinary Southern arts practitioners of color with rural roots, we know that all too often the stories, work, and wisdom of the most marginalized fall under the radar in most research. Our lens and methodology offer an attempt to interrupt this pattern. Given the tumultuous social, political, environmental, and economic realities in which our communities are now operating, we believe that this research is critical, timely, and holds many lessons for the arts and culture field and beyond. Our hope is that this project will illuminate the incredible ways that Southern artists and cultural workers have found to create and share work, shape movements, sustain ourselves and our communities, and ultimately save lives.

11. LEGACY

Southerners understand the **inextricable link between art, culture, and social justice work**, building on the long traditions of cultural organizing in the South.

"My favorite memory is listening to John O'Neal talk about the tour they did through the Mississippi Delta during Freedom Summer with the Free Southern Theater. Their work was beginning to take such traction and people were learning. Fannie Lou Hamer came to one of their shows, and the conversation they had afterward was really important in framing what was happening with sharecroppers. And they were having these record houses of people coming to see their work. The Klan burned down one of the churches where they were going to do the show. So, they did the show in a corn field next to the burned down church, and they had a big turnout despite the domestic terrorism."

CARLTON TURNER

Lead Artist / Director, Mississippi Center for Cultural Production (Sipp Culture)

To understand the link between art, culture, and movement building in the U.S. South is to acknowledge the region's long history of political organizing in direct response to the ways that Black communities, Indigenous communities, communities of color, and queer communities have been terrorized. The harmful and regressive legislation emerging in national politics today is, in part, a response to struggles and successes originating from the South. The region is a hotbed of resistance, from movements addressing Indigenous sovereignty, to abolitions of slavery and segregation, to labor organizing, to advancing the rights of sex workers, to climate justice. The South is very practiced in these fights.

In addition to the more visible roles that artists played in the Civil Rights and Black liberation struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, Southerners have consistently woven art and culture into movement work as a liberation strategy. Artistic and cultural practice is not seen as a preface or entertaining pause to the work; it is the work. As cultural strategist **SAGE CRUMP** reflects:

"There is no place in the world historically or currently that has activated our culture as a practice to transform the world like the U.S. South. The South is still one of those places that, because of lack of access to a lot of things, has maintained cultural practices along an arc of history that, in this current moment of freak out and adaptation, folks are needing to learn. Cultural practices and creativity are at the heart of justice movements and how communities both respond and vision for themselves. And artistic practices have a history and intention. What looks like ways of managing because of lack are more often ways of managing towards relationship."

Art and culture have been vital, powerful organizing tools to Southerners because they create connection and center relationship, which ultimately allows for base building and mobilization. It's for this reason that Black churches were critical sites of civil rights organizing, to provide an iconic example. Arts and culture also help disrupt geographic isolation, acting as a bridge between distant communities that face similar struggles. As the quote above illustrates, Free Southern Theater was a uniting force, particularly among rural communities, and was instrumental toward advancing the goals of Freedom Summer, creating vital space for Black communities to dialogue about their realities and vision their futures. Similarly, Appalshop's early work to unite Appalachian communities around economic justice disrupted the coal industry and led to the organization becoming a hub for action, filmmaking and storytelling, organizing, and education.

Generations later, Queer Appalachia builds on this legacy by producing a quarterly publication, providing microgrants to their community, and running an online hub centering mutual aid, visibility, regional news, and connection for LGBTQ folks in the region. Queer Appalachia uses their platforms to address some of the most critical issues impacting Appalachia, such as racism, extractive industry, the opioid crisis, rural survival for queers and trans folks, and more.

Arts practitioners and activists today understand the intersection of art and justice as an inherited tradition and as sound organizing strategy. Acknowledging the legacies at the intersection of art and justice work is key to understanding the vital relationship between social change and art and culture in the South.

WORKING AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF ART, CULTURE, AND JUSTICE

When examining the foundations and legacies of present-day art, culture, and justice work in the South, practitioners identified the following practices.

Naming one's lineage is a core Southern practice/value.

Practitioners often begin speaking about their work by recognizing the artists, cultural workers, and organizers who have come before. They also explicitly acknowledge and draw from the wisdom that exists in their ancestors' practices and strategies.

"I think about civil rights here in this particular city, and how many civil rights activists came out of Louisiana, I mean there is a fighting spirit. I think about the tradition of Black Masking Indians, and the ways in which they were not only masking physically, but also socially masking, while building power. I think about entertainment and the idea of song and dance as these passive ways of inserting power and inserting strategy into the work, and by that I mean, you know, through performance, through song and dance, I think that those have the capacity to kind of create the call and response that were not and are not always understood or seen by our white counterparts. They're sometimes seen as simply entertaining, this thing they can't quite put their finger on in terms of enjoying or consuming, and yet, I think that people of color have constantly used those as areas of movement-building momentum."

GIA HAMILTON

Executive Director and Chief Curator, New Orleans African American Museum

As another example, Southerners on New Ground (SONG) has modeled their current campaigns to end incarceration and pre-trial detention on key historic practices of abolition movements:

"SONG's bail out actions are rooted in the legacy of Black people buying each other's freedom. The Black Mama Bail Out, specifically, brings attention to the way women, trans women, femmes, femme-identifying people, etc., are left out of the narrative of police brutality and mass incarceration. As a tactic to confront the money bail system, these actions have been both inspiring and heartbreaking. Dismantling the prison industrial complex is daunting, but these actions have created a tangible entry point for political education and for people to understand systemic oppression."

GRACE NICHOLS

Performance Artist; 2018 Cultural Organizing Fellow, SONG

The importance of honoring matriarchal traditions (e.g., quilting; storytelling; food ways; door-to-door community organizing; and survival strategies for disrupting patriarchy, gender-based violence, and economic hardship) was of particular concern to many practitioners. These artistic and cultural practices have been passed down matrilineally, or within queer kinship networks. They have survived despite their erasure from popular histories of Southern organizing and activism and despite attempts to delegitimize them as valid cultural practice, in part due to gender bias. As one vision session participant shared:

"All of my stories begin and end with my grandmothers. I've been thinking a lot recently about how powerful these

women were, but how powerless they were in the time and place in which they grew up and lived. Central Appalachia is a very matriarchal place. We revere our grandmothers and our mothers. We hold them really high but also don't recognize them for how they hold this place together in the work that they do. Their cultural work – keeping families together, feeding us – and also work in a more traditional sense outside of the home Their contributions – especially in Eastern Kentucky, in Central Appalachia – are overlooked, and certainly in national narratives about this place. When I think about this place, I think about all the women who helped build it, all the women who are still here and helping build the future."

IVY BRASHEAR

Appalachian Transition Director, Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED)

Artist **DANIEL COLEMAN** reflects on the undertold history of Black women's role in the Civil Rights Movement:

"I think about the role of Black women in organizing, but who haven't been spoken about as being at the forefront, like, people who don't know that it was four Black women who organized – they were four Black women from A&T who organized sit-ins; it was too dangerous for four Black women to be in the front line like that, so they sent four Black men. But it was the women making it, and people don't know that history."

Community institutions serve as culture keepers and archives.

Whether formally incorporated or not, longstanding cultural organizations in the South often serve as repositories of knowledge and history. Some examples that specifically emerged in this research effort include Appalshop (Whitesburg, Kentucky), Esperanza Center for Peace and Justice (San Antonio, Texas), Ashé Cultural Arts Center (New Orleans, Louisiana), Highlander Research and Education Center (New Market, Tennessee), and Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator (Miami, Florida). Each of them has a decades-long presence in their communities, and in addition to stewarding deep histories of people and place, has served as an organizing and political education hub to advance innumerable initiatives.

These institutions' practices of self-archiving reflect the need of communities to record and document their own histories, which might otherwise be erased or forgotten. During our time in Pine Mountain, Kentucky, we met Ms. Carolyn Sundy of the East Kentucky Social Club,

a community center and social club in Lynch, Kentucky, that was founded by Black miners. She shared the oral history of the town and the club's founding, along with a meticulous visual archive detailing nearly 60 years of community history. Similarly, the New Orleans Video Access Coalition (New Orleans, Louisiana) and Esperanza Center have both made incredible efforts to self-archive the histories and trajectories of their organizations and communities over the past decades.

Beyond institutions, rich community-based archiving and documentation practices also exist across the region. Filmmaker and cultural organizer Audria Byrd speaks to the importance of having an archive for Black trans Southerners and connects this documentation practice to that of past generations:

"I love to see Black Trans people out here telling Black Trans stories, documenting Black Trans liberation, Black Trans support, community support. Because when you look back at what exists in media about Black Trans folks, it's very scarce, and so it's vital that we tell our own stories, and that we're telling our stories now. Because our stories have not always been told. ... I think that movements in general use documentation as a means of safety. I think that when we are moving in community, and when we are speaking truth to power, I think it's important that the world watch with us. I mean, "love" is a complicated word for this particular thing, but, the protests and marches that happened in the South, during the Civil Rights Movement – I love that there was documentation of that, because I think that we have things on camera that people can't really deny anymore."

AUDRIA BYRD

Filmmaker & cultural organizer

Tell your own movement story, or someone else will (or won't).

Many participants lamented the invisibility of the South's movement history outside of the Civil Rights Movement and described these untold histories as a foundational reality. Akin to minimizing the role of women in movement histories, the Southern region has been overlooked in U.S. histories of radical political movements, to the detriment of our collective knowledge and strategy, despite being home to some of the most innovative and impactful organizing tactics that have led to significant change. As such, Southern practitioners are quick to offer stories that aren't often shared.

“I WANT TO TELL MY OWN STORY”

In keeping with values of self-determination, the South is home to a rich practice of self-archiving, informed by the belief that we are the ones to best tell our own stories. Across the region, oral histories, self-documentation practices, storytelling, and archive creation are important aspects of community life.

One such story is the peculiarly harsh impact of the 1990s culture wars on Southern artists and cultural organizations, and the threats to funding they faced in an already precarious philanthropic landscape. Another, as reflected by artist and Alternate ROOTS member Nicole Garneau, is the contribution of Southern-based queer organizing to national LGBTQ movement-building efforts. She specifically highlighted organizing in New Orleans following the Upstairs Lounge fire, an arson attack on a gay bar in 1973 that killed 32 people and injured an additional 15. Despite a significant legacy of queer action and organizing throughout the South, defining moments in the national narrative around LGBTQ movement history center Stonewall, the Compton's Cafeteria riot, and other events that occurred outside of the South. D.M. Barrera of InTRANSitive, a Little Rock, Arkansas, based organization that supports trans folks – particularly around surviving violence, immigration, community building, and arts and cultural organizing – speaks to the erasure of Southern contributions to social justice movements:

“I think that folks who are not from the South believe that the only culture in the South is a racist culture, and KKK culture, and a culture of segregation and slavery. But there's a lot more – there's a big history of resistance and a lot of movements were born in the South and then spread to the rest of the country. We could change this narrative with visual art, and storytelling if we had the opportunity to tell our stories. We could promote all these folks who are out there but don't call themselves artists but have been

out there doing the work. We could have more uplifting of our stories. When you see these lists of artists to watch out for, hardly ever is there anybody from the South listed in these artists' lists. Or people in movements – who changed the trans movement – you don't see folks from the South acknowledged or represented. If we could get more stuff written about us and by us, we could change that narrative.”

D.M. BARRERA
InTRANSitive

Uplift and maintain the oral tradition.

Everything important and worth knowing is not written down. In the South's historical wake, where enslaved people were punished for reading and writing, and where discretion was key to maintaining pathways to liberation, the oral tradition was essential for transmitting messages and sharing knowledge. From singing circles to community meetings, the oral transmission of knowledge and wisdom remains an essential part of Southern cultural practice. It stands as a distinct discipline that amplifies storytelling, song, documentation, and self-archiving, to name a few practices. Oral traditions thrive across the region and function not only as repositories of the past, but also as technologies for continued visioning and remembering. Understanding the foundational importance of these practices is a core cultural competency for working in partnership with Southern communities.

THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE CONTINUES

Practitioners across the region articulated the ongoing need to shift power in the South – in terms of the inequities they navigate in their lives, in the arts and culture sector, and in alignment with liberatory visions for the South. The following issues were particularly resonant as current struggles impacting the lives of artists and their communities:

- Dismantling structural racism
- Poverty and economic justice
- Efforts to end criminalization and mass incarceration
- Migrant justice and abolishing ICE
- Healing the opioid epidemic
- Food inequality and food justice
- Transportation and geographic isolation
- Extractive industries
- Housing

Winning battles to dismantle structural oppression requires longevity, tenacity, a centering of local leadership and wisdom, and the integration of arts and cultural practice – characteristics participants in this research process associate with successful Southern organizing approaches. Recent political victories in the South are in part a result of decades of organizing and mobilization. As Project South reflected on Roy Moore's unanticipated 2017 defeat in Alabama:

“There are no national groups who have relationships with every warden in every jail in Alabama. There are local leaders who know how to navigate the churches, the jails, the nuances of a fragmented and contested ground like Alabama. Local leadership knows how to move and how to win. Local leadership in the South also knows

how to move with losses so that we keep moving forward towards the much larger wins for all people.”⁹

MK WEGMANN of MK Arts Co also reflected on the need for longevity in shifting power:

“An important strategy is to understand the practicality of long-term goals and not get caught up in short-term failures – understanding that if it took 600 years to create a system of racial oppression, it won't be dismantled in my lifetime. So how does one contribute to the ongoing work over the span of one's life?”

Culture is a longstanding and constantly evolving force. It is critically important that any social change strategy that seeks to address structures of power also addresses culture as both an object of change and a tool that can be marshalled toward change. Arts, culture, and the systems and institutions that support them have a role to play in creating justice movements that respond to the unique needs of the South. We must think long term. We must center the wisdom and experience of local leaders, who know their landscapes. And especially within the arts sector, we must continue to center artistic and cultural practice, as we organize, build power, and ultimately win.

Rurality and the peculiar erasure of Southeastern Native American communities are two Southern challenges that also emerged from interviews. While these items didn't emerge for most interviewees, we want to raise them up as specific areas of concern that affect marginalized communities and artists within the South.

Erasure of Indigenous Communities

The last U.S. Census found that of all U.S. regions, the South had the second-largest American Indian and Alaska Native population, alone or in combination with another race. Nationally, this population is growing at over twice the rate of the total U.S. population.¹⁰ Many Native American tribes and communities in the Southeast have not received full federal recognition, which primarily constitutes an acknowledgement of tribal sovereignty on the part of the U.S. federal government, and the establishment of a government-to-government relationship with the

⁹“Alabama Victory & the Importance of Black Southern Organizing.” Project South, 2017. <https://projectsouth.org/alabama-victory/>

¹⁰“The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010.” 2010 Census Briefs. U.S. Census Bureau.

U.S. federal government. Federal recognition is also a means to receive support from the U.S. government and other agencies. In addition to ongoing efforts by the U.S. government to assimilate and remove Native Americans from their territories, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 sought to incentivize and/or coerce tribes to exchange their territories for federal lands west of the Mississippi River. Thousands of those who would not voluntarily go were forcibly removed. In the aftermath of centuries of conflict, some Indigenous communities, including many in the Southeast, went underground or removed outward-facing indications of their cultures and heritages. This history of oppression continues to have negative ramifications. As some of our interviewees stated:

"There is limited national support for Native communities in the Southeastern United States. This has to do with a number of factors: settler colonialism and all of its legacies, including the Indian Removal Act of 1830, lack of full federal recognition (in many cases), anti-Black racism, etc."

ASHLEY MINNER
Community Artist / Folklorist

"Navigating that whole funding world and also our identity is a challenge. Because the Houma Nation is not federally recognized, so we are applying for these grants for funding for Indigenous people, but it's like, 'Are they going to validate us as being Indigenous enough?' The Houma has this legacy of colonialism, which also comes with mixed marriages."

MONIQUE VERDIN
Artist, Another Gulf Is Possible

As rising seas, land loss, and increasing storm threats impact tribal homes, particularly in Southeast Louisiana, Indigenous communities in the South are some of the first to experience the impacts of climate change and face climate migration. This carries impacts for arts and culture. How do we work to support Indigenous cultural practices from geographies that no longer exist or will soon disappear?

Rural Communities

Nearly 50 percent of the rural population of the U.S. lives in the South, approximately 28 million people.¹¹ Rural places face some distinct challenges, including lack of transportation infrastructure, geographic isolation, lack of broadband access, and lower educational attainment than urban centers. This research project's interviews and visioning sessions corroborated these statistics and highlighted other areas of concern – namely a lack of formal gathering spaces in rural places, and the animosity and invisibility facing LGBTQ people.

"There isn't a lot of support for Queer Appalachia in Bluefield. We exist primarily and thrive online. Around town we keep to ourselves exactly what we do because there would be little to no approval for it. Plenty of folks get offended just at the words 'queer' and 'Appalachia' being used together. We have good relationships with our rural post office workers and our friends at the print shop. Other than that we keep it under wraps, for our security and safety. There was an arson at one of our places in October that was especially frightening because we keep our address private. The people who know the address, you can count them on two hands. We didn't see how we could get tighter on security after the arson. A while back folks from our group and larger network were doxed, meaning their private and personal information was publicly posted. We took precautions back then for safety."

CHELSEA DOBERT-KEHN
Curator at Queer Appalachia

At the same time, participants in the research process spoke at length about rural places' strong social and cultural fabric, community resilience, innovation, and embedded systems of mutual support. One research highlight was the common practice of people playing many roles within a community, emphasizing the hybridity that interviewees and vision session participants attribute to Southern artistic and cultural practice (and beyond).

"Rural folks have to be more accountable to one another because they necessarily need more from one another. There are simply fewer people providing resources. In cities, you're not dependent on one person. In rural communities, people have to bring their whole selves. Folks may be the economic development person, but they also coach softball, mentor folks in math and can come over and fix your tiller. Part of the reason this happens is because folks are aware of each other's skills, and they ask! A lot of my work in the South reminds me to bring all of myself and give what I can, and other folks will do the same."

SAVANNAH BARRETT
Director of Programs, Art of the Rural

FUTURE VISIONS FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES:

Getting Around and Getting Together

Many participants in vision sessions and interviews described challenges concerning rural communities' lack of access to dedicated artistic spaces, such as performance, rehearsal, or studio spaces. In rural communities, we heard stories of many organizations and practitioners taking innovative approaches to meet these space needs, including partnerships with community colleges, or simply gathering to make the work happen wherever there is a space available. However, many practitioners dreamed of dedicated community-centered spaces in which to practice. As **KIM PEVIA**, Founder of Artist Market Pembroke and Writer, reflects:

"We have what we need here other than resources. We have the art. We have the culture. What we don't have are venues, buildings, and infrastructure to support those things. Once they're there, we have what we need."

Rural practitioners (and some urban folks too!) also reflected on the need to have better access to transit in order to do their work and have a better quality of life, implicating a region-wide lack of investment in transportation infrastructure. In considering this issue, it is important to highlight the overall rural nature of the South, the geographic distances separating communities, and how these factors have multiple impacts on the lives of arts and cultural practitioners, including: food scarcity; lack of access to steady employment; criminalization, if a practitioner is on parole and is required to attend meetings or be penalized; and the inability to network and connect with others in the field. As **CHELSEA DOBERT-KEHN** shares:

"Part of what makes Appalachia so beautiful – the geography of the mountains – is also extremely isolating. And since Queer Appalachia is run out of the coalfields of West Virginia, that might be one of the most rural and isolated places in the state. To get to our closest friends and collaborators is about a two-hour drive, and people just don't always have the money to drive like that."

¹¹ "Life Off the Highway: A Snapshot of Rural America." December, 2016. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2016/12/life_off_the_highway.html

Additionally, as we consider increasing climate migration into rural areas and ongoing infrastructure needs therein,

finding opportunities to resource and invest in the cultural life of rural communities is essential.



