



GCDN Annual Convening

Los Angeles 2025

Summary Report



GCDN
Global Cultural
Districts Network
An Initiative of AEA Consulting

THE
MUSIC
CENTER
L.A.'s Performing Arts Center

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*The GCDN team
would like to extend
our utmost thanks to:*



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The Music Center strives to deepen the cultural life of every resident of Los Angeles County and continue creating an increasingly relevant, multidisciplinary performing arts center.

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Bloomberg Connects is a free mobile app and digital platform that provides access to expert-curated content and guides for museums, galleries, sculpture parks, gardens, and other cultural institutions worldwide. It allows users to explore and engage with arts and culture through audio, video, and text content, as well as visit-enhancing tools like maps and tours, both on-site and remotely.

ABOUT GCDN

The Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN) is committed to improving the quality of urban life through the contribution of the arts, culture, and creative industries.

Initiated in 2013 by AEA Consulting, GCDN brings together policymakers, planners, and executives from widely diverse international contexts, all working at the intersection of culture and sustainable urban development through convenings, research and collaboration.

By fostering knowledge-sharing among those responsible for planning and managing creative and cultural districts, quarters, precincts, and clusters, GCDN stimulates the promotion of urban development with culture at its core across four fundamental areas: operational realities, the environment, society, and the economy.

gcdn.net

ABOUT AEA CONSULTING

AEA Consulting is a global firm setting the standard in strategy and planning for the cultural and creative industries. Since 1991, AEA has successfully delivered more than 1,200 assignments in 42 countries, helping clients around the world plan and realize vital and sustainable cultural projects.

With offices in New York and London, AEA offers a talented, multidisciplinary team of professionals with proven practical experience who deliver personalized solutions to organizations in the arts, cultural, creative and public sectors.

aeaconsulting.com

It's a wrap on LA25



Like any project crafted in the City of Angels, this convening took months of planning, writing, rewriting, re-rewriting, casting, and careful direction... and then, suddenly, it was over in a whirlwind of conversations, provocations, and connections, fuelled by good food, strong coffee, and the generous, open energy of a remarkable group of peers. But as with all the best stories, what stays with you is what lingers after the credits roll.

This was my fifth GCDN convening, and without question the most complex to plan both logistically and emotionally. As global uncertainties mounted and political tensions deepened, the program had to shift with them. The result was a convening that was, by necessity, more grounded and more urgent than celebratory.

Yet what emerged was not despair. On the contrary, our conversations were full of long-term thinking, collective resilience, and shared strategies for navigating complexity with care.

Together, we explored how institutions can resist panic and instead chart a path that is strategic, inclusive, and sustainable. We identified relevance as a shared act – not to be claimed, but earned and re-earned in constant dialogue with communities. Because there are no meaningful stories without listeners, it is key to long-term sustainability.

Beyond the intellectual content of the program, our many moments of togetherness reminded us that the political is personal and the abstract, visceral.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the *Queer Anthropologies* performances at Gloria Molina Grand Park. They moved us, anchored us, and expanded the frame. They brought joy, gravity, and fierce beauty into public space – and reaffirmed that cultural districts are not just sites of gathering, but of meaning-making.

That truth was made even more stark by the shocking and saddening images coming out of DTLA just two weeks later. Our team was especially struck by the sight of RIOS-designed public furniture – the same we had used to share food, good vibes, and ideas – being repurposed by protestors as shields.

Sometimes gathering and meaning-making isn't beautiful. But serving a community also means being present, supportive, and useful when things are difficult. That, too, is a form of creativity – and perhaps the most authentic expression of relevance.

The moment is fraught, and only becoming more so. It is our responsibility to respond with flexibility, resolve, and empathy. The path ahead remains challenging, but those who attended the LA25 convening left knowing that they are not treading it alone.

My deepest thanks to all who joined us – especially those who travelled far – and to our partners, speakers, artists, and contributors whose time and insight shaped this gathering. I am especially grateful to the team at The Music Center for their trust and support; to Bloomberg Connects and RIOS for their partnership and generosity; to my colleagues at GCDN and AEA Consulting who held it all together; and, of course, to the representatives of our GCDN member organizations, who make this network what it is.

I look forward to seeing how the threads woven together in Los Angeles continue to unfold before we meet again in Doha, 13-16 April 2026. In the meantime, I invite you to revisit our time in Los Angeles through this summary report, enriched by the critical reflections of three local thought leaders, Michael Manalo, Ezequiel Olvera, and lead rapporteur Eduardo Robles – and shaped in final form by Eduardo, Michael, Stephanie Fortunato, and May Wijaya.

Gregorio Lucena Scarpella
Director, GCDN

Welcome Remarks

Speakers

Cindy Miscikowski

Chair of the Board of Directors, The Music Center

Hilda Solis

Member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors

Moderator

Adrian Ellis

Chair of GCDN & Director of AEA Consulting



The 11th GCDN annual convening began with a warm welcome to attendees from around the world, setting a thoughtful tone for the days ahead. The Los Angeles Music Center’s Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, a celebration of New Formalist architecture, provided a fitting backdrop to inaugurate the U.S. convening. Opening remarks underscored the importance of fostering multilateral relationships and open dialogue among network members, while also reflecting on the evolving role of cultural infrastructure in shaping civic identity.

The opening session focused on Los Angeles County’s commitment to cultural diversity and creative infrastructure. Attendees learned about the County’s Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative, a groundbreaking cultural policy initiative designed to increase arts access throughout the greater Los Angeles area. They also learned about the Grand Avenue Cultural District, Los Angeles County’s first official cultural district. This district is home to iconic institutions such as The Broad, Walt Disney Concert Hall, and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), among others. The designation aims to strengthen connections between world-class cultural institutions while bridging community access and shared storytelling with cultural assets in surrounding neighborhoods, deepening the city’s identity and authenticity as a global anchor for arts and culture.



The importance of cultural districts as a strategic framework for fostering diverse storytelling, enhancing social cohesion, and driving arts-based economic growth was highlighted. Local leaders reflected on the future of Los Angeles with enthusiasm as it prepares to host major international events, including the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games. These global events present a unique opportunity to showcase the region's rich cultural diversity and creative talent, and government leaders shared an overview of the targeted policies and initiatives designed to leverage the global attention these events will attract.

The opening session concluded with a heartfelt ceremony, during which GCDN received a commemorative scroll from LA County officials to recognize the significance of the cultural district gathering for the region's cultural and artistic community.

When the Status Quo is Not an Option...

Speakers

Deborah Rutter
President Emeritus,
The John F. Kennedy
Center for the
Performing Arts

**Maria Rosario
Jackson**
Tenured Professor
(on leave), Arizona
State University

Moderator

Adrian Ellis
Chair of GCDN &
Director of AEA
Consulting



This mainstage panel featured a powerful discussion about the complex relationship between politics and public support for the cultural sector. Internationally respected cultural leaders reflected on the current pressures facing institutions, including recent U.S. policy shifts that challenge the status of federal cultural agencies, and concerns about artistic freedom and cultural pluralism in civic life.

The conversation highlighted the importance of ethical leadership, principled decision-making, and sustained advocacy in times of turbulence. Panelists discussed the need for institutions to remain steadfast in their missions while adapting to shifting conditions. They examined internal tensions that arise within large cultural organizations — particularly those with politically diverse boards — when navigating issues of equity, inclusion, and public accountability.

The importance of understanding the broader circumstances impacting cultural institutions was highlighted, particularly in relation to the culture wars being waged on the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. A key message was the necessity for artists and institutions to remain steadfast in defending their practices and First Amendment rights (which protects religious freedom, free speech and free press, and citizens' right to

peacefully assemble and petition), underscoring the importance of perseverance in overcoming challenges.

The events of 2020, following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, were recognized as a catalytic moment that prompted many organizations to reassess their internal structures and public commitments. Participants emphasized that moving beyond performative responses toward meaningful structural change requires individual and collective will, as well as a long-term investment in trust-building.

The session concluded on a note of cautious global optimism centered around maintaining space for questioning and addressing obstacles. Emerging cross-sector strategies, such as those linking arts with health or environmental work, were seen as promising frameworks for broader societal impact. Also, the opportunity to prioritize trust over profit and to inspire the next generation of leaders was highlighted. To this effect, speakers noted the growing need to reimagine funding models, prioritize local and state-level advocacy, and expand support through partnerships, continued corporate sponsorship, and sustainable investment.

Key Takeaways

- Disruption is necessary when conventional approaches fail.
- Community-led solutions outperform top-down interventions.
- Risk-taking is essential for meaningful cultural advancement.
- Funding models need radical restructuring.
- Intersectional thinking breaks institutional barriers.



Beyond the Podium: Arts, Culture, and Olympic Legacies



Speakers

Tamsin Ace

Director, East Bank

Jason Bruges

Founder, Jason Bruges Studio

Nora Halpern

Executive Director, LA28 Cultural Olympiad

This session explored programmatic opportunities for the upcoming LA28 Cultural Olympiad, focusing on how host cities can create inclusive and sustainable initiatives. The discussion drew on both local experiences and international precedents to examine the potential of large-scale events to create meaningful cultural legacies.