Vision Board from Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange Session, Pine Mountain, KY, 2017.

III. HYBRIDITY

Hybrid art practices, intersectional analysis, and multiple geographies of community accountability are core components of the ways in which Southern artists pursue work that integrates art, culture, and social justice. This finding is informed by our interviews and vision circles, and is evidenced by artists' work in multiple issue areas, varied geographic scopes, and the many roles that individuals play in their communities.

"Almost without exception, artists are concerned with economic and social justice to a degree that I had not seen before. Now I find that those who do not work within that context are the exception rather than the rule."

MAURINE KNIGHTON

Program Director, Arts, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

When we asked interviewees to describe their work and the work they're seeing in the world, they readily offered numerous examples of issue areas that they sought to address. Without question, artists and cultural workers are using their skills and expertise to move the progressive needle and are doing so in ways that recognize the connections among multiple struggles for justice.

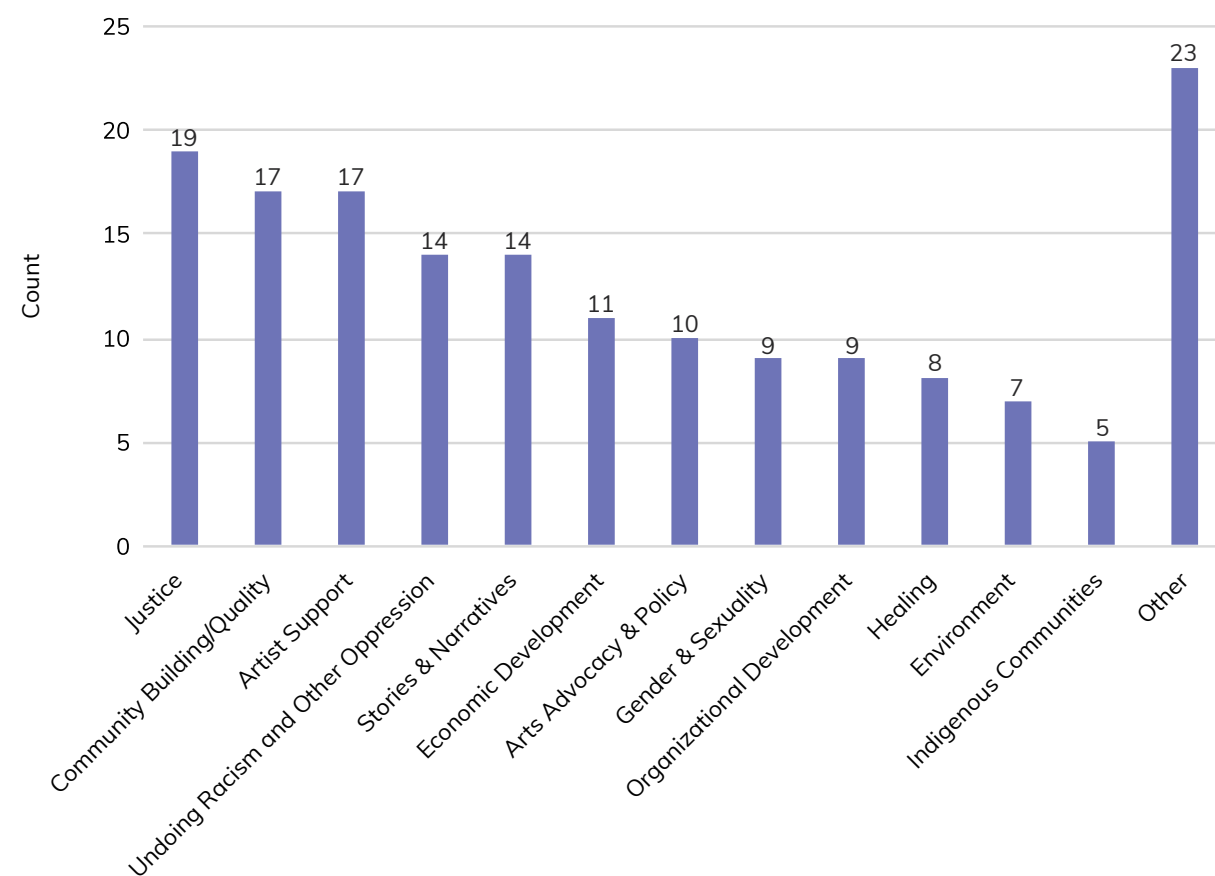
And justice is the most oft-mentioned issue area that intersects with interviewees' work. Artist support, also among the top three issues, takes a wide range of forms in our interviewees' practices: direct grantmaking to artists, establishing an artist market in rural North Carolina, curating Black diasporic artists, providing gathering space for queer women artists of color. Many interviewees work on multiple issue areas, embracing an intersectional/multi-issue approach that seems to characterize much of the work that people described in the South.

"Our work is intersectional because our lives are intersectional. We come from communities of color, working class communities, queer communities, the homeless, immigrants, domestic workers, the poor, people who have been pushed out of their homes and public spaces because of gentrification and privatization. We are artists, mothers, youth, elders, disabled, struggling for social, environmental, gender, and economic justice. Multi-issue cultural organizing is necessarily at the heart of our work."

GRACIELA SANCHEZ
Executive Director and Buena Gente of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center

Issues Addressed via Arts & Cultural Practice

(41 Respondents; all mentioned multiple issue areas)



The story of one of our interviewees, Monique Verdin, interdisciplinary artist and member of the Houma Nation, provides a window into this kind of hybrid and intersectional practice. Born in New Orleans, and raised in Southeast Louisiana and along the Gulf Coast, Monique developed an early interest in photography, which blossomed when she discovered that her Houma relatives were living next to waste pits and decided to document this injustice. From that early self-guided work, Monique moved into film, creating *My Louisiana Love* (2012), an intimate portrait of the ways environmental injustice and coastal erosion were affecting her life and the life of her family. Over time, she's collaborated with theater artists, environmentalists, and architects to pair stories with data about environmental devastation. Presently she is working with communities in St. Bernard Parish and the greater New Orleans area to create the Land Memory Bank and Seed Exchange – a mobile studio, environmental and cultural resource center, community history archive, civic dialogue space, and seed bank for native plants.¹²

As a mixed-race Native artist working outside of nonprofit structures and creating explicitly political work that confronts the powerful oil and gas industry, Monique has faced challenges obtaining funding for her work. However, local organizations have given her important boosts. She offered Studio in the Woods and Antenna Gallery as important supporters, each of which provides residency, exhibition, and project support to local artists. In part due to this backing from local organizations, she was an artist in Prospect 4, New Orleans' internationally acclaimed triennial art festival. Linkages between these parts of the Southern arts ecosystem – community-based (nonprofit) organizations, informal spaces, large-budget (nonprofit) organizations, for-profit entities – are ripe for further research.

"For me, I'm trying to create a safe space for community to be able to input their own instead of me telling their story. I'm challenged with how to do that authentically and be held accountable in the future. What are the best practices for that? ... To make sure that it's the community and that I'm not just taking it to tell my own story that I want to tell. To allow all of those truths that people have to be there."

MONIQUE VERDIN
Artist, *Another Gulf Is Possible*

As Monique's story illustrates, practitioners are using arts and cultural practices to address multiple levels of transformative impact at the same time, tackling personal, cultural, systemic, and communal change. As another interviewee, Community Artist / Folklorist **ASHLEY MINNER**, shared:

"When people are able to locate themselves as survivors in their own familial legacies, as heirs of deep knowledge and culture, they can understand wealth in a different way. Our communities are very rich, even if in a capitalist sense, many of us aren't so rich. Or maybe we're being asked to take on the label 'poor.' At the same time ... there's internalized oppression that happens, right? Sometimes when we learn to get by with less, we start to believe we deserve less. I hope the people I work with realize they deserve to live well, that they deserve as much or as good as anybody. Our work calls attention to the fact that there is disparity and this ought not be."

When asked about communities to which they are accountable, all interviewees mentioned working in at least two geographic scopes. We did not directly inquire about geographic scope. This finding may simply reflect the experiences of the people with whom we spoke. However, there seems to be a perception and/or experience that one needs to travel outside of the South, or have a regional or national presence, to obtain the resources necessary to do the work at home. This outside-inside effect may be another interesting area of further inquiry.

Artist Roger May's story illustrates aspects of this trans-local practice and accountability. After years away from his home state, May returned to Charleston, West Virginia, in 2017 to reconnect and contribute to the land that reared him. He works in long-form documentary, primarily through still photography, and is the designer and director of *Looking at Appalachia*. Founded in 2014, this crowdsourced image archive seeks to diversify and complicate understandings of the region and move beyond the War on Poverty-era stereotypes that continue to linger in the U.S. imaginary. Early in the project's life, May understood that as a white man, he couldn't be the only curator for a project concerned with a racially and gender diverse region that had primarily been documented by white men. He assembled editorial and advisory committees, representing folks from across Appalachia with an intentional mix of identities and

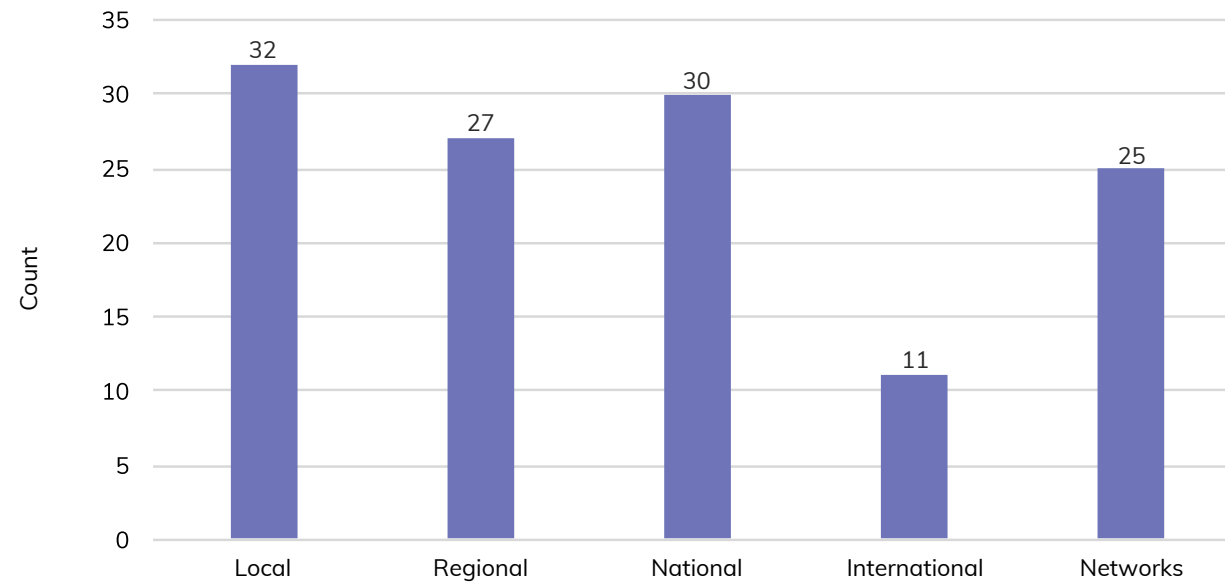
¹² For more information about Monique's work see <http://landmemorybank.org/> and <https://www.visionmakermedia.org/films/my-louisiana-love>.

experiences. To date, Looking at Appalachia has received more than 7,000 submissions and has operated without funding from any external sources. To support himself,

May continues to travel to work on reporting projects for national and international media outlets. That work pays the bills.

Geographic Scope of Interviewees' Work

(41 respondents; 34 mentioned multiple geographies)



When asked about accountability, the self-identified Appalachian American shared,

"I was having a talk with a friend of mine. He said, 'I consider myself West Virginian before I consider myself American.' I felt that. First and foremost, I feel responsible to my community that is West Virginia. Moving out from that, Greater Appalachia, and then peers and students that I've spoken in front of and have asked me questions. ... West Virginia is the only state that is completely contained in [the Appalachian] boundary. New York and Pittsburgh are also technically Appalachian, so I like to think about a responsibility to those places and those communities as it relates to this work."

Like our interviewees, we embraced hybridity in our research process. Our visioning sessions asked participants to consider the roles that arts and culture could play in making tangible 50-year visions for their communities. In the Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange (KY-RUX) gathering at Pine Mountain Settlement School, it was clear that one cannot separate addressing the opioid epidemic from economic justice, or lack of food security from improvements in rural transportation systems. And none of this can happen without art and culture. Many participants mentioned **the critical importance of gathering people over food, storytelling, and song – tried and true methods to break down barriers, meet on common ground, and make possible difficult conversations in geographically, politically, and culturally diverse communities across the state.** This practice and understanding is a fundamental part of the KY-RUX strategy for progressive organizing. It is particularly critical in bridging urban-rural divides that can create disconnects among politically aligned people who live and work in these different contexts.

FUTURE VISIONS AT THE INTERSECTIONS:

Environmental and Coastal Adaptation

In Miami and New Orleans, the two coastal cities in which we conducted visioning sessions, rising sea levels, coastal land loss, increased flood risk, and other impacts of climate change were of shared concern. Visioning session participants faced a peculiar challenge: imagining their communities two generations ahead also meant **reckoning with the fact that each of these cities will mostly be underwater.** However, not a single participant considered leaving their community. Rather, they imagined creative

approaches to rebuilding infrastructures that could sustain human life, illustrating a multi-generational commitment to place. Creating an inhabitable urban space for humans in these cities would require cross-sector and cross-issue problem solving and creative approaches to organizing. What is needed to sustain an arts practice or organization in the face of extreme environmental hazards? How could philanthropy support arts practice in the face of such adaptation?



Miami vision board showing elevated city infrastructure, 2017.

IV.

DIVESTMENT

When it comes to arts and culture, the South is the least well-funded U.S. region. This trend leads to a formalized nonprofit infrastructure that Southerners perceive as weak and inattentive to local needs and realities of Southern artists and communities.

When it comes to arts and culture, the South is the least well-funded U.S. region. This trend leads to a formalized nonprofit infrastructure that Southerners perceive as weak and inattentive to local needs and realities of Southern artists and communities.

When asked about entities, networks, or other systems that provide meaningful support for arts and cultural work, more often than not, interviewees talked about what wasn't working or was missing.

Infrastructure Gaps	Count
Lack of Funding	32
Invisibility/Erasure of Southern Arts and Culture	25
Inaccessible Infrastructure	22
Inappropriate Language/Definitions of Art	22
Need More Flexible Funding	20
Lack of Technical Assistance	10
Marginalization of Folk/Traditional Arts	8
Native American Community (in)Visibility	6

*38 respondents, 33 mentioned multiple gaps

Lack of funding – whether from private foundations or public coffers – was the most oft-cited gap in the infrastructure for Southern arts and culture. Very few interviewees mentioned corporate funding or individual donors. Some interviewees also described a lack of funding flexibility, especially for artists who are working outside of 501(c)3 structures or pursuing explicitly radical or politically engaged work.

"I feel like we should have more opportunities to do more creative work long term. I think with the arts council, there's a big dog grant. You have to be operating like a nonprofit institution to be able to play in that world, or you get these measly individual artist grants that are just like \$1,000 There's not a lot of opportunity for those who are working in between. There's an in between of not being an organization and also not just needing a \$1,000 grant but needing more funding to really put something on."

MONIQUE VERDIN
Artist, Another Gulf Is Possible

In 2017, a person living in the South received only \$4.21 in arts and culture funding from philanthropy, compared to the national average of \$8.60 per person.

Reflecting on the lack of robust private philanthropic infrastructure for arts and culture in the South, interviewees who work in the grantmaking world shared common reflections on the South's different histories of philanthropy and giving. As **REGINA SMITH** of Kresge Foundation shared:

"In my experience, in the South, individual giving has served as the backbone of arts sector support. Compared to the northeast and other parts of the country, in the South, the numbers of private philanthropic institutions are not as extensive. Of course, that varies depending on the context - rural, urban, or suburban."

Questions of language also emerged. Many of our interviewees mentioned that grantmaking institutions (and others with concentrated resources) do not recognize artists' and cultural communities' work because it doesn't appear in spaces or forms that people understand as "artistic" or "cultural." These judgments affect the distribution of resources and political support. Cultural strategist **SAGE CRUMP** shared an example of these dynamics:

"There's a gap in support for folks operating outside of institutions, and external decisions of what an institution is, and what it has, and what it looks like. I think there are lots of institutions in communities, I mean like longstanding cultural practices and places that don't do taxes and all those things. That's not who they are. The candy lady is an institution in community. I'm not talking about funding the candy lady, but she should be recognized as a place of value along with the church. Or maybe fund the candy lady. I don't know!"

Data on philanthropic giving to arts and culture in the South reflects these on-the-ground observations.

PRIVATE PHILANTHROPIC GIVING TRENDS IN THE SOUTH

Compared to other U.S. regions, the South receives the smallest per capita number of private philanthropic dollars for arts and culture, and this trend has remained consistent since 2010. In 2017, the South received \$4.21 per person versus a national average of \$8.60. If we look at total philanthropic giving by region, the South and the West appear somewhat comparable, but, per-capita analysis paints a different picture, solidly placing the South at the bottom.

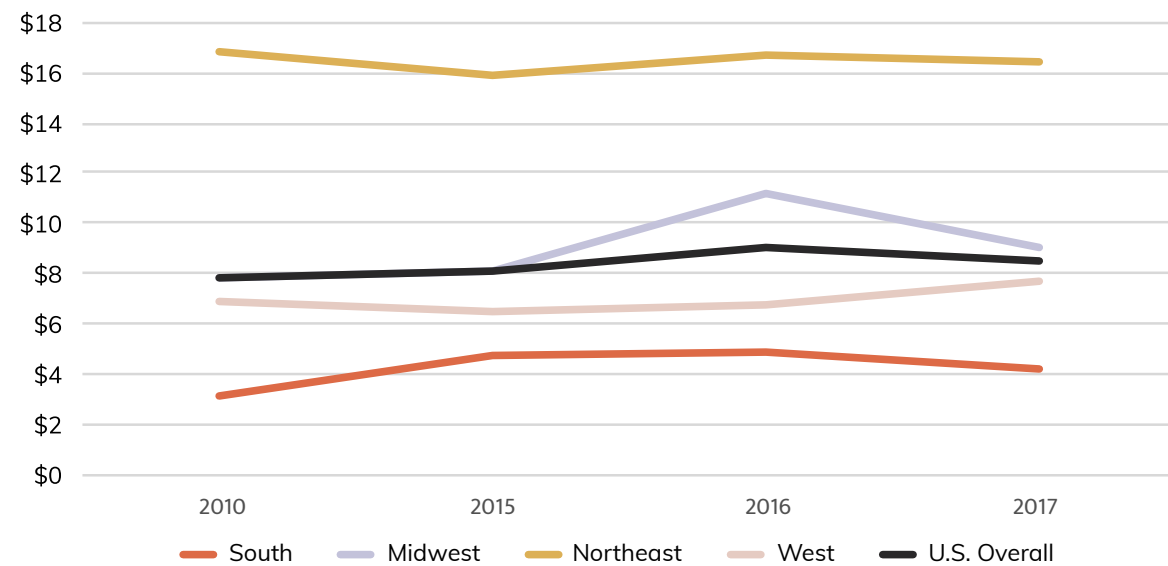
There is also much variation among Southern states. In 2017, all states fell below the national average of \$8.60 per person, except Arkansas.¹³ Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and West Virginia all received less than \$2 per person in philanthropic support to arts and culture nonprofit organizations in 2017 and in most years prior.