Strategic planning was framed as essential to avoiding the pitfalls of past host cities, with a particular focus on designing cultural programs within existing cultural infrastructure and community networks. The legacy of previous Olympics, including those in Los Angeles (1984), London (2012), and Paris (2024), offered insights into balancing tourism-driven initiatives with authentic local engagement.

Moderator

Angelita Teo

Director, IOC/ Olympic Foundation for Culture and Heritage

Speakers emphasized the importance of early and sustained community engagement, artist inclusion, and volunteer participation. Cultural programs were presented not only as platforms for showcasing creativity, but as mechanisms for social cohesion, neighborhood connectivity, and civic pride.

The role of public art, storytelling, and sound-based interventions were also discussed as tools for expanding representation and engaging diverse communities. The panel concluded with reflections on how site-specific programming and cross-sector partnerships could

position LA28 as a model for cultural integration within global sporting events.

Key Takeaways

- Arts and culture play an essential economic and social role when cities host world sporting events.
- Cultural programming creates opportunities for global cultural exchange and cultural impact.
- Diverse representation enhances global event relevance.
- Legacy planning is crucial for the impact on cultural ecosystems.
- Local artists are vital to authentic cultural showcases.



DAY ONE

Glocal Perspectives on Impact: Measuring What Matters

Speakers

Bronwyn Mauldin

Director of Research and Evaluation, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture

Michael O'Leary

Deputy CEO & Project Director, Melbourne Arts Precinct Corporation

Victoria Perera Rojas

Associate Director, Evaluation & Learning, The Music Center

Moderator

Natalia Vartapetova

Senior Consultant, AEA Consulting



This session brought together leaders in arts and cultural impact measurement from diverse institutions, including The Music Center, Melbourne Arts Precinct Co., and the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture. The conversation centered on how different organizations approach measuring and evaluating the impact of cultural programming, with a particular focus on accessibility, community engagement, and social impact. The panelists shared their unique perspectives on balancing quantitative metrics with qualitative outcomes, while emphasizing the importance of thoughtful planning and community-centered evaluation approaches.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on methodological innovations and challenges in data collection. The panelists highlighted the evolution from traditional email surveys to more diverse data collection methods, including in-person surveys and

digital tools, shared insights about The Music Center’s comprehensive approach to measuring over 60 programs annually, and revealed how LA County’s shift to in-person surveying uncovered important demographic differences between email and on-site respondents. This demonstrated the critical importance of methodology selection in capturing accurate representations of program impact and audience engagement.

The panel addressed several complex challenges in impact measurement, particularly the tension between proving economic value and capturing intangible artistic benefits. They specifically highlighted the pressure to demonstrate economic impact while acknowledging that some of the most meaningful aspects of arts experiences resist quantification. Emphasis was given on thoughtful planning through a Theory of Change model, and measuring outcomes like creativity, wellbeing, education, and social connections. They provided Melbourne’s unique perspective on infrastructure impact measurement, combining traditional economic metrics with broader social indicators. This approach encompassed tracking job creation for underrepresented groups, sustainability achievements like 90% building material reuse, and cultural participation metrics. This comprehensive framework demonstrated how cultural districts can effectively measure both concrete outcomes and broader community impacts. This framework showed how cultural districts measure outcomes and impacts.

Key takeaways from the session included the importance of early stakeholder engagement in defining measurement goals, the need for multiple measurement approaches to capture different types of impact, and the emerging role of technology in data collection and analysis. The audience discussion raised important questions about measuring intangibles, the potential and limitations of artificial intelligence (AI) in impact assessment, and ethical considerations in data collection. The panel emphasized that while comprehensive measurement is challenging, it remains essential for demonstrating value, improving programs, and ensuring cultural institutions serve their communities effectively.

Key Takeaways

- Cross-cultural collaboration enhances district identity.
- Metrics must reflect diverse value systems.
- Global networks strengthen local initiatives.
- International case studies provide implementation frameworks.
- Cultural diplomacy builds soft power.

Creative Recovery: Restoring Places, Rebuilding Communities

Speakers

Leslie Ito

Executive Director,
Armory Center for the Arts

Janet Newcomb

Executive Director,
National Coalition for
Arts' Preparedness &
Emergency Response
(NCAPER)

Moderator

Ramon Marrades

Director,
Placemaking Europe



This session examined the role of cultural organizations and artists in building community resilience and facilitating recovery during and after natural disasters, drawing on examples from the recent wildfires in Los Angeles, California, and floods in Valencia, Spain. These cases demonstrated how arts organizations often become vital community anchors during crises, providing immediate relief and long-term support.

Through the lens of the local art community's response to the Los Angeles wildfires, participants gained insight into how cultural institutions can quickly adapt to serve as care centers. The stories shared highlighted both the immediate challenges of disaster response and the deeper systemic issues affecting recovery, especially the digital divide that limits access to vital services and aid. Insights from national emergency readiness efforts showed the critical importance of preparation and training for arts workers, who often find themselves on the front lines during community crises.

A theoretical model for understanding recovery as both a civic right and a cultural process was introduced based on the tragic experience of the 2024 Valencia floods. Three principles for citizen empowerment — the right to shape one's environment, to creatively adapt, and to envision new futures — provide a structured approach to guide

community-led recovery efforts. This framework can be especially relevant in situations where traditional institutional responses have fallen short.

The session concluded by emphasizing that successful recovery must be flexible, locally led, and rooted in community knowledge. It also highlighted how creative practices foster collective memory, solidarity, and a sense of belonging, which are essential for long-term recovery.

Key Takeaways

- Cultural organizations and artists play a central role in disaster recovery, providing both immediate relief and long-term resilience.
- Cultural institutions can rapidly pivot to become places of refuge and care.
- There is a need for disaster preparedness and training for arts workers, recognizing that they often serve as second responders in community crises and need better tools and support.
- Community-led recovery is a civic right, and cultural processes need to focus on empowering citizens.
- Recovery requires a flexible, locally driven approach that integrates cultural assets, community knowledge, and creative strategies.



Grand Avenue Cultural District: The Making of

Speakers

Alex Costas

Recruitment,
Onboarding &
Relationship
Management,
Bloomberg Connects

Rachel Moore

President & CEO, The
Music Center

Moderator

Lily Cabatu Weiss

Executive Director,
Dallas Arts District



This session examined the development of the Grand Avenue Cultural District, tracing its evolution from individual advocacy to a coordinated downtown effort. The discussion provided insight into the collaborative processes behind one of the most ambitious cultural projects in Los Angeles.

Early efforts by civic leaders, such as Gloria Molina, and philanthropists, like Eli Broad, paved the way for transformation, including major investments in Grand Park and the establishment of cultural anchors along the corridor. The formation of the district involved extensive stakeholder coordination, strategic planning, and the securing of public and private funding — including a significant grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies to support infrastructure and accessibility.

Digital innovation emerged as a key feature of the district’s strategy, with plans for QR code networks and mobile platforms designed to enhance navigation and interpretation. These tools aim to bridge institutional silos, enhance cultural access, and foster deeper engagement across diverse audiences.

The cultural district’s comprehensive approach goes beyond physical and digital infrastructure to include community engagement and

economic development. Plans include establishing grants for artists and organizations, addressing safety concerns, and securing corporate sponsorships. The goal is to create a sustainable creative ecosystem that supports both established institutions and emerging artists, while serving as an economic driver and emotional anchor for the community.

Looking ahead, the cultural district's success will be measured by its ability to achieve multiple objectives: becoming a premier cultural destination, promoting inclusive community engagement, and stimulating economic development. With Bloomberg's backing and the upcoming appointment of an executive director by 2028, the project aims to turn Grand Avenue into a global model for cultural districts worldwide, while maintaining its distinctly Los Angeles character.

Key Takeaways

- Long-term planning ensured the sustainable growth of the downtown Los Angeles cultural corridor, encompassing the Financial District and Historic Core.
- The Grand Avenue Cultural District is a success in urban cultural development.
- Cultural anchors established neighborhood cohesion.
- Partnership with local government and philanthropy helped shape the district's identity.
- Leaders and investors see opportunities for economic revitalization, storytelling, and tourism ahead of world sporting events.
- An official cultural district designation from the County of Los Angeles legitimized community stakeholder efforts and enhanced strategies and frameworks.

Ownership Structures to Support, Community Resilience & Equity

Speakers

Ken Ikeda
CEO, Community Arts
Stabilization Trust
(CAST)

Madeleine Spencer
Co-director,
Placemaking U.S.

Prophet Walker
CEO, Community
Labs

Moderator

Emily Harney
Senior Associate, AEA
Consulting



The session discussed innovative approaches to community ownership and investment. Panelists shared experience in real estate development and land trusts, emphasizing the importance of intentional community building, preventing artist displacement and exploring new models for arts housing and community development. Valuable insights from placemaking were shared about how community activism in Santa Ana, California led to the preservation of local monuments and a shift in perspectives on community engagement.

The discussion explored practical implementation challenges and their solutions. From the complexities of aligning private capital with community values, to a discussion about innovative approaches like 99-year leases for small businesses. The speakers emphasized the importance of sustainable ownership models, noting that philanthropy alone cannot fill all gaps. The importance of collective decision-making from local community-based organizations was emphasized, highlighting the Santa Ana Land Trust as an example of successful cooperative governance.