In Foundation Center's 2017 research sample, South-based funders provided 76% of private foundation dollars granted to South-based arts and culture organizations, and this trend played out in 2010, 2015, and 2016 as well.¹⁴ This finding runs counter to a consistent narrative that we heard from practitioners: "Most philanthropic dollars supporting arts and culture in the South come from national sources." This discrepancy between the data and the popular narrative suggests that in-region philanthropic dollars aren't reaching local communities in ways that people understand or perceive.

So where do these philanthropy dollars go? Perhaps to a small number of large organizations?

Yes indeed. The South is no exception to this national trend.

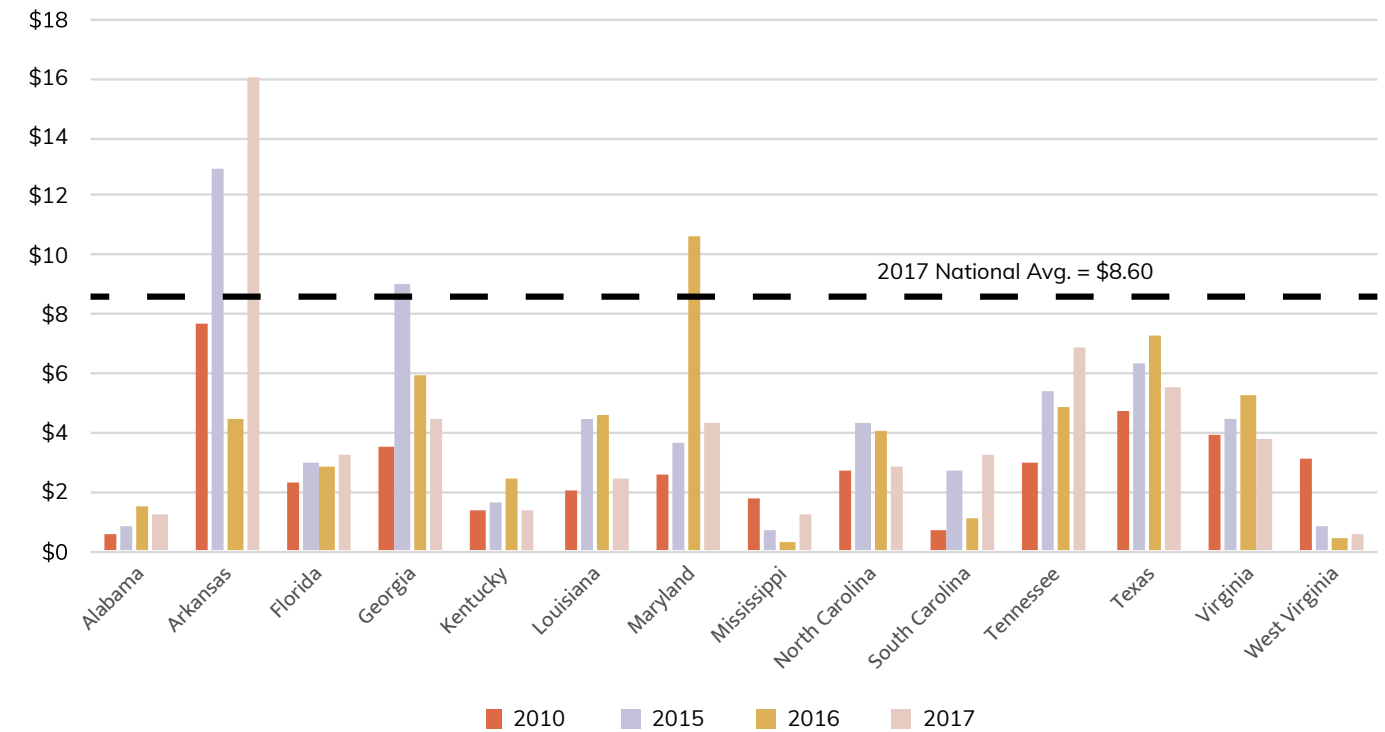
Per Capita Philanthropic Support for Arts and Culture by Region



¹³ In 2010, Walton Family Foundation in Arkansas awarded three exceptionally large grants, totaling \$1.2 billion, to establish the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (also in Arkansas). These grants significantly affect all 2010 numbers. We removed these grants from our analysis of the regional trends.

¹⁴ Data on philanthropic giving comes from Foundation Center. The search set is based on the Foundation Center's grants sample database, which includes all grants of \$10,000 or more awarded to organizations by a set of approximately 1,000 of the largest private and community foundations. For community foundations, only discretionary and donor-advised grants are included. Grants to individuals are not included in the file.

Per Capita Philanthropic Support for Arts and Culture by State (South Region)



Between 2015 and 2017, Foundation Center data shows that grantee organizations with operating budgets of \$10 million or more, which make up only 12% to 13% of organizations in the data set, received 47% to 54% of the funding. In the South, \$10M+ organizations (also roughly 12% of organizations in the sample) received between 49% and 62% of funding in a given year. In 2017 alone, the 20 top-funded organizations in the U.S. South received 41% of private philanthropic dollars for arts and culture in the region.¹⁵ This data is only a sample of the larger ecosystem, but our analysis suggests that philanthropic giving in the South mirrors that of the rest of the country, with the majority of dollars going to a few organizations, many of which have Western European cultural roots. This impression echoes that of Helicon Collaborative's report, *Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy*, which describes this national trend in detail. Helicon's research found that 2% of all cultural institutions receive

nearly 60% of all contributed revenue, and these organizations have annual budgets over \$5M, tend to focus on Western European forms, and serve predominately white and upper income audiences.¹⁶

In addition, we learned that patterns in giving to Southern arts and cultural organizations for "support strategy" (e.g., general support, capacity building, capital) and art/culture disciplines (e.g., performing arts, museums, humanities) track closely with national patterns. South-based museums and performing arts institutions receive more than 60% of arts and culture funding, and grant dollars for program development and general support far outnumber those designated for policy/advocacy or leadership/professional development. In 2017, only 6% of private foundation dollars designated for arts and culture went to rural organizations throughout the U.S.

¹⁵ Analysis conducted using Foundation Center Research Dataset, 2019.

¹⁶ http://www.notjustmoney.us/docs/NotJustMoney_Full_Report_July2017.pdf

In its grants database, Foundation Center tracks "populations served." In 2015-17, nation-wide and in the South, a majority of dollars were "Not Specified/General Public," and very small percentages of total grant dollars went to specific populations other than "Children and Youth," which generally hovers between 20% and 30% in a given year. Aging/Seniors, Incarcerated People, Immigrants, and Ex-Offenders all received less than 0.5% of arts and culture grant dollars distributed to the South in most years.

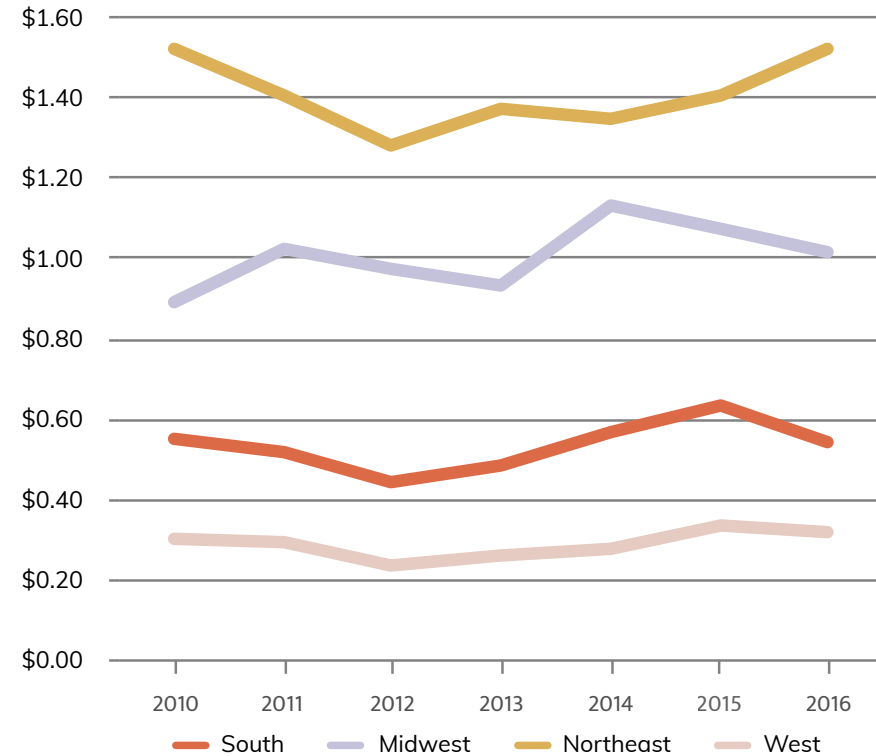
From 2015 to 2017, \$0 were specifically directed toward Transgender People, Middle Eastern Americans, and People with Physical Disabilities. While we don't know the reasons behind these patterns, they speak loudly. One could hypothesize that funders do not see arts and culture as having particular benefit to these populations or that the institutions to which these funders make arts and culture grants do not explicitly focus on engaging with these populations.

PUBLIC FUNDING AND OTHER REVENUE

Unfortunately, the theme of under-resourcing continues when we look at public funding for arts and culture, which is comparatively small in the South and West on a per capita basis. **Examining state arts agency (SAA) grant dollars awarded between 2007 and 2016, the South and**

West were the least well-funded regions, respectively hovering around \$0.50 per person and \$0.30 per person. The Northeast, despite significant fluctuation, never dips below \$1.20.¹⁷

Per Capita State Arts Agency Grant Dollars Awarded by Region



¹⁷ Analysis conducted using National Association of State Arts Agencies dataset (2017), U.S. Census Bureau.

From 2007 to 2016, only 2.5% of Southern SAA grant dollars were awarded to individual artists, and only 15.1% were awarded to grantees in non-metro areas.

If we look at number of grants (rather than dollars), we see that 9% of all SAA awards went to individual artists and 27% went to non-metro areas, indicating that public awards to individual artists and non-metro areas tend to be smaller, but the dollars are reaching these often-under-resourced populations. Some interviewees lamented the politically conservative legislatures that must approve state arts grants and shared that it can be challenging to obtain state arts funding to pursue projects at the intersection of art and social justice without having to code language.

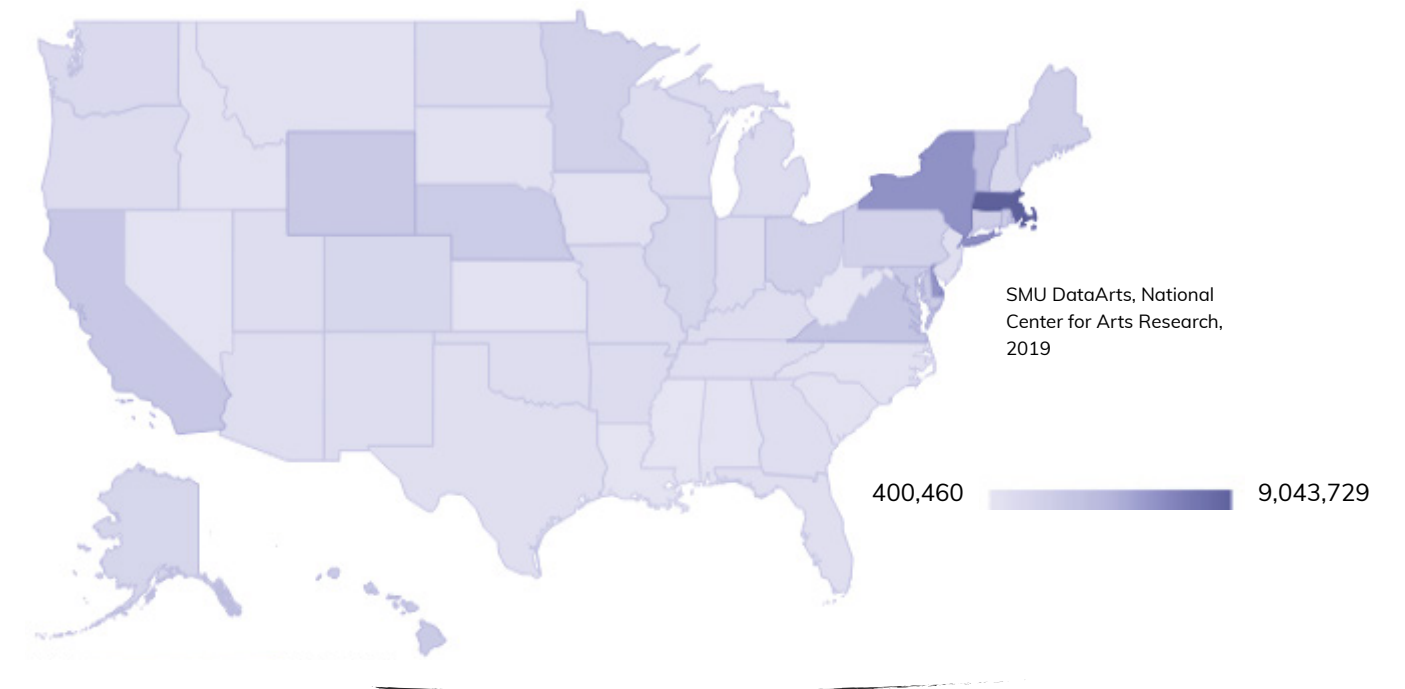
While we did not incorporate specific analyses of other kinds of financial support for arts and cultural work (e.g., corporate support or individual donors), we did analyze the overall revenue of arts and culture nonprofit organizations and found that trends of comparatively low per-capita support in the South remained.¹⁸ **From Louisiana moving east through North Carolina, an area that largely maps onto the U.S. Black Belt – a span of counties in the Southeast with particularly high percentages of**

Black people – the statewide dollars per person rest at the lowest end of the range, along with Kentucky and West Virginia.

There are metro areas in the South that are relatively well supported, when we look at nonprofit arts organization revenue on a per-capita basis. Interestingly, these metro areas don't significantly shift the per capita dollars statewide, which could indicate that a larger percentage of people in the South live rurally than in other parts of the country.

Looking at overall revenue, a 2017 analysis that we commissioned from DataArts provides a few additional insights that would be interesting to further explore.¹⁹ Compared to the rest of the country, Southern states and metro areas exhibit a higher density of organizations in disciplines related to history and have a relatively high density of museum organizations. Given recent battles over Confederate monuments and the underlying conflicts around who gets to tell the story of who we are in the South, these trends of investment in historical and archival institutions are compelling.

Total Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organization Revenue per 10,000 Population by State



¹⁸ Analysis conducted by SMU DataArts. Revenue data for nonprofit arts and culture organizations came from the most recent IRS Business Master File, current as of August 2019.

¹⁹ The analysis was commissioned prior to DataArts' merger with the National Center for Arts Research at Southern Methodist University.

Based on our research, we don't have strong hypotheses regarding why trends of low per-capita funding to arts and cultural work in the South are so persistent. However, a majority of interviewees mentioned the negative impacts of stigma caused by erasure and generalizations about Southern history. These narratives can impact how entities, particularly outside the South, perceive and invest in the region. **LAVASTIAN GLENN**, Co-Chair of Grantmakers for Southern Progress, described one aspect of this oversimplification:

"This narrative that the South is the only or most racist place in the country is just not true. There are definitely degrees and different contexts for places. The idea that the South is worse than other places ... is not an excuse or a legitimate assessment for not funding There's so much judgment and processing that happens even before folks get to the South. Part of the issue with these narratives is that we try to absolve ourselves of guilt ... even for folks who live outside of the South, there's a good vs. bad narrative in that the people in the South are the architects of racism and are the most racist and backwards people and that the folks in the North or the West are not. And it's in this narrative two things happen: black and brown Southerners are made invisible, and the entire region of people are devalued. Unlearning those narratives about who's good and who's bad and who's capable of change is very powerful and can lead to increased investments in the region."

Some interviewees offered clear observations about the kinds of infrastructural shifts that are necessary to improve the welfare of artists and make their creative work more vibrant. Jennifer Cole, Chief of Staff of the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University, and former Executive Director of Nashville-based Metro Arts, believes that the ability of any person to pursue a creative practice, professional or otherwise, is dependent on some very basic (though often unmet) needs:

"From an infrastructure standpoint, before someone can create, before they have the capacity to do that financially or emotionally, they have to belong. Affordability of housing, physical space – commercial and residential,

across a spectrum. The other [issue] is mobility, [and if they can] get to places where they can consume or create those things ... transit and who feels that they can be mobile. Financial inclusion is another giant factor. We will continue to validate and normalize the same white/Western normative, the same artistic products into the world, if we don't look at who can afford things and who dictates what is considered mainstream in arts and culture. An example is, we know in Nashville that we don't have many public artists working in Nashville, and very few of [them] are ALAANA because the practice requires a great amount of financial risk. We've been trying through programs and cultivation to change this. But you must focus not on the project but on how to pay people a living wage through a project structure that reduces personal financial risk. The fundamental barrier isn't interest; it's a financial ability. How do we restructure that infrastructure so that it starts supporting this gap?"²⁰

In addition to specific infrastructural challenges for arts and cultural work, other social and economic forces also emerged as critical barriers to artists' livelihoods and the well-being of their communities. Racism and economic injustice were the most mentioned. Many interviewees also highlighted the rural-urban resource gap.

Regional and Local Challenges	Count
Racism	33
Economic Injustice	32
Rural-Urban Resource Gap	16
Space for Arts and Cultural Practice	16
Burnout of Cultural Workers	12
Criminalization	11
Environmental Degradation	10
LGBTQIA Marginalization	10
Transportation	7
Migrant Justice	4
Opioid Crisis	3
Lack of Political Support for Arts and Culture	2

*36 respondents; 34 mentioned multiple challenges

While this section of the report has focused on nonprofit arts and cultural infrastructure and funding, **traditional nonprofit arts and cultural infrastructures are not necessarily places where Southern practitioners and communities do their creative and cultural work.** Adding to this dynamic is the reality that most foundation dollars go to relatively few institutions in the South. While more research is needed to better understand

other infrastructure dynamics (e.g., the role of for-profit and unincorporated entities in supporting artists), the above analyses paired with interviewees' reflections point toward the necessity for Southern folks to build and use infrastructures and institutions that may not easily appear on a national radar. **Those looking to support arts, culture, and organizing in the South must move beyond what is easily known or understood.**

FUTURE VISIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT:

Re-Framing and Re-Naming Value

Southern art is as varied as the people and contexts that create it – from contemporary dance to zydeco, from abstract expressionism to quilting, from live storytelling to photography to choreopoems. Artists and communities are making work across numerous genres and with a variety of processes. Our research did not reveal any clear patterns or nascent definitions of how one might describe or identify Southern art, but questions of value did emerge consistently among interviewees.

Who decides what is beautiful? Who decides what is art? What is folk, high, original, note-worthy, of national relevance, ready to tour?

Many of our interviewees felt that large-budget institutions in their communities or philanthropic organizations are most often determining the answers to these questions. As a result some work is perceived to have less value: work that is folk/traditional, work created in divested or rural contexts, work created by artists and/or communities of color. These perceptions hung heavy in the air during visioning sessions as well.

"And even the larger presenting spaces are mostly interested in bringing in artists from outside their community. It becomes a situation, where we are trying to shift that paradigm with Sipp Culture, to focus our efforts on production. Other spaces are focused on presenting and treating the community as consumers first. It limits our ability to expand the intellectual and cultural practices that enable our community to thrive and grow. Our artists and community members need to expand and deepen, and we don't have the spaces to do that. It's not that we don't have cultural practices. It would be ridiculous to

think that. But they're only seen as the local color versus something that we hold up and share with the world. This leads to other people having the power to tell our stories. It can be a culture killer, others naming our culture for us. It's a very dangerous place."

CARLTON TURNER

Lead Artist / Director, Mississippi Center for Cultural Production (Sipp Culture)

Practitioners, especially artists of color and those living in rural places, want to reframe the ways that Southern artistic and cultural production is assessed in the broader arts and culture field. This desire relates to the artists' work and the cultural organizations that steward it.