A significant portion of the conversation focused on the role of artists in community development. The Black Cultural Zone in East Oakland, California was highlighted as an example of artist-centered development, with discussions about making commercial spaces

more accessible to artists through innovative lease-to-own programs. Panelists shared successes, while addressing concerns about gentrification and the importance of protecting invisible communities of artists and ensuring they are “being held by community” rather than just being in it.

The session concluded with important discussions about the future of urban development and community engagement. The speakers emphasized the need for free art and design spaces in communities, advocating for increased investment in architectural and design representation in cities. They stressed the importance of deep listening and learning in civic service, particularly in the post-COVID context, and the need for community needs to be identified rather than communities being subjected to unnecessary social experiments.

Key Takeaways

- Alternative ownership models foster local control.
- Shared equity builds community resilience.
- Land trusts can preserve cultural heritage.
- Cooperative structures democratize decision-making.
- Financial models must prioritize sustainability.



A Tale of Softer Cities



Speakers

Mouna Andraos

Co-president, Daily
tous les jours

Chelina Odbert

Executive Director,
Kounkuey Design
Initiative

Anupam Yog

Managing Partner,
XDG Labs Pte Ltd

Moderator

Ilana Altman

Co-Executive
Director, The Bentway
Conservancy

This session explored how cities can be reimagined to address current challenges related to mental health and social isolation. The speakers highlighted the vital role of public spaces in promoting community well-being and social connectedness, especially as cities continue to adapt and evolve in the post-pandemic era. The discussion centered on the concept of “soft cities” — urban environments intentionally designed to foster care, meaning, and shared experiences.

Case studies showcased how overlooked infrastructure can be transformed into welcoming, human-centered spaces. Projects emphasized creative interventions, flexible programming, and community-informed design as essential components of social infrastructure.

Throughout the session, speakers reiterated that creating softer cities involves more than just physical infrastructure — it calls for a fundamental change in how we conceive and design urban environments. The discussion highlighted the significance of intentional design, policy reform, and innovative programming in developing urban spaces that support mental health, social connectedness, and more sustainable urban living patterns.

The session concluded with a call to shift from productivity-focused design to one that values presence and harmony. This approach challenges traditional urban planning by emphasizing the importance of stillness and reflection in city spaces.

Key Takeaways

- The concept of soft cities is characterized by urban areas intentionally designed to foster care, connection, and shared human experiences, transcending utilitarian approaches to city planning.
- Soft cities is a new urban philosophy that values presence, reflection, and stillness, rather than just productivity, pushing for a deeper, more mindful approach to urban planning.
- Creative urban interventions can transform a city's social infrastructure.
- Public spaces are tools for mental health, wellness, and social connection.



DAY ONE

It Starts With an H... Harnessing Hope to Transform Narratives of Homelessness

Speakers

Najel Monteiro
Cultural Director,
Cultuur Concreet

Liam Noordzij
Cultural Director,
Cultuur Concreet

Alisa Orduna
Founder & CEO,
Florence Aliese
Advancement
Network, LLC

Kevin Sherrod
Practice Area Leader
- Arts & Culture,
Gensler LA, Gensler
/ USC

Moderator:

**Letitia Fernandez
Ivins**
Senior Director,
Civic Strategies &
Partnerships, The
Music Center



This breakout session examined how cultural districts can address homelessness not just as a lack of housing, but as a crisis of visibility, agency, and belonging. The panel wove together insights from international cultural organizers, designers, civic strategists, and homelessness advocates.

Speakers described homelessness as a systemic problem that calls for innovative solutions, noting that roughly 52,000 people in Los Angeles are without shelter. They agreed that cultural districts are uniquely positioned to address these issues by creating inclusive spaces and fostering connections, and highlighted creative interventions that focus on lived experiences, provide accessible information about services, and uphold dignity in all interactions.

The case studies presented demonstrated successful efforts to bridge the gap between housed and unhoused communities. International approaches showed how cultural organizations support global migrants who have lost housing due to temporary work arrangements. A notable example from Rotterdam illustrated how cultural initiatives can meet immediate needs while also advocating for long-term systemic change. The participants concurred that effective solutions require patience, active listening, and a focus on behaviors and needs rather than labels.

Los Angeles-based initiatives showcased how creative expression can serve as a common ground for diverse community members. The Calirose Project and Art Cart bring housed and unhoused neighbors together to create and sell art, while peer ambassador groups manage hygiene stations. The Skid Row Midnight Commission's laundry room teaches life skills with respect.

All these approaches exemplify dignity-centered strategies that recognize the agency and contributions of unhoused individuals. The session concluded with actionable recommendations for cultural districts worldwide: design inclusive spaces that welcome diverse publics; shift from security-focused approaches to community ambassador models; involve people with lived experience of homelessness in programming decisions; and build partnerships with community-based organizations. Collectively, these strategies can transform public spaces from borders into bridges, fostering greater social cohesion and a sense of belonging for all community members.

Key Takeaways

- Trust is the biggest currency in building relationships with unhoused communities.
- Effective programs meet people where they are, respecting their pace and autonomy.
- Arts initiatives can bring together housed and unhoused neighbors, fostering understanding.
- Cultural organizations can influence policy while providing immediate support.
- Involve people with lived experience of homelessness in programming and decision-making.
- Partner with community-rooted initiatives to enhance impact and reach.

DAY ONE

LA Cultural Navigators: Rolling Downtown to Crenshaw... to Dinner!

Guides

John Arroyo

Assistant Professor,
Urban Studies and
Planning, UC San
Diego

Demar Matthews

Founder/Principal,
OffTOP Design

Aaron Paley

President,
Community Arts
Resources

Howard Sherman

Chief Operating
Officer, The Music
Center



The guided bus tour began at The Music Center and made a tour through the city's cultural landscape — from the institutional spine and emerging cultural district of Grand Avenue in Downtown Los Angeles to the historically rich and creatively vibrant neighborhoods of Crenshaw and Leimert Park. Along the route, four expert guides shared reflections from their perspectives on the city, offering personal insights and professional context to illuminate the layered stories that shape these places.

Stories of Place: Los Angeles

Speakers

Jason Foster

President & CEO,
Destination
Crenshaw

Rachel Moore

President & CEO,
The Music Center

Miguel Santana

President & Chief
Executive Officer,
California Community
Foundation



Moderator

Mandalit del Barco

Entertainment
Correspondent, NPR
West

Day 2 of the 2025 GCDN convening was held at the iconic Walt Disney Concert Hall, a globally recognized architectural landmark in downtown Los Angeles, located across the street from the previous day's event at the Music Center's Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. The institution is a stakeholder and community partner in the new Grand Avenue Cultural District, and attendees were warmly welcomed.

The day began with a main stage panel featuring prominent Los Angeles-based arts leaders who discussed the city's diverse cultural identity and creative ecology, each offering a unique cultural perspective and experience.

Panelists illustrated the complexity of Los Angeles, acknowledging its size and diversity as both strengths and challenges. They discussed how the city's neighborhoods are increasingly divided by class rather than ethnicity, and how this poses a need for cultural leadership to be rooted in legacy.

Speakers discussed their leadership efforts to shape the cultural narrative of Los Angeles through community involvement, challenging hierarchical structures, and creating platforms that foster increased cultural participation. They explored place-based and narrative-change work that regenerates cultural communities,

as well as efforts by major institutions to leverage their platforms for social change.

The discussion also touched on how cultural institutions are responding to federal attacks on diversity by doubling down on local partnerships and prioritizing inclusive programming and cross-sector collaboration.

Looking ahead to upcoming global events hosted by Los Angeles, such as the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games, panelists discussed how the city can showcase its cultural richness to international visitors without resorting to superficial spectacle. They emphasized how these global events provide an opportunity to showcase community initiatives and cultural districts that might otherwise be overlooked, resulting in a more inclusive portrayal of Los Angeles on the world stage.

The session concluded with reflections on how the arts sector can better partner with the tech industry. While new tools like AI offer opportunities for innovation and community participation, speakers cautioned that collaborations between the tech industry and the arts and culture sector must be deliberate and focused on transforming narratives and benefiting the artist community.

Key Takeaways

- LA's neighborhood diversity creates a rich storytelling tapestry.
- Gentrification threatens authentic cultural narratives.
- Multicultural approaches are essential for inclusive representation.
- Historical erasure requires intentional counter-documentation.
- There is a moral imperative in cultural leadership to promote and protect local culture.

Storytelling for Change: Resistance, Renewal, and Reimagining

Speakers

Leticia Rhi Buckley
Chief Executive
Officer, LA Plaza de
Cultura y Artes

Kristin Fukushima
Executive Director,
Little Tokyo
Community Council

Karen Mack
Executive Director, LA
Commons

Moderator:

Stephanie Fortunato
Special Projects
Director, GCDN



This session brought together community leaders from across Los Angeles to explore the power of storytelling as a tool for cultural preservation, resistance, and community empowerment. The conversation highlighted how communities use public narratives to assert their identity, resist displacement, and shape more just futures.

Examples included communities like Little Tokyo, known for its resilience and self-determination; the leadership of Black-led cultural organizations in shaping South LA's neighborhood identity as a hub for Black creative expression; and historic preservation initiatives to celebrate Latino culture through inclusive programs and storytelling. Panelists discussed how communities can leverage narratives to shape public policy, preserve history, and inspire action.