"It was the church that taught us how to speak, how to play, how to sing, that nurtured and fashioned us. That's culture. Until the dawn of the '60s the only road that we had where we had anything to say with impact was in our church, religious institutions, or in our masonic or esoteric institutions. The universities were much more controlled So we have to be about doing the work. At the same time, what the funding community has to look at is how we judge the work people are doing. The standards that you would apply to the work that's being done in New York would be different than the work [here], which has different variables ... in terms of transportation, or education, or abilities. But never think that because one may not have the necessary prerequisites to do the work that one isn't capable. It's about how we value the skills that people have and the way we go about elevating."

ANONYMOUS

²⁰ ALAANA is an acronym that stands for African, Latinx, Asian, Arab and Native American.

Foundations that want to invest in Southern arts and cultural work need to critically interrogate the frames they use to assess value and worthiness, focusing their energies on understanding local context and in-community understandings of aesthetics, value, and relevance.²¹

"I believe it takes great intentionality from philanthropy to do more than just find the 'grass tops' or people who say that they 'represent' community. In many cases, local leaders are very invested in their ability to be gatekeepers and to determine how resources for the town or region are used and/or distributed, a reality not unique to the South. [It takes a lot] of staff time, self-reflection, and a long-term willingness to ask hard questions: Who are the people

that we need to meet? Where do they spend time? How do we participate as guests in community to understand the local political, racial, economic and cultural dynamics? Who is not included in the conversations we're in? Why aren't they included? At ArtPlace, we worked diligently to implement these practices. Sometimes we got it right and sometimes we got it wrong; nonetheless, we stayed committed to learning and improving each time."

F. JAVIER TORRES

Former Director of National Grantmaking at ArtPlace America (currently Director, Thriving Cultures Program, Surdna Foundation)



Miami vision board showing elevated city infrastructure, 2017.

²¹ Aesthetic Perspectives, a report from Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, provides a helpful framework for approaching and understanding diverse community approaches to these questions of value. <http://www.animatingdemocracy.org/aesthetic-perspectives>



Entrenched structures of oppression, combined with a chronic lack of philanthropic and public investment in local cultural organizations and artists, have led Southern artists to build alternative systems of mutual support, resource sharing, and collaboration.

"It's difficult to survive here in Arkansas. Anywhere that I go, folks are usually like, 'How do you survive in Arkansas?' Folks always ask that, and it's so much, the way that folks here are figuring out how to support each other, figuring out how to survive, definitely being very resilient, and very loving ... Like, they also don't receive very much funding, but they're out there, like, feeding community, clothing community, sheltering community. And that's a big inspiration for doing that, for doing the work and figuring things out here."

D.M. BARRERA

InTRANSitive

A solidarity economy is defined by endeavors that aim to improve the quality of life and/or share and redistribute resources in a community or region through efforts outside of capitalist structures. As scholar Ethan Miller states, "A compelling array of grassroots economic initiatives already exist, often hidden or marginalized, in the 'nooks and crannies' of the dominant economy: worker, consumer, and producer cooperatives; fair trade initiatives; intentional communities; alternative currencies; community-run social centers and resource libraries; community development credit unions; community gardens; open source free software initiatives; community supported agriculture (CSA) programs; community land trusts and more."²²

While a relatively new term, coined in 1997 in Lima and popularized during 2001's World Social Forum in Brazil, **the solidarity economy encompasses practices that have existed for centuries amongst Black, Indigenous, and poor and working-class communities in the South.**

Imbued with a spirit of self-determination, these practices developed as a matter of survival in the face of limited access to resources and as a desire to gain economic security outside of the systems that oppressors dominated. Then and now, efforts range from informal resource sharing among neighbors or a community (e.g., swapping tools or childcare, ensuring that a hub of people has everything needed before a hurricane or other impending disaster, signal boosting crowdraising efforts to support the basic needs of queer and trans Southerners), to more formally organized efforts in the tradition of Black Southern cooperatives. While Black cooperatives have existed across the South since the 1800s, a new wave of Black-led cooperatives emerged throughout the South in the mid-1960s, primarily focused on land, agriculture, and equitable development. Present day, an even newer wave of Black land cooperatives has emerged, particularly focused on creating space and resources for Black LGBTQ folks.

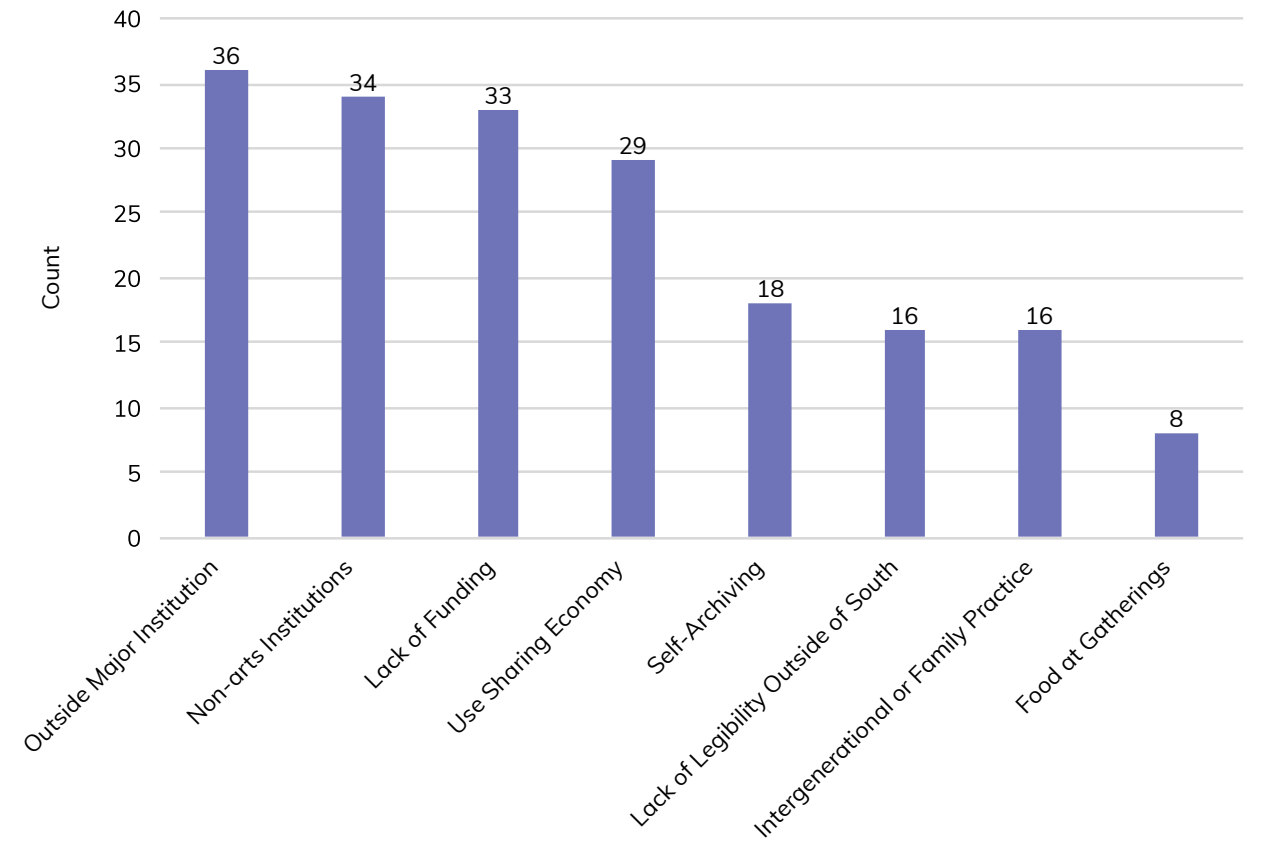
WHY IS THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY SO IMPORTANT TO SOUTHERN ARTISTS?

Drawing inspiration and strategy from this legacy of self-determination and survival in the face of structural oppression, Southern artists continue to find innovative ways to persevere and create work via the solidarity economy. Several factors intersect to create the need for such alternative systems.

There are limited opportunities for Southern artists and cultural workers to operate in the resourced economy. As other sections of this report detail, there are deep gaps in philanthropic support for arts and culture throughout the South, and the few well-resourced organizations are not tangibly supporting local artists.

Contextual Factors for Arts and Cultural Practice

(38 Respondents; 35 mentioned multiple practices)



"I hear from local traditional musicians that organizations and promoters often bring in bands from out of state rather than booking local music. For example, a traditional music organization here recently brought in a string band from Oregon. They're a great band and I'm not saying they should not book them, but that music is from here! They could support musicians who live right down the road and need the gig and keep that money in the community. And I suspect groups from out of town are able to demand higher payment than the local performers. Even with that, if a band does get booked, it's often the most common conception of the state's traditional music. I've heard from an African American gospel and blues musician who is a West Virginia native and has lived here for at least 20 years that when organizations book a traditional musician from West Virginia they are 9 times out of 10 looking for bluegrass or an old-time string band. There is a visibility issue for people of color and other minorities. There's been a Black gospel tradition in this state for over a century,

but it's often not recognized or seen as being among the state's diverse musical traditions. I see funding available for 'mountain' traditions, but anything that falls outside of that conception tends to not be sufficiently supported."

EMILY HILLIARD

Folklorist, West Virginia Folklife Program

A significant number of community institutions, projects, and organizations function in non-incorporated structures and cannot or do not wish to become incorporated. For some, it is not an accessible model. For others, whose cultural practices have existed outside of any state structure for centuries, incorporation is not necessary or a good fit. In alignment with this understanding, most interviewees mentioned the critical role that places, spaces, and opportunities that fall outside of major, large-budget institutions and the conventional nonprofit arts ecosystem play in providing resources.

²² Miller, Ethan. "Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues." Published in Kawano, Emily and Tom Masterson and Jonathan Teller-Ellsberg. Solidarity Economy I: Building Alternatives for People and Planet. Amherst, MA: Center for Popular Economics. 2010.

Reliance on the solidarity economy is anchored in the belief and experience that outsiders will not come to save Southerners and that we must take care of each other. This sense is especially entrenched in the psyches of communities of color, LGBTQ communities, and geographically isolated communities, and is reflected in national philanthropy's lack of investment in Southern communities. This need to care for ourselves is also amplified by events such as Hurricane Katrina, in which entire communities of the most oppressed people – Black neighborhoods, the elderly, poor folks – were left to endure on their own without aid or resources.

Southerners have a solid track record of supporting ourselves via the church, social aid and pleasure clubs, community giving circles, grassroots campaigns, barn/house party/bar fundraisers, and now crowdsourcing campaigns. The success of completely grassroots-funded campaigns and community institutions stands as evidence. Some examples include: bail out actions; Cooperation Jackson, a network of cooperatives and worker-owned, democratically self-managed enterprises; and the East Kentucky Social Club, a community-supported cultural institution in Lynch, KY, founded by Black miners.

HOW DO SOUTHERN ARTISTS AND CULTURAL WORKERS OPERATE IN THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY?

- **Exchanging goods and services** – Practitioners make their work happen by trading equipment, studio and performance space, lighting design, editing and production skills, materials, and more. These networks enable creative work in the South.

“A lot of sharing happens – we share equipment with the Center for Artistic Revolution. They try to find a little funding here and there to make purchases, e.g. a big speaker with (a) mic, and share with other orgs too. We received donations around megaphones. We share those. We share a projector and screen. CAR has existed in a church. All orgs use the space... There's also a lot of cost sharing based on who has money at the time.”

D.M. BARRERA
InTRANSitive

- **The work happens in a variety of places** – Practitioners shared that work is presented in a variety of non-traditional venues, such as churches, schoolhouses, barns, and at community gatherings. They emphasized the importance of community institutions, such as the church, in providing training for practitioners. Artist and former Alternate ROOTS Executive Committee member NICOLE GARNEAU described one example:

“Clear Creek Schoolhouse is a space for experimental performance and all kinds of cultural work. It's this old schoolhouse that got relocated to a family farm and is owned by this person named Philip, whose family has owned the deed to the land for many, many generations. He grew up here. They will program anything and let anyone perform there. Potluck at 6:30. Performance starts at 8pm. We'll pass the hat. As an artist, it's so nice to have a space where I can gather people. What if the schoolhouse was more resourced? Right now, it's very informal and aesthetically adventuresome.”

- **Networks are key to the Southern creative solidarity economy** – Members of Alternate ROOTS, SONG, Queer Appalachia, and the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture discussed relying on connections and resources via these networks, along with other networks in the South, to further their work and get their people what they needed. Examples include marketing support within different communities and regions, housing support while touring, support with fundraising, sharing studio space, sharing opportunities for presenting work, assistance in meeting basic needs, and microgrant programs. Audria Byrd, Filmmaker and cultural organizer, discussed the ways networks have supported her artistic practice:

“I think a lot about crowdfunding and sharing content, fundraisers through social media, and also individuals within networks of kinship in which we call in favors or we ask for favors. But it's also nice when there is organizational support available for folks. I'm grateful to Campaign for Southern Equality, who have tangibly supported my art and cultural organizing with microgrants and use of studio space. I've also received personal financial support from We Are Family Charleston in the form of microgrants through the Trans Love Fund.”

AUDRIA BYRD
Filmmaker & cultural organizer

As another example, Queer Appalachia uses the following they have grown from their social media platforms and publications to help resource the basic needs of queer and trans folks throughout Appalachia and the South:

“No one expected that we would have grown this large social media platform. The social media platform, the followers and the equity that it's built – is the wealth of the project, and what we try to do is share it when it's needed. Sometimes that has taken the form of posting community SOS's, giving out grants, organizing coat drives, or lending the platform entirely for occasions like Black History Month or #NoThanks, a Thanksgiving alternative that raises money for Indigenous foodways. The nature of the Instagram is that it is a submission-based feed. The content is submitted by our community members, shared from our comrades, or created ourselves. We see this as a platform we built and continue to maintain on behalf of our community”

CHELSEA DOBERT-KEHN
Curator at Queer Appalachia

- **Committed space for creative practice and cultural production is emerging as a key component of cooperatives.** For example, Cooperation Jackson's Nubia Lumumba Arts and Culture Cooperative conducts regular programming out of a multi-purpose venue, presents work and exhibits, and provides opportunities for artists to share and build their skills through training and exchange.

FUTURE VISIONS FOR ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL INVESTMENT:

Moving Beyond Necessity

With many Southern organizations, artists, and cultural workers struggling to sustain themselves – particularly those of color and in rural contexts – many practitioners shared a sense that Southern artists and organizations are not afforded the opportunity to take risks. Despite a

robust regional legacy of innovation, Southern practitioners shared that they experience a lack of access to risk capital and opportunities to try out new models in their socially engaged practice.

And yet the work continues. The prevalence of solidarity economies points to this fact, but at what cost do people keep going? Burnout, exhaustion, and chronic anxiety. How can philanthropy leverage monetary and non-monetary resources to build upon and sustain existing and new community assets, some of which may be hard to understand or perceive due to their existence outside of capitalism?

“There isn’t a lot of local financial support, which precludes our ability to build long-term partnerships with those who have capital. A lot of incredible work is happening that isn’t sustainable. ... Very few people have benefits or full-time salary in a way that, if they have a baby, they aren’t out of this process forever. There’s a lot of wealth in the South and in rural places, but the transfer of resources and the social conditions of sharing wealth are very different. Most of the wealth stays in the family and is passed down. What is shared is more like a flood mentality. ... People give to charity and to moments of crises, but there is not the same

culture of investment focused on improving quality of life or everyday experience for the greater community. ... I hate to focus on money, but we need it. We need money invested in such a way that the investment models how to behave in regional contexts. We need investments to mentor local, state, and regional organizations to see arts and culture as a core part of quality of life. Folks don’t yet see that this work has the power to change the opioid epidemic. So we need investment, but we also need a culture shift in the theory of change behind these investments and the impact that philanthropy can make. Long-term vision for projects is about five years because that’s all people can imagine getting resources for. There need to be longer timelines to do coalition building and address root issues. We need to find creative solutions to sustain people to look [ahead] 15 years, not just five.”

SAVANNAH BARRETT
Director of Programs, Art of the Rural



Participants from the Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative at Southern Movement Assembly Visioning Session, Whitakers, NC, 2017.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

The South is a region with rich heritage and cultural and artistic practices. It is also a region that has a long history of extractive labor, exploitation, and national divestment.

“There is a history of exploitation in Appalachia. The white people who colonized the land exploited the Indigenous population, violently removing them and taking the land. When capitalists took interest in the coal they were literally extracting wealth from the land. Coal mining is dangerous and toxic; the land is left poisoned, chronic illness rates in specific areas of West Virginia reflect that clearly. If the people who owned the coal mines lived in these communities, it would be better here. Perhaps the newest form of extraction economy is the pharmaceutical industry. The opioid epidemic in Appalachia is directly related to coal mining. Being a coal miner is taxing on the body, there are not a lot of other jobs in the region that pay the same either. When miners get hurt there is a lot of pressure to manage the pain as quickly as possible, to get back to work right away. A lot of people in the region navigate addiction, it’s just one more way people outside the region are able to capitalize on the lives and bodies of Appalachia.”

CHELSEA DOBERT-KEHN
Curator at Queer Appalachia

HOW MIGHT ARTS PHILANTHROPY TRANSFORM TO EQUITABLY SUPPORT THE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL LIVES OF SOUTHERN COMMUNITIES?

As we consider this question and the possibilities that a reorganization of arts philanthropy for the South holds, let us start by recalling that the wealth fueling philanthropy was built on the backs of Black and Indigenous bodies in the colonial project that became America, and in later decades, was fueled by extractive industries that exploited poor people of all races. In the words of one of our advisors, “Whose money is it?” And in the words of an interviewee:

“The children and grandchildren of the steel industry, the mills, the mines, all the people who got rich off the blood of poor people, are still in power here and have family foundations and control the money. They’re the gatekeepers. They’re the ones who deem me worthy or not. If they don’t like what you do, we don’t get the money. For us, it’s a tightrope walk.”

ANONYMOUS

Let us also revisit the data from the National Center for Responsive Philanthropy. Between 2010 and 2014, the South received \$41 in foundation funding per person, compared to the national funding rate of \$451 per person and the New York state rate of \$995 per person. While funding trends for the South have generally indicated corrective course in other sectors over the past several years, the arts and culture sector has lagged. Additionally, given the region’s broader challenges around infrastructure, arts and culture is often the last thing that funders move to support. Yet it’s been essential to our survival for so long. In a moment where national philanthropy is looking toward the South, funders need to practice responsive, strategic, and creative approaches to resourcing the region’s arts and culture.

Given the wealth of work that has happened with limited resources in the South, what could a resourced arts and culture sector in the South do? What might be possible?

Based on the research informing this report, we make the following recommendations to funders:

Begin by listening

Ask communities what they want. People who live in a community are in the best position to identify challenges and create solutions. Not a single person we interviewed wanted anyone from the outside to come in with a big mouth and small ears. Find culturally appropriate ways to learn alongside those who are doing the work on the ground and learn from entities (e.g., other funders) who are already supporting it. In a region that remains so chronically under-resourced and has a pervasive history of extractive labor practices, it is also important to compensate people for their time, knowledge, and energy, and center their presence and wisdom in national gatherings.

Do your homework, check your framework

As several interviewees mentioned, people often approach the South with an assemblage of stories that stigmatize the region as backward, racist, stuck in the past, and under-developed – and also with significant legibility bias and a lack of understanding around how the work happens. Funders, especially those coming from the outside, must embrace and actively pursue a more complex and nuanced understanding of the social, economic, and political histories of the region. Doing the background work requires honoring local histories and storytelling as well as finding

local leaders that may not appear on your initial scans and may not show up as local gatekeepers. It takes time to build trusting relationships that reveal these community networks and knowledge, an essential beginning place.