The session emphasized that storytelling is not a luxury but a necessity in the face of cultural erasure and systemic inequity. Participants highlighted the role of cultural institutions as amplifiers of community voices, stressing that authentic engagement requires more than representation — it demands partnership and shared authorship.

The discussion ended with a powerful call to action, urging audience members to become cultural ambassadors and actively participate in preserving and sharing their community's stories.



Key Takeaways

- LA's neighborhood diversity creates a rich storytelling tapestry.
- Gentrification threatens authentic cultural narratives.
- Multicultural approaches are essential for inclusive representation.
- Historical erasure requires intentional counter-documentation.
- There is a moral imperative in cultural leadership to promote and protect local culture.

Must We Build It for Them to Come?

Speakers

Josie Cahill

Head of Partnerships
& Engagement,
BBC Salford /
Co-founder and Chair
of We Invented the
Weekend festival

Natasha Sharma

Co-founder, Govandi
Arts Festival,
Community Design
Agency

Joan Weinstein

Director, Getty
Foundation

Moderator:

Joe Wilson, Jr.

Director, Department
of Art, Culture and
Tourism, City of
Providence



This session examined how festivals and cultural programming can catalyze community development, social cohesion, and spatial equity. Panelists presented programming models from Mumbai, Manchester, and Los Angeles, illustrating how creative interventions — whether large-scale or hyperlocal — can transform public space and foster civic engagement.

Speakers emphasized the importance of accessibility, co-creation, and responsiveness to local contexts. The various approaches discussed include community steering committees, artist development programs, modular infrastructure, and intentionally temporary interventions. These strategies help bridge institutional aims with grassroots energy, enabling festivals to function as civic laboratories.

Discussions also challenged assumptions about permanence, suggesting that temporary programming can have enduring impact when rooted in strong values and community ownership. Panelists reflected on how lessons from the pandemic — particularly around flexibility and co-responsibility — have reshaped how public events are planned and experienced. Ultimately, the panel promoted festivals as spaces for civic expression and alternative futures- where temporary changes can spark lasting positive transformation.



Key Takeaways

- Audience development requires strategic engagement.
- Community co-creation ensures relevance.
- Digital accessibility expands participation opportunities.
- Programming must reflect neighborhood demographics.
- Visitor experience begins before physical arrival.

Culture, Climate, and the Future of Place

Speakers

Denise Fairchild

President Emeritus,
Emerald Cities
Collaborative

Sheena Khan

Head, Environment
& Culture Programs,
Expo City Dubai
(Terra)

Daniel Tobin

Founder & Creative
Director, UAP | Urban
Art Projects



Moderator

Freya Stannard

Director, Exhibition
Road Cultural Group

This session examined how arts and culture can support climate resilience and environmental justice. Drawing on examples from Los Angeles, Dubai, and Sydney, panelists explored how creative strategies and public art can foster ecological awareness and community empowerment.

Discussions ranged from grassroots environmental justice efforts to large-scale design interventions that honors Indigenous People's heritage and promotes sustainability. Case studies presented illustrated how cross-sector collaboration — between cultural institutions, arts workers, and city planners — can create a shared policy language around climate action.

Participants emphasized the importance of embedding arts and culture into climate initiatives. They discussed the role of creativity in shaping collective memory and fostering a sense of responsibility for one's environment.

The session concluded with an emphasis on collaborative approaches to cultural programming and the centrality of environmental justice in climate initiatives.

Key Takeaways

- Cultural districts can lead in building sustainable ecosystems through collaborative programming and institutional alignment.
- Climate justice must prioritize the lived experiences and leadership of frontline communities to be truly equitable and impactful.
- Public art can serve as a powerful medium to connect people with place, heritage, and ecological consciousness.



Reclaiming Space: How Feminist and Community-Led Spatial Practices can Shape More Inclusive Cities



Speakers

Maya Shpiro

Social Impact &
Co-creation Lead,
Building Diversity

Geraldina Interiano Wise

Artist/Board Chair
& co-founder,
ALMAAHH

Sue Bell Yank

Executive Director,
Clockshop

This breakout session focused on feminist spatial frameworks that have helped communities reclaim public narratives and create more inclusive urban environments. The speakers showcased unique feminist spatial imaginaries — characterized by participatory design, empathy, active listening, and community co-creation — guided by a core principle of equity and belonging.

In the Los Angeles presentation, arts-based community engagement programs offered pathways for long-term residents to influence park development in a gentrifying neighborhood. In the Houston discussion, the ALMAAHH Museum project showed how cultural spaces can oppose historical erasure by centering the needs and perspectives of marginalized communities. In both cases, the importance of ongoing community care was emphasized.