Consider community-driven philanthropic models

Explore ways to co-design goals and strategies for artistic and cultural investments and place decision-making power in the hands of the community you want to support. What could a process like participatory budgeting teach philanthropy about practices of engaging a broad set of stakeholders to dream and strategize about how to invest resources? How could artists, culture bearers, and those most affected by intersecting oppressions be at the centers of those planning processes? Both the Kentucky Foundation for Women and ArtPlace America’s Local Control Local Fields Assembly in Central Appalachia have employed participatory grantmaking models in their work. Additionally, the visioning session approach that we used as part of our research blended crafting, storytelling, collective dreaming, power analysis, and gathering over food/fellowship to help participants identify ways that arts and culture could help realize 50-year community visions. We trust that there are many other models from which to learn.

Resource existing community cultural institutions

Cultural centers, social clubs, and less-formal community institutions or kinship hubs recognize the importance of cultural life in shaping the story of “who ‘we’ are and creating a sense of belonging.” These cultural institutions can also serve as spaces for organizing. Some of the entities that emerged in our research process were not nonprofit organizations (e.g., the East Kentucky Social Club, Clear Creek Schoolhouse, Queer Appalachia). For funders who are interested in drawing upon cultural organizing and other arts and cultural strategies to build progressive political infrastructure in the South, these institutions are already bridging different sub-communities and have likely developed methodologies and praxes for political education and individual and community transformation. Learning from this ongoing work is a strong and respectful way to enter.

Support the development of local artists and their work on their own terms

Lack of funding, particularly local funding, was the most-mentioned challenge for artists we interviewed, especially in cases when individual artists and cultural workers had large visions but weren’t affiliated with nonprofit institutions. Grantmakers could partner with values-aligned locally led intermediaries – e.g., nonprofit partners, values-aligned arts councils, and other locally led public entities – to create flexible and responsive means to support artists with varying project scopes and various legal statuses. The THRIVE program at MetroArts in Nashville provides an interesting example of a system hack, distributing money to artists via an invoicing process rather than grants. In addition, supporting large-budget institutions to commission and present works by local artists could provide new platforms and possibilities for Southern artists seeking that type of trajectory.

Make long-term capital investments in existing community assets and projects

As much of our analysis shows, per-capita financial support to Southern arts and cultural nonprofit organizations is the lowest in the country. While foundations can offer more than financial support, money is a critical component to getting work done, especially in a region that has been chronically under-resourced. To counter these trends, grantmakers need to understand that they will likely need to help build infrastructure and core capacity of arts and cultural organizations (and beyond!) and do so over periods of time that are long enough to see community and/or region-level results.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

CONTEXT

- Think about the South in the context of longevity – it has taken over two generations of organizing to win some of the victories the South is currently experiencing
- Think about the realities in which practitioners operate (e.g., geographic isolation, climate change and disaster, food inequality, mass incarceration, the rural resource gap) and accordingly adapt grantmaking practices and strategies
- Challenge your perceptions of what an institution is/can be

COMMUNICATION

- Listen deeply and be willing to learn – from practitioners, local leaders, and your peers
- Do not solely gravitate to the voices, models, and experiences that resonate most deeply with your lens
- Hire from the South or place staff on the ground to build authentic relationships and inform grant recommendations from a Southern lens

PROCESS

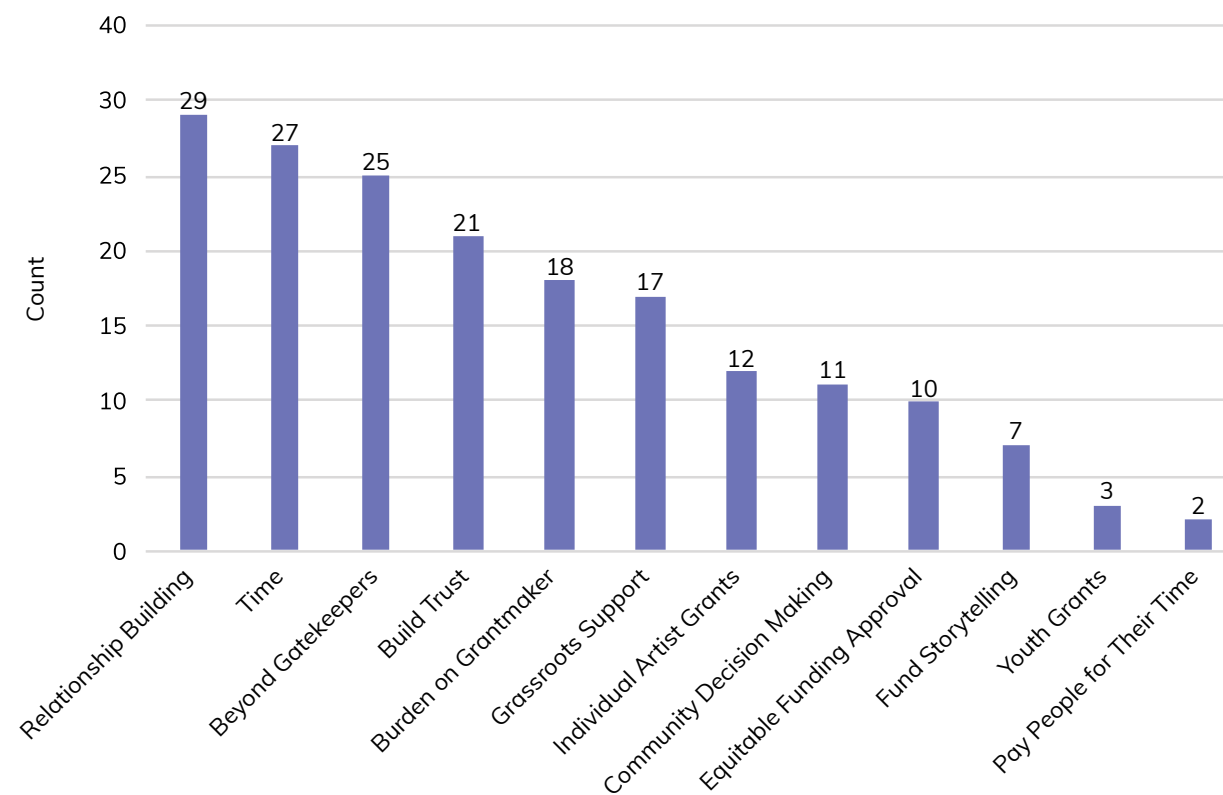
- Consider community-led decision-making models
- Seek input from folks on the ground when it comes to setting strategy or making decisions
- Explore alternative methods for grant submission and reporting, such as videos, site visits, phone conversations
- Develop new financial mechanisms for reaching unincorporated projects and individual artists
- Don't replicate extractive processes

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Interviewees responded to the question, "If an entity with extra capital wanted to support work at the intersection of arts, culture, and social justice in your community/in the South, what advice would you give them?"

Recommendations to Funders

(40 Respondents; 38 made multiple recommendations)



Below are some illustrative quotes from our interviews:

"Be mindful of how missing so much of the narrative is based on who is telling the story. The problems foundations have are in funding what they don't know and don't recognize. They need education!"

VICKI MEEK
Artist Activist

"Put the money in the hands of people on the ground! They [foundations] don't 'know better,' so they shouldn't insist that they know better. Don't insist on only doing it their way. Trust that the people on the ground, connected to communities, know best. Capital has to be tied to capacity-building for local infrastructure and sustaining that capacity over a long time. Find ways to convene people. It's not just giving money to organizations, it's connecting them to one another. It's looking at the South as a whole strategically – who else is doing it, and where. Center the voices of the people meant to benefit from the change we seek."

MK WEGMANN
Principal, MK Arts Co

"A more diverse funding landscape would better support artists and culture bearers creating political work in this politically charged time. And we need more funders who recognize and fund the artistic process, not just artistic products."

ASHLEY MINNER

Community Artist / Folklorist

"National funders have assumptions that funding in the South means funding around race, or funding equitably."

ANONYMOUS

"Invest in grassroots organizations. Support the work that we are already doing."

ANONYMOUS

"Allow time for excavating context."

MICHELLE COFFEY

Executive Director, Lambent Foundation

"Work with the community. Don't have outsiders come in to tell people their own story."

MONIQUE VERDIN

Artist, Another Gulf Is Possible

"New Orleans has a deep history of outsiders coming in and pushing their agenda. We have had to think very differently about what it means to come in from a place of privilege and how to deeply listen."

ANONYMOUS

"If you come in offering lots of money, you won't get the people you want and the change you want. Also, artists aren't the best writers. Don't default into white supremacist culture that says everything needs to be documented on a piece of paper. Create alternative accessible granting processes."

MONIQUE DAVIS

Illustrator and Author

"I would say look for the orgs that have been doing the work without funding already, cause that's where the passion is. Right, like, we have been funding our work out of our own pockets, that's how you know it's been happening, so, if you find the orgs that are doing the work without the funding, they're already caring, making this wave, making this change, imagine what they would be capable of doing – imagine what we would be capable of doing – if we had funding."

D.M. BARRERA

InTRANSitive

"Listen to the people and the community and the work that you are trying to help with instead of going in with your own preconceived notions about what needs to be done and what needs to be funded. ... be mindful about the work that you're funding and the way that you're funding people. Be careful that that does not reinforce the inequality that I'm assuming you want to end, or remedy. And also, invest in structural long-term changes, at least as much as you're investing in short term band aids."

AUDRIA BYRD

Filmmaker & cultural organizer

"Create platforms and infrastructure for Black, brown, queer people, poor people to do their work – consistent streams of money, not just we're gonna offer this one-time thing that people can apply for and try to make a piece, but create – and I think it's even important to institutionalize in that sense – have the money be organized so that people can create a cultural center, and people can create consistent long-term vision work for Black, brown, poor, youth and rural folks."

DANIEL COLEMAN

Artist

"Literally trusting culture bearers to do what they do, and offering unrestricted money to those who have been underfunded... . The arts and cultural sector, as I just mentioned, is gonna produce regardless, and I don't think that funders should let themselves off the hook because of that fact. I think they should fund it and say, great, how can we make your lives easier?"

GIA HAMILTON

Executive Director and Chief Curator, New Orleans African American Museum

VII.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR RESOURCED ORGANIZATIONS

For national arts centers, residency programs, venues:

- Are your programs reaching Southerners?
- Are you reaching folks on the margins in the South?
- How are you embracing hybrid practices in your curatorial work?
- How are you moving beyond your own blinders of aesthetic legibility?

For larger institutions in the South:

- How are you supporting local artists?
- How are you embracing hybrid practices in your curatorial work?
- Are you moving beyond your own blinders of aesthetic legibility?
- What values and whose values inform your work?
- What work does your community need and want to experience in this moment, and how do you know?
- How are you supporting the longstanding work of organizations and community institutions that have never received adequate resources but have been doing the work to sustain arts and cultural communities – particularly communities that have been marginalized, oppressed, and extracted from?

For movement and organizing spaces:

- Are you equitably collaborating with artists and cultural workers to tell the stories that need to be told in this moment?

For everybody, consider who has power in the region and where power lies.

When you are in a position to make decisions, you can either contribute to neo-colonization and white supremacy or dismantle them.

- Do not replicate extractive processes.
- How are you using the resources available to you to support Black communities, Indigenous communities, and communities of color? Rural arts and culture? Undocumented artists? Trans and queer artists? Artists with disabilities? How can you support these communities inside of your mission, or does your mission need to change?
- If you have positional power, how might you give up or share your power in the name of justice and equity (e.g., white curators and directors, transplant curators and directors, national organizations headquartered in the South)?



Visioning Session Participants, Dallas, Texas 2019

VIII.
**AREAS FOR
FURTHER INQUIRY**

As mentioned previously, it is impossible for a single scan to capture the breadth of work happening in the South. Several emergent themes surfaced during the scan that appear ripe for further investigation.

Beyond the Black and White Binary – The South has always been multi-ethnic, due to the many Indigenous peoples of the region. Additionally, as Wendi Moore-O’Neal shares, a binary framework reinforces the mythology of a monolithic Blackness in the colonial South, when in actuality, many different people from many different cultures from the African continent were enslaved and brought to the Southern United States during the transatlantic slave trade.

Over the past several decades, the South has experienced increasing waves of immigration and is currently home to one-third of the nation’s immigrants.²³ Multiple global and national forces have influenced these patterns, including the creation of NAFTA, conflict and occupation, disaster, the increasing cost of living in coastal cities, and most recently, climate migration. Between the years 2000 and 2010, Asians comprised the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the South, and over the last decade, Southern states have seen the highest growth of Latinx immigrants. These trends signify a need to move beyond a Black-and-white framework to comprehend the region’s arts and cultural landscape.

Additionally, three of the five states with the highest rates of detained migrants are located in the U.S. South. Over the last several years, the South has experienced an increase in for-profit detention centers, and witnessed expanded cooperation between ICE and local sheriffs, who are using beds of local jails to detain migrants. Given this reality, we believe it is particularly important to consider supports for undocumented artists and cultural workers, acknowledging factors like geographic marginalization and labor.

Investments in Southern Storytelling – Through this scan, we collected a body of under-told histories from generations of Southern artists and cultural workers. Building on the oral tradition, we sense that there is an opportunity to support further documentation and amplification of Southern stories that link art, culture, and justice. Many structures or models could steward this kind of effort: an ongoing programmatic collaboration among different institutional and organizational partners, implemented in each state

through humanities councils; or a re-granting program through a Southern-based entity.

Deeper Research on Southern Arts and Cultural Infrastructure and Funding – Due to the abbreviated initial timeline and lack of ongoing financial support for this study, we were not able to source data on arts and cultural funding from community foundations, local arts councils, individual donors, and corporations. We also did not investigate for-profit or commercial entities that support artists and cultural workers. Accessing and analyzing this data would provide a more complete picture of the South’s ecosystem, looking at smaller grants, other financial and non-monetary resources, and who is accessing them. There is also significant need for an effort to more deeply understand dynamics affecting projects and artists working in unincorporated structures. Additionally, the field could deepen its understanding of the way that resources are distributed by conducting specific research on the role of community-rooted, locally grown, and POC (people of color)-led intermediary organizations with regranting or micro-granting programs, such as the Black Belt Community Foundation, Southerners on New Ground, Foundation for Louisiana, House of Pentacles and others.

Generational Transition, Succession, and Support for Elders – Several Southern arts leaders, who are directing community-based cultural centers and are of retirement age, stressed that they didn’t feel they could retire for two primary reasons: 1) economics and the lack of later-life supports for artists and cultural workers; 2) the difficulties around finding new leadership for their organizations. Elders shared their observations that younger people in their communities are hesitant to take on leadership roles because they witness how unsustainable executive director positions can be. Along with this reality, the importance of prioritizing local leadership for homegrown community institutions remains critical. Further research could help reveal strategic approaches for developing the next generation of Southern arts leaders and providing them with the resources and support they need to thrive and sustain themselves and their organizations.

Practitioners across a range of ages acknowledged the shameful lack of support for elder Southern artists and cultural workers and the poor quality of life that many faced in their later years. For artists and cultural workers of color,

the realities of structural racism in the South compound this general lack of support. The picture becomes even starker when we layer on an ongoing trend in our field – that artists are often paid less than administrators. What could a field-wide response to support these elder artists, who have given so much and paved the way for younger generations of artists, look like? Possible models to explore include: annual lifetime achievement awards for elder artists and cultural workers; documentation/oral history grants, through which elder artists or cultural workers receive funding to share their story and have their work documented in the process; or mentorship grants through which an elder artist or cultural worker receives funding to mentor a younger arts leader.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- What supports do immigrant, undocumented, and migrant artists and cultural workers most need now?
- How can the field support efforts to further document and uplift Southern stories that link art, culture, and justice?
- How do community foundations, local arts councils, individual donors, and corporations resource and support the Southern arts and cultural ecosystem?
- What are the current and potential roles of locally grown intermediaries in advancing arts and cultural work in the South?
- How can the field concretely support Southern elder artists and culture bearers? What are the possibilities for developing the next generation of Southern arts leaders and providing them with the resources and support they need to thrive?

²³ Pew Center – 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/17/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>

Advisory Committee

Ashley Minner Community Artist/Folklorist Baltimore, Maryland	Maria López De León President, CEO and Board Member National Association of Latino Arts and Culture San Antonio, Texas
Carlton Turner Director/Lead Artist Mississippi Center for Cultural Production (Sipp Culture) Utica, Mississippi	MK Wegmann MK Arts Co New Orleans, Louisiana
Clayton Lord Vice President of Strategic Impact Americans for the Arts Washington, District of Columbia	Nicole Garneau Artist Estill County, Kentucky
Grace Nichols Performance Artist 2018 Cultural Organizing Fellow, Southerners on New Ground Durham, North Carolina	Sage Crump Cultural Strategist New Orleans, Louisiana
Graciela Sanchez Executive Director and Buena Gente Esperanza Center for Peace and Justice San Antonio, Texas	Savannah Barrett Director of Programs Art of the Rural Louisville, Kentucky
	Wendi Moore-O'Neal Jalayah Consulting New Orleans, Louisiana

Interviewees

Name	Work/Affiliation	Current Place of Residence
Andy Smith	Former CEO, Columbia Film Society	Columbia, South Carolina
Ashley Minner	Community Artist/Folklorist	Baltimore, Maryland
Audria Byrd	Artist, Filmmaker	Durham, North Carolina
Carlton Turner	Director/Lead Artist Mississippi Center for Cultural Production (Sipp Culture)	Utica, Mississippi
Chelsea Dobert-Khen	Curator at Queer Appalachia	Bluefield, West Virginia
Christa Blatchford	Executive Director, Joan Mitchell Foundation	New York, New York
Clayton Lord	Vice President of Strategic Impact Americans for the Arts	Washington, District of Columbia

Name	Work/Affiliation	Current Place of Residence
Clifford Murphy	Folk & Traditional Arts Director National Endowment for the Arts	Baltimore, Maryland
Daniel Coleman	Artist	Greensboro, North Carolina
Darcy McKinnon	New Orleans Video Access Coalition	New Orleans, Louisiana
Diego Barrera	Director, InTRANSitive; Artist	Little Rock, Arkansas
Emily Hilliard	Folklorist, West Virginia Folklife Program	Charleston, West Virginia
F. Javier Torres	Director, Thriving Cultures Program Surdna Foundation	New York, New York
Gia Hamilton	Executive Director and Chief Curator New Orleans African American Museum	New Orleans, Louisiana
Grace Nichols	Performance Artist 2018 Cultural Organizing Fellow, Southerners on New Ground	Durham, North Carolina
Graciela Sanchez	Executive Director and Buena Gente Esperanza Center for Peace and Justice	San Antonio, Texas
Jardana Peacock	Writer, Theater Artist, Culture Bearer	Louisville, Kentucky
Jennifer Cole	Chief of Staff Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts Arizona State University	Tempe, Arizona
Judi Jennings	Director, Special Project	Louisville, Kentucky
Kim Pevia	Founder, Artist Market Pembroke and Writer	Red Springs, NC/Robeson County
Lavastian Glenn	Director, Racial and Economic Justice Nathan Cummings Foundation	New York, New York
Lawrence Wofford	Pastor	Selma, Alabama
Luisa Dantes	Filmmaker, Cultural Organizer	New Orleans, Louisiana
Maurine Knighton	Program Director, Arts Doris Duke Charitable Foundation	New York, New York
Michelle Coffey	Executive Director, Lambent Foundation	New York, New York
MK Wegmann	MK Arts Co	New Orleans, Louisiana
Mollie Quinlan-Hayes	Former Deputy Director, South Arts	Marietta, Georgia
Monique Davis	Illustrator and Author	Jackson, Mississippi

Name	Work/Affiliation	Current Place of Residence
Monique Verdin	Artist, Another Gulf Is Possible	St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana
Nichole Potzauf	Executive Director Blue Ridge Mountains Art Association	Blue Ridge, Georgia
Nicole Garneau	Artist	Estill County, Kentucky
Peter Prinz	CEO, Co-Founder, Space One Eleven	Birmingham, Alabama
Regina Smith	Managing Director, Arts & Culture The Kresge Foundation	Troy, Michigan
Robert Bush	President (retired), Arts & Science Council Charlotte-Mecklenburg Region	Charlotte, North Carolina
Roger May	Artist, Looking at Appalachia	Charleston, West Virginia
Rosie Gordon Wallace	Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator	Miami, Florida
Sage Crump	Cultural Strategist	New Orleans, Louisiana
Sandy Shaughnessy	Division Director Division of Cultural Affairs, State of Florida	Tallahassee, Florida
Savannah Barrett	Director of Programs, Art of the Rural	Louisville, Kentucky
Vicki Meek	Artist Activist	Dallas, Texas
Molly Murphy & Anna Lee	Co-Directors, Working Films	Wilmington, North Carolina

APPX A.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Visioning Sessions

Pine Mountain, KY

State-wide focus
Partners: Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange, a project of Art of the Rural and Appalshop

New Orleans, LA

City-wide and Southeast Louisiana-focused
Partners: Wendi Moore-O'Neal, Jaliyah Consulting

Miami, FL

City-wide/Metro-area focus
Partners: Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator and Young Arts Foundation

Whitakers, NC

Regional focus
Partners: SpiritHouse, Inc. and the Southern Movement Assembly

Dallas, TX

City-wide/Metro-area focus
Partner: Ignite/Arts Dallas

Freedom Maps: Activating Legacies of Culture, Art, and Organizing in the U.S. South was initially commissioned in fall 2017 to help the Ford Foundation's staff understand three areas of interest:

- What is the infrastructure for arts and cultural work in the South?
- What is the current state of artistic practice?
- How does this infrastructure and practice intersect with work toward social justice?

Given the breadth of this inquiry and the large size and diversity of the South region, we established some more specific research questions to anchor and frame it.

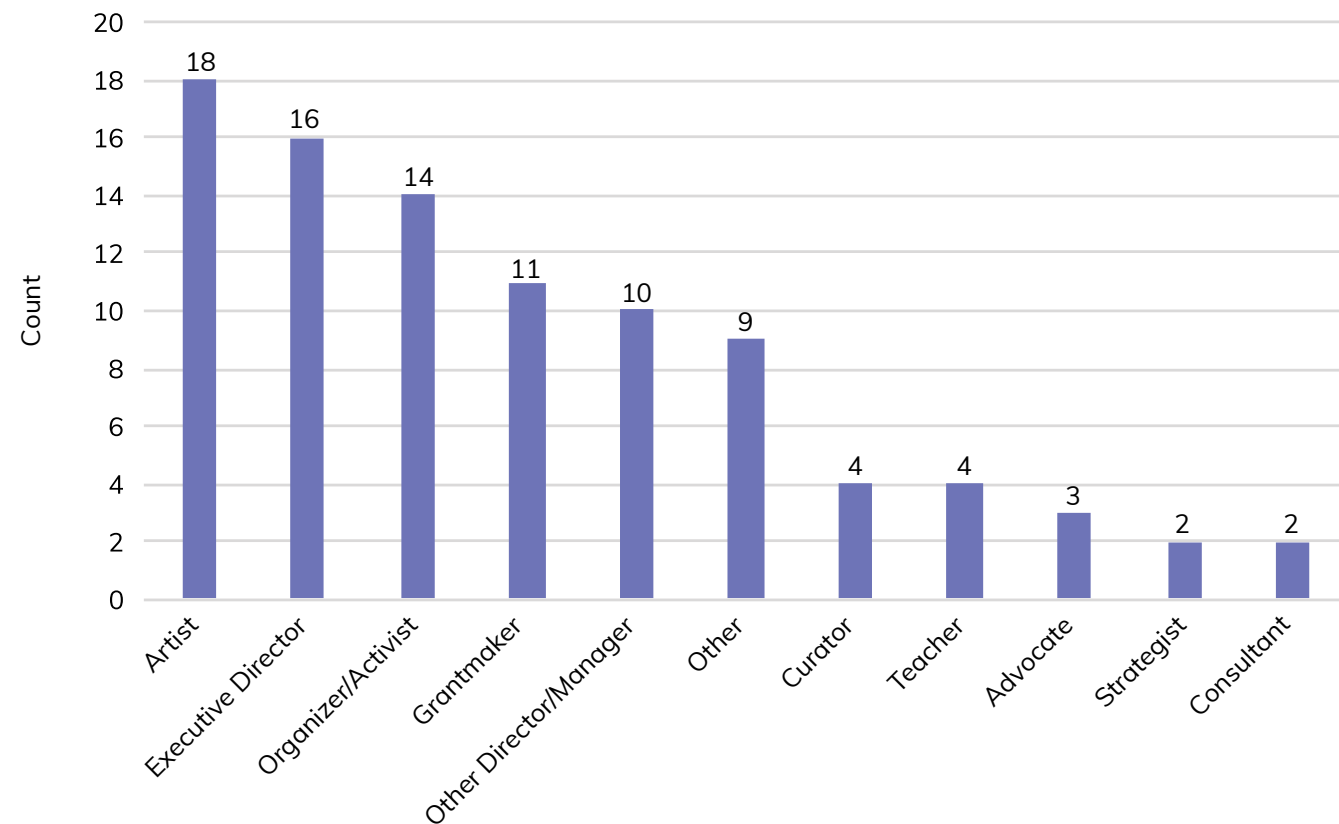
- How are Southern-based artists working at the intersection of art and social justice?
- What aesthetics are operating in this work?
- How are artists resourcing and supporting their work?
- How are knowledge, skills, and wisdom being shared, cultivated, and passed between generations?

- Are there critical differences between: states, urban/rural experience, un/documented folks, and along lines of gender, sexuality, race, and/or class?
- How have artistic and cultural practices been used to advance social justice work in the South?
- What are some visions of futurity at the intersections of art, culture, and social justice in the South?

We conducted this initial scan over a three-month time period, culminating in an internal report for the Ford Foundation in early 2018. When support toward a public version of the report was no longer aligned with the Ford Foundation's strategy, we remained committed to seeing this project through to completion and publication. In 2019 with the support of new partners, Ignite/Arts Dallas at Southern Methodist University and Alternate ROOTS, we initiated a second stage of research to update the data, conduct additional interviews, and fill some gaps from the first phase of the report.

Interviewee Work Roles

(41 Respondents; 27 respondents mentioned multiple roles)



We identified and explored three data sources with three accompanying methodologies:

Interviews

We conducted 60-minute interviews with 41 people, most of whom are living in the South and working in a variety of roles in or adjacent to the fields of arts and culture and/or social justice. Among those interviewed are a handful of grantmakers who support work in the South but live outside of the region. The majority of interviewees have multiple roles in the communities to which they feel accountable, and almost all interviewees work in a range of geographies, spanning local to international. We identified interviewees through our networks of grassroots artists, administrators, and funders and also asked interviewees to recommend at least one other person with whom we should speak. Most interviews were conducted via telephone, though some happened in person. Interviews were then analyzed for emergent themes and illustrative quotes.

More than 50 percent of interviewees engage in their communities as "practitioners," which we define as those who pursue some type of arts and/or cultural work, including practicing artists, cultural organizers, and arts administrators.

The majority of interviews (34 out of 41) were conducted in 2017, with the remainder occurring in 2019.

More information about interviewee demographics is located at the end of this appendix.

Visioning Sessions

"What do you want your community to be in 50 years, and how can arts and culture help you make progress toward those visions?" This question held the center of visioning sessions that we conducted with grassroots artists and organizers and other cultural workers and tradition bearers in five places in the South. Drawing upon the Free Southern Theater's story-circle methodology and equipped with a giant bag of craft supplies, we engaged participants in an iterative process of personal and collective reflection and visual art-making about the pasts, presents, and futures of their communities.

Pine Mountain, Kentucky

State-wide focus
Partners: Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange, a project of Art of the Rural and Appalshop

New Orleans, Louisiana

City-wide and Southeast Louisiana-focused
Partners: Wendi Moore-O'Neal, Jaliyah Consulting

Miami, Florida

City-wide focus
Partners: Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator and Young Arts Foundation

Whitakers, North Carolina

Regional focus
Partners: SpiritHouse, Inc. and the Southern Movement Assembly

Dallas, Texas

City-wide/Metro-area focus
Partner: Ignite/Arts Dallas

We created audio recordings for all but the Dallas session, and we took pictures or, if invited, kept the originals of the vision boards that participants created. Photographs of the vision boards and of the vision sessions in action are included throughout the report.

Arts Ecosystem Data Analysis

We partnered with SMU DataArts, Foundation Center, and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies to access their data sets, and in the case of SMU DataArts, to conduct original analysis to help us understand aspects of Southern arts and cultural infrastructure at a regional and state level. We also conducted our own per capita and comparative analyses between the South and other U.S. regions. The data set we used focused largely on nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, as well as private foundation and public funding to those nonprofit entities (as well as individuals and non-arts organizations, in some cases). We know that this is an imperfect and limited look at what "infrastructure" entails, and we believe this comparative regional analysis – the first of its kind for each of our data partners and perhaps for the arts and culture field – points toward some interesting patterns and areas for deeper inquiry. For more information about these data sets and analyses, please contact us at freedommapsreport@gmail.com.

Advisory Committee

To support this research effort, we engaged a group of 11 practitioners and supporters of arts and culture throughout the South region. These advisors provided contacts for potential interviewees, reviewed our research plan, served as interviewees, reviewed drafts of this report, and in some cases served as co-organizers and hosts of visioning sessions. Their support has been invaluable. Please see the final report for a list of our advisors.

Region Definitions

For this research scan, we grouped states into the following regions:

Midwest

Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Kansas
Michigan
Minnesota
Missouri
Nebraska
North Dakota
Ohio
Oklahoma
South Dakota
Wisconsin

Northeast

Connecticut
Delaware
District of Columbia
Maine
Massachusetts
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New York
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
Vermont

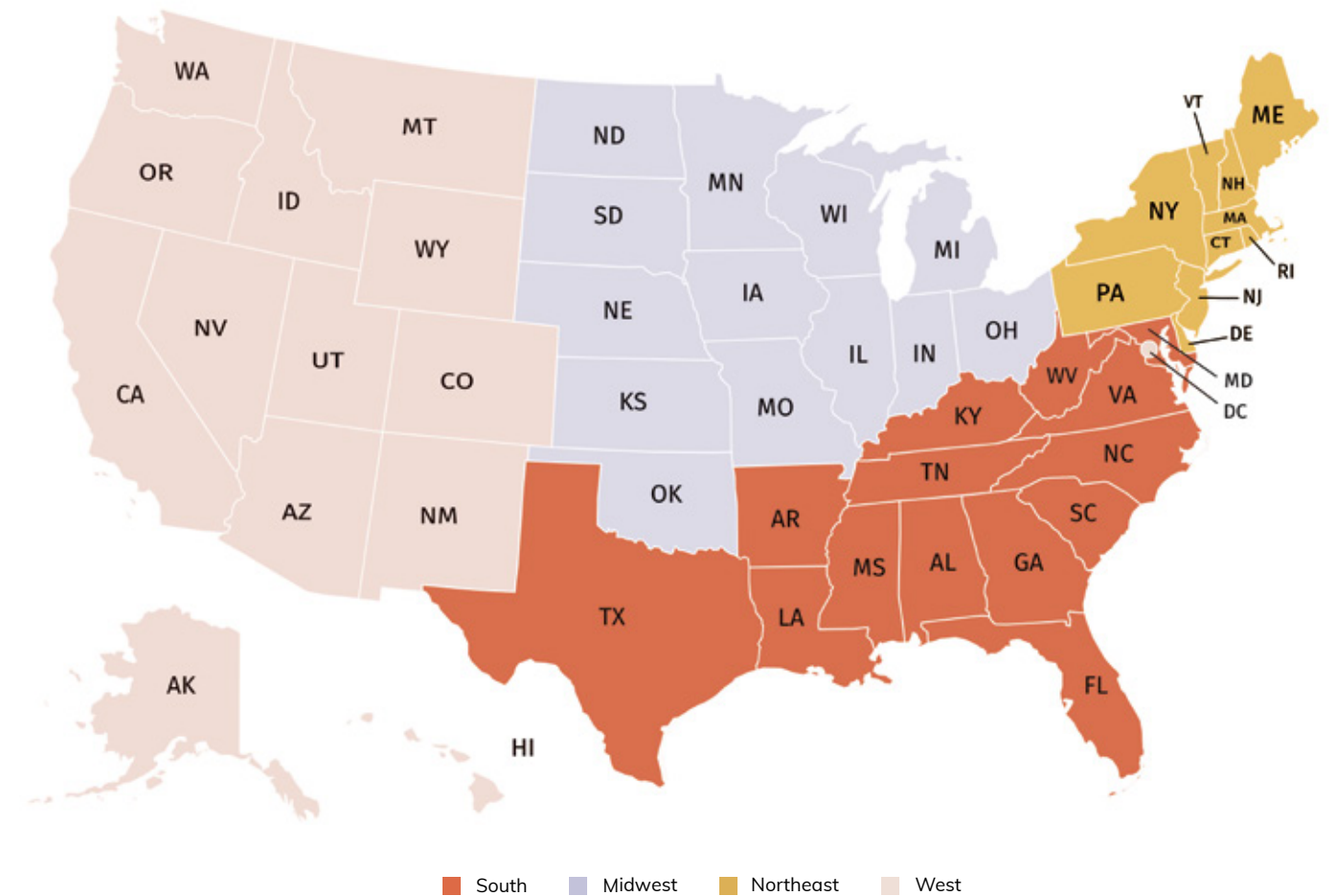
South

Alabama
Arkansas
Florida
Georgia
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maryland
Mississippi
North Carolina
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Virginia
West Virginia

West

Alaska
Arizona
California
Colorado
Hawaii
Idaho
Montana
Nevada
New Mexico
Oregon
Utah
Washington
Wyoming

Freedom Maps Regions

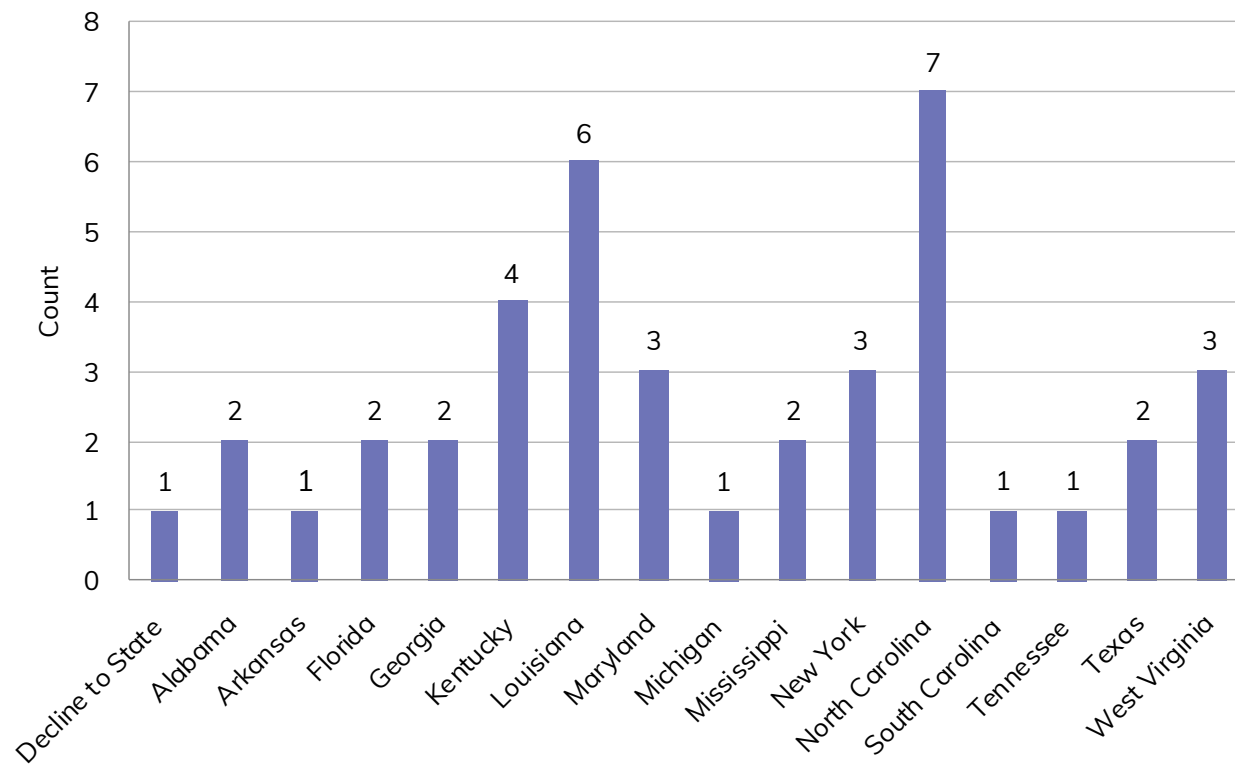


There are many definitions of the South, and people are likely to disagree about what states should be included. We respect Southern self-determination and acknowledge that multiple factors inform debates around these identifications. Our 14-state region most closely aligns with Alternate ROOTS' definition of the South, as well as the organization's description of "communities of place, tradition, or spirit," which nods to the shared legacies that unite Southerners. The U.S. Census' South definition also aligns somewhat closely with ours, except Oklahoma,

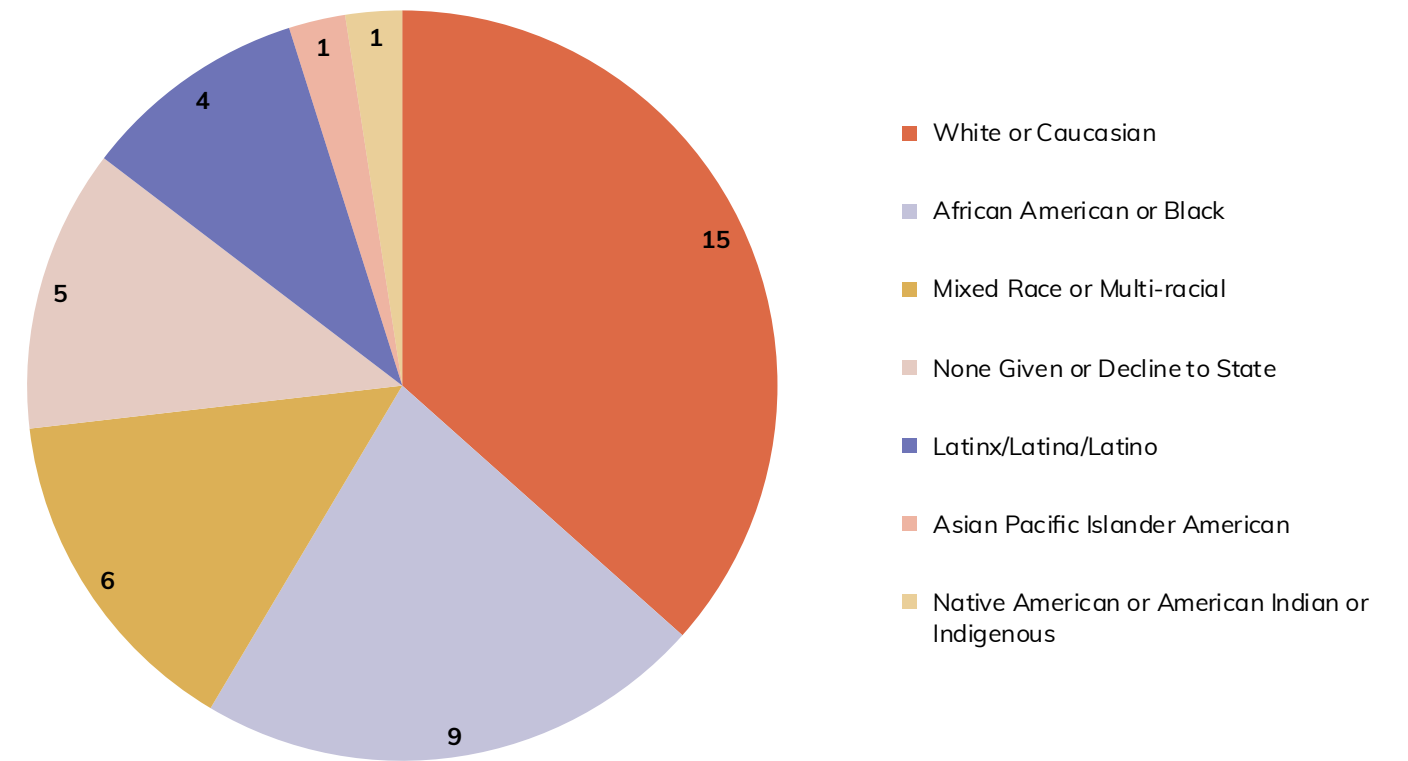
which we've included in the Midwest, and Delaware and D.C., which we've included in the Northeast. It is important to note that there is variation in the South's definition in some of the secondary data sets we analyzed.

INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHICS

Interviewee State of Residence
(41 Respondents)

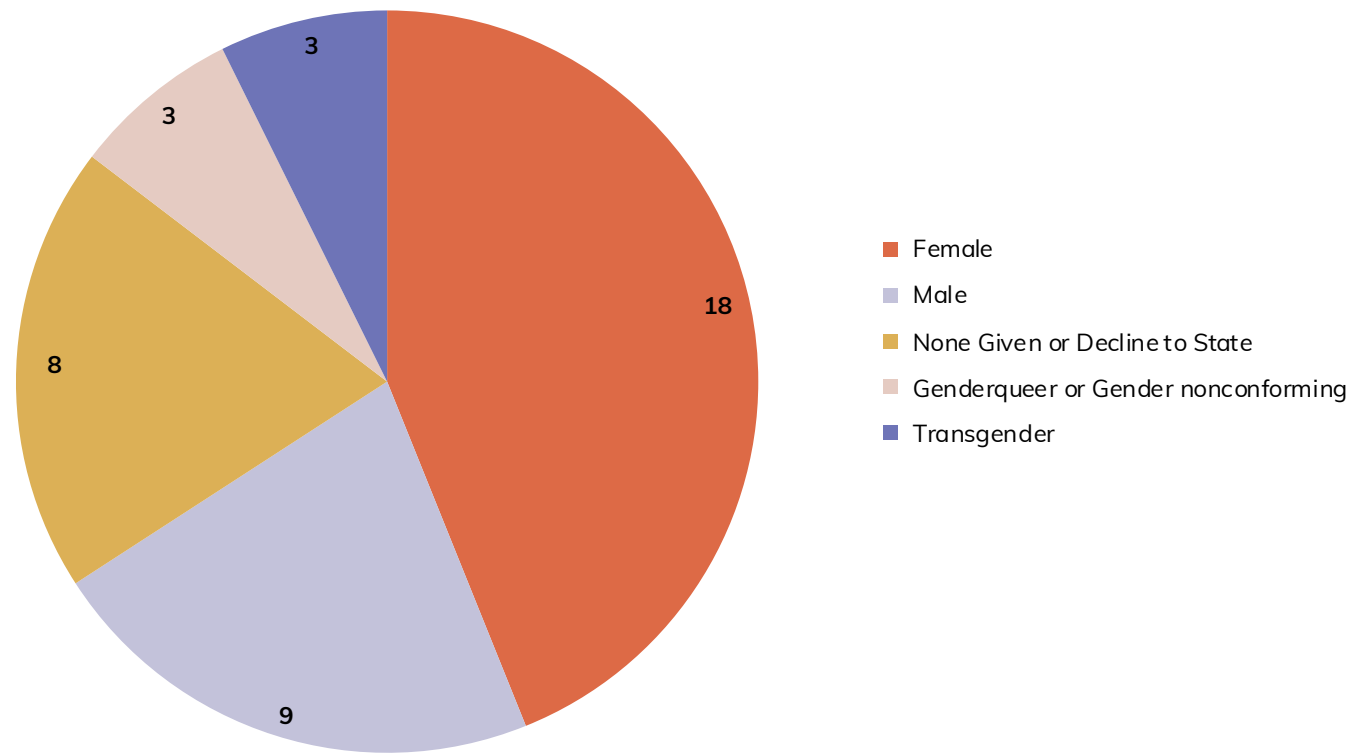


Interviewee Racial or Ethnic Identity
(41 Respondents)



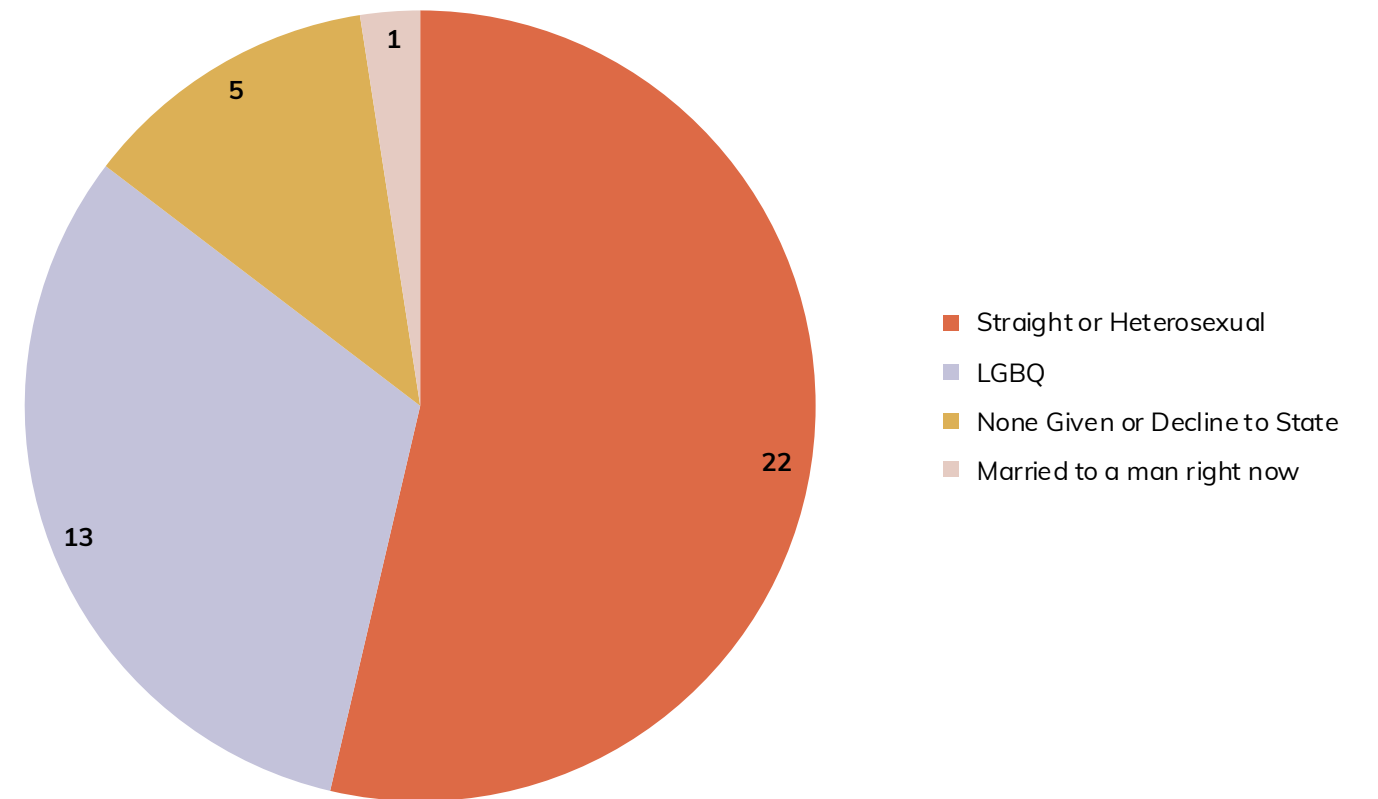
Interviewee Gender Identity

(41 Respondents)

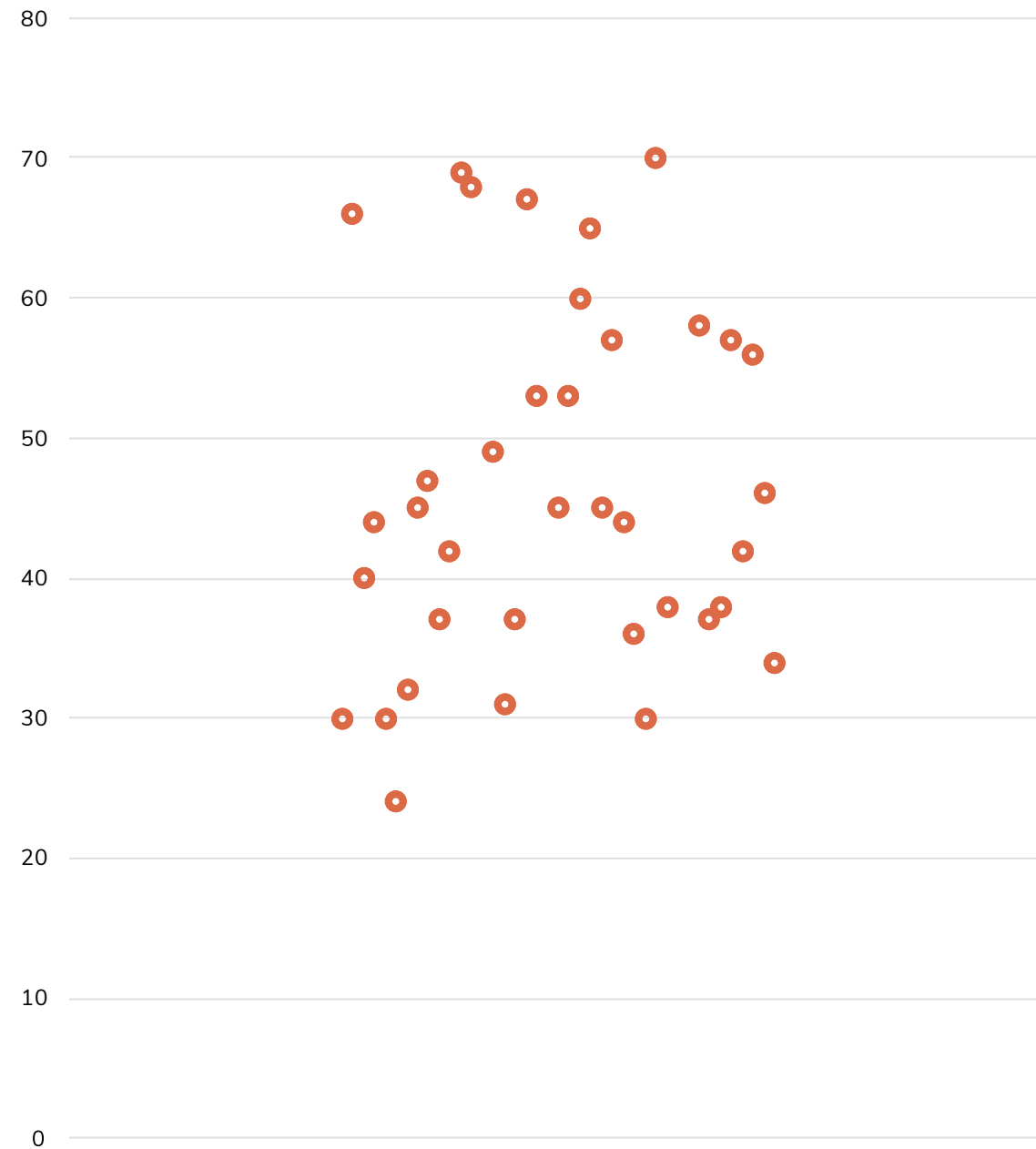


Interviewee Sexual Orientation

(41 Respondents)



Interviewee Age
(38 Respondents)



APPX B.

A PEOPLE'S TIMELINE OF SOUTHERN ARTS AND ACTIVISM: 1859-2019

This timeline reflects a history of Southern arts and activism as defined by practitioners who were engaged through interviews and visioning sessions via this project. It is not a comprehensive timeline of Southern arts and activism, but rather provides snapshots of some of the organizations, historical moments, and people that practitioners defined as aspects of their legacy, or that were noted by practitioners as “under-told stories.” Given the importance of the Southern cultural practice of honoring legacies of work and telling the un(der)told story, and knowing that there is so much more cultural organizing history that remains untold, we think a larger “people’s history” project could be a fount of information to inspire and strengthen movement building nationwide.

A PEOPLE'S TIMELINE OF SOUTHERN ARTS AND ACTIVISM: 1859-2019

October 16, 1859

Abolitionist John Brown leads a small group on a raid against a federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia), in an attempt to start an armed slave revolt and destroy the institution of slavery. Brown was tried by the state of Virginia for treason and murder, and executed.

June 20, 1863

West Virginia secedes from the rest of Virginia and becomes part of the Union. As Appalachian artist Chelsea Dobert--Kehn shares, "West Virginia Day is something that West Virginians are very proud of. They didn't want to be part of the Confederacy, and they wanted an end to slavery."

1891

Black folklorist, anthropologist, ethnographer, novelist, short story writer, and filmmaker Zora Neale Hurston born in Notasulga, AL. Her work was largely unrecognized for the duration of her life.

1913

Pine Mountain Settlement School founded as a boarding school for children in Southeast Kentucky's remote mountains, and a social center for surrounding communities. Today it remains a cultural institution that provides instruction in environmental stewardship and Appalachian traditions.

1917

Civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer born in Sunflower County, MS, to sharecroppers. Her activism and voice helped tell the story of the plight of Black folks throughout the South. She was an instrumental organizer in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party, and Freedom Summer.

1924

African American artist, curator, and art collector Samella Lewis born in New Orleans. Her work depicted freedom, humanity, and Black history. She founded numerous museums across the U.S. and published *Black Artists on Art*, a catalog that featured Black artists not typically showcased in mainstream art galleries, which sold thousands of copies.

1932

Highlander Center founded by Myles Horton as the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, TN. They first focused on organizing around labor rights, training union organizers and leaders in 11 southern states, and fighting segregation in the labor movement. Today the center focuses on popular education, cultural work, and participatory research to mobilize for change.

1935

Zilphia Horton appointed first cultural director of the Highlander Folk School. She served as a leader in the mobilization of folk culture resources in the service of social justice causes. In 1946 she helped to transform the song "We Shall Overcome" into a Civil Rights anthem.

1940

Playwright, activist, founder of Free Southern Theater and Junebug Productions John O'Neal born.

1947

Kalamu ya Salaam born. Salaam is a poet, author, filmmaker, and teacher from the 9th Ward of New Orleans. Salaam was a member of John O'Neal's Free Southern Theater for five years and was a founder of BLACKARTSOUTH. A well-known activist and cultural critic, Salaam has spoken out on a number of racial and human rights issues.

A PEOPLE'S TIMELINE OF SOUTHERN ARTS AND ACTIVISM: 1859-2019

1952

African American author, teacher, academic, and social activist bell hooks born in Hopkinsville, KY, a small segregated town. In a career spanning four decades, she has written over 30 books addressing race, class, gender, feminism, and education. She is widely regarded as one of the most important intellectuals and writers of her generation. In 2014, she founded the bell hooks Institute at Berea College in Berea, KY.

1955-56

Montgomery Bus Boycott, a protest against racial segregation on the public transit system of Montgomery, AL. The campaign was successfully implemented because people organized to provide rides to work.

1956

Visual artist Ron Bechet born in New Orleans. Bechet exhibits his work nationally and internationally, and it can be found in the collections of the New Orleans Museum of Art, Pennsylvania College of Art and Design Museum, Tulane Law School, and the Ogden Museum of Southern Art.

1958

Lumbee tribe of North Carolina breaks up a Klan rally in Cranston, NC, and kicks the Klan out of their territory.

1958-60

Efforts to burn down the coal mines in Eastern Kentucky in response to unfair labor conditions. The Roving Pickets are formed from these actions, and in 1964 evolves into the Appalachian Committee for Full Employment, an antipoverty organization whose goal was to organize unemployed miners and make the local War on Poverty programs more responsive to poor people.

1960

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee founded at Shaw University in Raleigh, NC. SNCC carried regional impact and was active across the South, organizing sit-ins and freedom rides and mobilizing voter registration drives.

1960

Desegregation of New Orleans schools begins with the first Black children attending schools. It takes a few more years for Houma children to integrate.

1963

Launching as the creative arm of SNCC's organizing efforts, Free Southern Theater is founded by John O'Neal, Doris Derby, and Gilbert Moses in Mississippi. FST provided free theater to the South, both as a voice for social protest and as a means to center Black cultural production.

1964

Freedom Summer, a campaign organized by SNCC, NAACP, Congress of Racial Equality and others, launches in June 1964 with the goal of registering as many African American voters as possible in Mississippi; also sets up dozens of Freedom Schools, Freedom Houses, and community centers in small towns throughout Mississippi to aid the local Black population.

1964-65

Free Southern Theater's first touring season commences with three plays: "Purlie Victorious" by Ossie Davis; Martin Duberman's "In White America"; and Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," which sparked controversy when actors performed it in whiteface. These productions toured through poor and rural areas of the South. As part of their mission, the shows never charged an entry fee and performed in public places like churches and community halls.

A PEOPLE'S TIMELINE OF SOUTHERN ARTS AND ACTIVISM: 1859-2019

1968

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated in Memphis, TN.

1969

Appalshop founded in Whitesburg, KY, as one of ten Community Film Workshops, started by a partnership between the federal Office of Economic Opportunity and the American Film Institute; it established itself as a hub for filmmaking, storytelling, media arts, and culture in Appalachia.

1969

Fannie Lou Hamer founds the Freedom Farm Cooperative in Sunflower, MS, focused on sharing resources around food and agriculture, housing, skills building, and entrepreneurial support for African Americans.

1969

East Kentucky Social Club founded by Black miners in Lynch, KY, with the primary mission to "stay together," as Black miners from Lynch began to migrate away due to economic hardship. EKSC evolved into a site for community social gathering and cultural traditions, mutual aid, and Black Appalachian diasporic connection. Today, there are EKSC chapters across the country. The flagship club in Lynch houses self-created archives detailing the story of the Black mining community in Lynch and the EKSC.

1973

Upstairs Lounge Fire, New Orleans, LA. An arson attack at a third-floor gay bar at 141 Chartres St. kills 32 people and ushers in a wave of LGBTQ action and organizing in New Orleans and across the South.

1974

Wendi Moore-O'Neal born. Wendi Moore-O'Neal is a Black feminist butch dyke cultural worker, activist, facilitator, and educator born and raised in New Orleans. She uses story circles and song sharing, learned from her family of movement veterans, as tools for growing inspiration and building democratic process. Through her organization, Jaliyah Consulting, she has worked in local, regional, and national organizations, but her heart's work is rooted in the Deep South of the U.S., especially in the kind of organizing that happens around kitchen tables and good food. She is a collaborative filmmaker, frustrated painter, freedom-song-singer and teacher-learner of liberatory culture.

1976

Alternate ROOTS founded at the Highlander Center (New Market, TN). ROOTS is an organization based in the South whose mission is to support the creation and presentation of original art, in all its forms, which is rooted in a particular community of place, tradition, or spirit. One of the first integrated arts spaces, ROOTS is an incubator for participatory democracy, and models regional organizing that is responsive to the needs of Southern artists. Originally an acronym for "Regional Organization of Theaters South," ROOTS established itself as a thought leader in the field of community-based arts and is the only regional collective of artists committed to social and economic justice.

Early 1980s

Photographers Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick develop "Slavery: The Prison Industrial Complex," an ongoing series of photographs that chronicles African American life within the Louisiana prison system. The series serves as both a historical record and testimony of life at the Angola penitentiary, and stresses the connections between slavery and incarceration.

A PEOPLE'S TIMELINE OF SOUTHERN ARTS AND ACTIVISM: 1859-2019

1980

Junebug Productions founded by John O'Neal. As the organizational successor to the Free Southern Theater, Junebug Productions established a mission to create and support artistic works that question and confront inequitable conditions that have historically impacted the African American community. Today, under the helm of Executive Artistic Director Stephanie McKee-Anderson, a respected performer, choreographer, and cultural organizer, Junebug works toward their vision of creating a world that is abundant with authentic and captivating stories that reflect the vast complexities of Black lives.

1980

George Washington Carver Museum & Cultural Center founded in East Austin, TX, and is dedicated to the collection, preservation, research, interpretation, and exhibition of historical and cultural material reflecting all dimensions of experiences of persons of African descent living in Austin, Travis County, and in the United States. The museum is also a key source of information on the history and celebration of Juneteenth.

1980

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB) founded by Ronald Chisolm and Dr. Jim Dunn.

1980

First production of "Don't Start Me to Talking or I'll Tell Everything I Know," the first solo piece written and performed by John O'Neal featuring Junebug Jabbo Jones, a character created by SNCC members to represent the wit and wisdom of common folk. This was the last production of the Free Southern Theater and the first production of Junebug Productions.

1981

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth founded as a grassroots, member-based, statewide organization working on a broad range of issues, including coal and water, new energy and transition, economic justice, and voting rights.

1981

Trans Appalachian writer, artist, and activist Bryn Kelly (1981-2016) born. Bryn Kelly was known for her literary work and advocacy and dreamed up the concept for Electric Dirt, Queer Appalachia's publication. She is warmly remembered by many for her legacy of activism, Appalachian pride, country queer aesthetics, and lasting artistic gifts.

1986

South Dallas Cultural Center founded by Artist Thornton and Elaine Thornton after nearly a decade of organizing and lobbying city council members. SDCC is a hub for Black art and culture, and commissions work from local artists through its Diaspora Performing Arts Commissioning Project.

1986

Space One Eleven founded in Birmingham, AL, by Peter Prinz and Anne Arrasmith to provide exhibition opportunities and support to artists and create a public forum for contemporary art. Through the years, SOE has faced condemnation from conservatives for the subject matter presented through their art.

A PEOPLE'S TIMELINE OF SOUTHERN ARTS AND ACTIVISM: 1859-2019

1987

Esperanza Peace and Justice Center founded in San Antonio, TX, by Chicana activists seeking to bring together diverse movements for justice in the city. For the last 30 years, the Esperanza has galvanized a multiracial and bilingual cultural arts/social change community headed by Latinas, the majority of whom are queer. Esperanza's cultural programming serves over 70,000 people each year through arts and cultural events, exhibitions, workshops, concerts, theater performances, and more.

1988

The first LGBTQ arts exhibit in San Antonio (and one of the first in the state of Texas) is launched at the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. It becomes an annual event.

1989

Women With A Vision, Inc (WWAV), a community-based nonprofit, is founded by a grassroots collective of African American women in response to the spread of HIV/AIDS in communities of color. Today WWAV's major areas of focus include sex worker rights, drug policy reform, HIV-positive women's advocacy, and reproductive justice outreach.

1991

Dreamed up at a kitchen table in the Magnolia Housing Projects, Cash Money Records is established in New Orleans by brothers Bryan "Birdman" Williams and Ronald "Slim" Williams.

1993

Ashé Cultural Arts Center founded by Carol Bebel and Douglas Redd after concerns about negative portrayal of their community in contemporary art exhibits in white-controlled organizations in New Orleans in the early 1990s. Today, Ashé continues to be a vital force in Central City, and provides opportunities for arts presentations, community development, artist support, and houses a repertoire of original works.

1993

Southerners on New Ground founded to build, sustain, and connect a Southern regional base of LGBTQ people in order to transform the region through strategic projects and campaigns developed in response to current conditions in the South.

1993

Founded in Houston's Third Ward by seven Black creatives, Project Row Houses transformed 1.5 blocks of shotgun houses into a hub for community-engaged art. Today, PRH encompasses five city blocks and houses 39 structures that serve as home base to a variety of community-enriching initiatives, art programs, and neighborhood development activities.

1993

North American Free Trade Agreement established and ushers in a great migration of Mexican immigrants who were displaced as a result of NAFTA.

1994

Lesbian feminist anti-racist writer, scholar, and activist Mab Segrest publishes her autobiographical work *Memoir of a Race Traitor*. The book narrates her experience working against the Klan with North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence.

1994

In Birmingham, Space One Eleven features an exhibition, "Domestic Dilemmas," by Laura Elkins, an artist born and raised in Mississippi. Residents launch a campaign against the exhibition, calling it vulgar, and questioning whether the exhibition was an appropriate use of public funds, putting the organization's funding at risk.

A PEOPLE'S TIMELINE OF SOUTHERN ARTS AND ACTIVISM: 1859-2019

1995

New Orleans-based Sabrina Mays Montana and Darryl Montana, a fourth-generation Black Masking Indian and son of legendary "Big Chief Tootie" Montana, found Faces of Culture, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to the presentation and preservation of New Orleans' indigenous African American cultural traditions, and an extension of the Allison Montana Institute of Art, Culture and Tradition.

1996

Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator founded in Miami by Rosie Gordon-Wallace to exhibit, support, and nurture emerging artists from the Caribbean and Latin America. Despite losing their physical space, DVCAI continues their programs and exhibitions, via partnerships, pop-up exhibitions, and much innovation.

1998

Esperanza Center successfully sues the city of San Antonio when the city discontinued its committed funding, claiming that the city engaged in viewpoint discrimination by penalizing the center for the socio-political views expressed in its presentations. The court ruled in favor of Esperanza, finding that the city had impinged upon Esperanza's First Amendment rights.

1999

Spirit House founded in Durham, NC, by a group of artists, teachers, and activists, with the goal of creating and developing grassroots programs that aimed to eliminate the negative impacts of poverty and racism on the Black community.

1999

Gihan Perera and Tony Romano found the Miami Workers Center in the Liberty City neighborhood, a strategy and action center building the power and self-determination of South Florida's most oppressed communities through an intersectional approach linking gender, race, and socio-economic status.

2000

MK Wegmann appointed CEO & President of NPN/VAN and makes the decision to relocate the national organization to the South, and her hometown of New Orleans, LA.

2005

Hurricane Katrina strikes New Orleans, LA as a Category 5 hurricane. In its wake, over 1200 died, thousands were displaced, and many were criminalized. Under the leadership of Carol Bebel, Ashé Cultural Arts Center acts as a community-based center for the activities of ReBuild New Orleans, and takes a leadership role in implementing the strategy to repopulate their Central City neighborhood with its former residents. Under the leadership of MK Wegmann, NPN/VAN supports recovery efforts by providing support and re-grants to area artists and arts organizations.

2005

Foundation for Louisiana, a social justice philanthropic intermediary, is established in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and plays a critical role in moving money to communities on the ground in the aftermath of the storm. Today, under the leadership of Flozell Daniels, Jr., FFL supports freedom work statewide, through programs in racial justice, climate justice, criminal justice reform, economic opportunity, LGBTQ organizing, and support for Louisiana's arts and culture. FFL remains the sole Black-led philanthropic entity in the state of Louisiana and unapologetically advances a racial justice agenda throughout the state.

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2009

Ausettua Amor Amenkum, Big Queen of the Washitaw Nation Black Indian Tribe, receives the Mardi Gras Indian Hall of Fame's Queens' Choice Rising Star Award. She also serves as artistic director and founding member of Kumbuka African Drum & Dance Collective, a Tulane University adjunct professor, and an activist. She masked with Big Chief Donald Harrison Sr. until his death. Ausettua uses her role as Big Queen to increase self-esteem and to celebrate African American women's contributions to New Orleans' indigenous cultural expression, religion, and spirituality.

2010

The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. The largest marine oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry dumped 210 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, causing extensive damage to marine and wildlife habitats as well as fishing and tourism industries, with impacts felt for years.

2011

Under the leadership of Deon Haywood, Women With A Vision initiates a lawsuit in the Eastern District of Louisiana on behalf of nine people who had been forced to register as sex offenders through the Crimes Against Nature Statute (CANS). The law, which was 203 years old and originally created to penalize gay sex, was expanded to require anyone prosecuted for prostitution within the past 20 years to register as a sex offender, which had dire impact on housing access, employment, and food security for many sex workers, particularly trans folks. In 2013, the original case was settled in federal court in favor of over 700 people who had been placed on the registry. In 2012, while the CANS case was still waging, Women With A Vision's building was burned down through an act of arson, which was thought to be a hate crime.

2012

First Southern Movement Assembly occurs, bringing together organizers and cultural workers from across the South to develop a people's agenda around social and economic justice, collective liberation, and just recovery from disaster.

2013

Chokwe Lumumba, a Black organizer, radical, activist, and attorney, is elected mayor of Jackson, MS on a platform centering Black power, human rights, and the legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. He holds the position briefly until his untimely death in 2014. The Hinds County coroner refused to perform an autopsy. Hinds County Supervisor Kenneth Stokes and others believe Lumumba was murdered.

2013

Cooperation Jackson is founded in order to build a solidarity economy in Jackson, Mississippi, anchored by a network of cooperatives and worker-owned, democratically self-managed enterprises, including an arts and culture cooperative that offers production support and exhibition opportunities to Jackson artists.

2014

Taylor Alexander and Micky Bee found Southern Fried Queer Pride, an Atlanta-based nonprofit organization empowering Black queer and QTPOC communities in the South through the arts. Southern Fried Queer Pride was born out of a lack of space for Black and brown queer folks to build community, a lack of queer art, and in opposition to the established narrative of Southern queers.

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2015

Level Artist Collective is formed by Ana Hernandez, Horton Humble, Rontherin Ratliff, John Isiah Walton, and Carl Joe Williams. As five artists of color with deep ties to the city of New Orleans, Level Artist Collective developed with the intent of creating a platform to promote, support, and sustain their cooperative voice and vision. Their work presents a distinctly New Orleans narrative to the larger contemporary art dialogue through fiercely independent studio practices.

2017

Confederate monuments are removed throughout New Orleans. The city, residents, and organizations begin to shape a cultural placemaking strategy around the empty monument sites.

2017

House of Pentacles is founded by Joie Lou Shakur. House of Pentacles is a film training program and production house designed to launch Black trans youth (ages 18-35) into the film industry and tell stories woven at the intersection of being Black and trans.

2017

Following years of organizing, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, son of the late Chokwe Lumumba, is elected Mayor of Jackson, and promises to make it the most radical city on the planet.

2017

Recognizing the importance of art and culture in movement building, SONG hires its first Cultural Organizer, Tori Grace Nichols.

2017

"Money kept you in. Black love got you out." SONG organizes their first Black Mama's Bail Out, freeing 41 Black mothers and caregivers in time for Mother's Day, and claiming the top spot on GiveOut Day through raising \$30,130 from a record-setting 711 donors. SONG has continued this campaign annually.

2017

Creating a parallel to Freedom Summer, 30 undocumented individuals board the Undocubus, painted with "No Papers No Fear" in English and Spanish on both sides, to travel across the Southern states, picking up new riders and making stops along the way to organize. The ride ends in Charlotte, NC, for the Democratic National Convention, where they demand that deportations stop and that immigration reform be adequately addressed. A group of riders was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for their action and later released.

2017

Doug Jones defeats Roy Moore in Alabama, in many ways due to a continuation of the work and strategies SNCC seeded.

2017

Carlton Turner founds the Mississippi Center for Cultural Production (Sipp Culture). Sipp Culture honors the history and builds the future of Utica, MS, weaving together research, development, and local agriculture with contemporary media and storytelling to promote the legacy and vision of their hometown. Sipp Culture's place-based program promotes economic empowerment and the self-sufficiency of low- and moderate-income people through education, technical assistance, training, and mentoring in agribusiness. Additionally, it works with the community to create an advocacy base to lobby and establish increased broadband access in this rural community – a key to sustainable community development in the 21st century.

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2017

Southerners on New Ground (SONG) develops "Cash Bail Blues," a performance rooted in the cantastoria tradition that serves as a vibrant call to action against the cash bail system and its impact on Southern communities. The piece was performed in cities across the South, and SONG developed a digital toolkit to give communities the tools to develop and host cantastorias in their communities.

2018

Zora Neale Hurston's nonfiction book *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo,"* about the life of Cudjoe Lewis (Kossola), the last presumed living survivor of the Middle Passage, is published posthumously.

2018

Stonewall survivor and trans activist Miss Major Griffin-Gracy launches the Griffin-Gracy Educational Retreat & Historical Center, aka House of GG, a permanent home in Arkansas that supports and nurtures the leadership of trans women of color living in the U.S. South.

2018

An LGBTQ group of migrants splinters off from the migrant caravan of thousands traveling to the U.S. from Central America. Some make their way to the Southern states, are granted asylum, and make a home in the South. Others remain detained at ICE facilities throughout the South.

2018

Elizabeth Catte, a writer and public historian based in the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia, publishes *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*. The book works to change the narrative about the region through unpacking Appalachian stereotypes, and provides examples of writing, art, and policy created by Appalachians as opposed to for Appalachians.

2018

Protestors pull down Silent Sam, a Confederate monument, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The hashtag #doitlikedurham is born.

July 29, 2019

Blackjewel Miners Blockade. Five miners stopped an outbound train that was loaded with a million dollars' worth of coal. The company that owned the mine in eastern Kentucky, Blackjewel, had gone bankrupt and failed to pay 1100 miners for their work, which had dire economic consequences for the miners and their families. The miners pledged to block the coal train until they received the wages they were due. The blockade lasted two months. Blackjewel eventually agreed to pay the workers some \$5.1 million in unpaid wages.

2019

Mama Carole Bebelle is honored via a proclamation from the city of New Orleans for her life's work and advocacy on behalf of the artists, cultural workers, and artistic life of the city.

APPX C.

PARTNER PROFILES

Through our research process, we were able to partner with many individuals and organizations. Some hosted us in their communities for vision sessions. Some porch sat, broke bread, or walked through mountain trails with us. Others chatted on the phone with us. And all were eager to talk all things Southern arts and culture, in order to share the vibrancy, truths, and struggle that shaped the cultural lives of their communities. While the list below is not an exhaustive account of all of the amazing work about which we heard – much less all of the work we didn't hear about – we want to lift up these partner organizations and their work at the intersections of art, culture, and justice, for the ways they prioritize artists, cultural workers, and communities that are operating under multiple social and economic marginalizations. Below are some brief descriptions of these projects and/or organizations.

Ignite/Arts Dallas: An Initiative for People, Purpose, and Place

Dallas, TX

www.igniteartsdallas.com

Ignite/Arts Dallas launched at SMU Meadows School of the Arts in 2015 to integrate artistic practice and community engagement in ways that involve Meadows students, the wider SMU campus, the city of Dallas, and the arts field at large. Ignite/Arts partners with artists and organizations throughout Dallas and across the country to support and develop meaningful cultural programs that benefit the local community, connect Dallas's cultural energy to other creative communities, and introduce students to the arts' critical role in social engagement. For more information, visit www.igniteartsdallas.com. Ignite/Arts Dallas is supported by The Meadows Foundation, Embrey Family Foundation, Communities Foundation of Texas, New England Foundation for the Arts, The George and Fay Young Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and individual supporters.

Mission: To challenge the imaginations of students and citizens to move towards creating more just and vibrant communities.

Vision: To thrive at the nexus of creativity and the engagement of communities – our campus, our city, our planet – by nurturing unique art experiences.

Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator

Miami, FL

<http://dvcai.org/>

Diaspora Vibe has maintained an unwavering commitment to Black artists and migrant artists, despite recently losing its space due to the rapidly gentrifying Miami landscape. The organization now operates in an itinerant capacity, maintaining its residency and exhibition program despite ongoing space challenges.

Mission: Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator's commitment to artists of Caribbean and diverse cultures ensures they receive validation, visibility, and professional opportunities. Our artists break boundaries of traditional forms and work outside of institutionalized systems; they often must create new systems and infrastructures to sustain their practice. We promote, nurture, and exhibit the diverse talents of emerging artists from the Latin and Caribbean diasporas through an artist-in-residence program, international exchanges, community arts events, and a dynamic exhibition program collaborating with art spaces and inhabiting the virtual landscape.

Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange (RUX)

Kentucky (statewide)

<http://www.kyruex.org/>

This project works to bridge urban-rural divides and geographic isolation that make statewide progressive organizing in Kentucky a challenge. The project takes an asset-based and culturally grounded approach to its work, acknowledging that urban centers have greater financial wealth, but that rural places are rich as well – in cultural activity, natural resources, skills, and knowledge. It also acknowledges, enacts, and creates increasing awareness of rural-urban interdependence.

Mission: Together, we are growing relationships across divides to build a more collaborative and connected Commonwealth. Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange is a strategy to enact the full power of collaboration between arts, agriculture, community health, and small business to build collective capacity and support homegrown leadership across regions of Kentucky. RUX is a partnership between Art of the Rural and Appalshop. Kentucky RUX brings rural and urban people together in unique community settings over three, weekend-long intensives each summer. Our programming is focused on people, places, and partnerships. We work together to find our commonalities, deepen connections to the people and places of the Commonwealth, and collaborate on projects that add value to Kentucky communities.

Metro Nashville Arts Commission (MetroArts)

Nashville, TN

<https://www.metroartsnashville.com/thrive>

MetroArts' THRIVE is a micro-funding program, which began in 2014 and has supported more than 350 Nashville-based artists and 71 community projects throughout the city. The program is designed to build, strengthen, and cultivate communities in Nashville and Davidson County by supporting artist-led projects that encourage artistic and cultural experiences, community investment, and neighborhood transformation. Because these payments to artists are structured as purchase orders rather than grants, MetroArts has been able to support individual artists and eliminate barriers of access to funds that require 501(c)3 designation.

Mission: Drive an equitable and vibrant community through the arts.

Vision: Every Nashvillian participates in a creative life.

SpiritHouse, Inc.

Durham, NC

<http://www.spirithouse-nc.org>

Inspired by the legacies of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement and Black feminism in the United States, SpiritHouse is a Black-women-led, cultural organizing collective that works locally, North Carolina-wide, regionally, and nationally to support the transformation of communities facing multiple marginalizations and systemic oppressions. The Harm Free Zone – their long-standing work to transform narratives and practices of safety, justice, and community-driven practices to reduce and eliminate reliance on law enforcement – provides a powerful example of cultural organizing toward prison abolition and to envision a world beyond mass incarceration.

Mission: SpiritHouse uses culture, art, and media to support the empowerment and transformation of the communities most impacted by poverty, racism, gender inequity, criminalization, and mass incarceration, through grassroots programs, cultural organizing, and community collaborations. We accomplish our mission through grassroots leadership development, cultural organizing, and collaborations with partners, coalitions, and networks.