Moderator

Catalina Casas

Consultant, AEA
Consulting

Speakers noted that this is made possible when designers balance their professional expertise with a deep respect for community knowledge, shared decision-making, open communication, and welcoming environments. They recognized the tension between artistic vision and community needs, suggesting that the most innovative solutions come when these perspectives inform each other.



Some helpful tips for cultural districts include allocating sufficient budgets for ongoing community engagement, selecting communication methods accessible to everyone, presenting data in ways that resonate with diverse audiences, and redesigning engagement processes to include underrepresented voices from the beginning.

The speakers concluded that spatial justice is achieved when historically marginalized communities see themselves in the urban environments they helped create, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and ownership.

Key Takeaways

- Empathy is a central principle in inclusive design.
- Arts programming can test ideas of community engagement.
- Allow time for story collection beyond structured surveys.
- Trust requires balancing design expertise with lived experience.
- Budget time for authentic community engagement from day one.
- Communicate design updates using accessible, plain language.
- Success = historically excluded communities seeing themselves represented.

Welcome to the Los Angeles Central Library



Speakers

Gregorio Scarpella

Director, The Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN)

Stacy Lieberman

President and CEO, Library Foundation of Los Angeles

John F. Szabo

City Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library

Speakers welcomed GCDN attendees to the Central Library, the main branch of the Los Angeles Public Library, and a major landmark within the developing Grand Avenue Cultural District. They shared an overview of the Library's centennial celebration and how it has expanded to meet community needs, offering services that support storytelling, digital inclusion, and intellectual freedom. Their remarks highlighted the Library's role as a cultural institution with satellite branches, programs, and initiatives across the city, serving diverse communities. They discussed the ongoing reinvention of the Library, emphasizing how its programming is tailored to nearby neighborhoods, including immigrant communities and individuals experiencing homelessness who are affected by mental health issues. The Library's leadership specifically underscored its vital role within the community and its ongoing relevance as an institution.

Redefining Relevance: Who Do We Do This For?



Speakers

Elly Andriopoulou
Managing Director,
Stavros Niarchos
Cultural Center
(SNFCC)

Skye Patrick
County Librarian,
LA County Library

Alex Sarian
President and CEO,
Arts Commons

Moderator

Elaine Bedell
CEO, Southbank
Centre

This closing mainstage panel brought together leaders from various cultural institutions worldwide to discuss the changing role of public institutions amid a polarized, fast-paced world.

Panelists examined how libraries, cultural centers, and performing arts venues are transforming their missions to stay relevant to their communities. Key topics included co-creation, inclusive programming, and reaching beyond traditional audiences, such as conservatives who might be skeptical of cultural institutions.

Speakers highlighted new strategies for community engagement, blending institutional identity with responsiveness, and aligning programs with public needs. The discussion also focused on changing leadership styles — from top-down directives to facilitation and collaboration.

Looking toward the future, panelists envisioned cultural institutions as lively, adaptable community hubs. They stressed the importance of continuous evolution and maintaining flexibility while upholding core values. The session concluded with a call for ongoing listening and adaptation, emphasizing that institutions must remain relevant and indispensable to civic life.

Key Takeaways

- Traditional audience metrics reinforce exclusionary practices.
- Community co-creation ensures meaningful cultural relevance.
- Institutional transformation requires power redistribution.
- Access barriers go beyond ticket prices; they are also programmatic.
- Cultural organizations must justify their community value.



Building Stories of Place

Speakers

Ron Elad

Partner, Buro
Happold

Regina Myer

President, Downtown
Brooklyn Partnership

Chris Obayda

Principal, Grimshaw

Mark Thomann

Director, WILDING X

Michael Volk

Principal, Global
Co-lead for Culture +
Museums, Gensler

Claire Weisz

Principal, WXY
architecture + urban
design

Moderator

Daniel Payne

Principal, AEA
Consulting



This focus track brought together design leaders who explored how architecture, planning, and design shape the identity and trajectory of a place. Speakers presented a range of projects that highlighted the evolving relationship between built form, social purpose, and environmental responsibility.

Case studies ranged from contemporary architectural interventions in heritage sites and museums to large-scale building projects and transformation of public infrastructure in neighborhoods. Presenters shared insights into community engagement processes, designing for climate resilience, and integrating storytelling into physical spaces.

Whether working within historic districts or emerging cultural corridors, the case studies demonstrated how inclusive and

participatory design can catalyze broader cultural, social, and economic transformation. Special attention was paid to ensuring the development processes serve existing communities. The session highlighted how successful projects demonstrated the ability to serve as bridges between past and future, community and culture, environmental responsibility and human experience. The panelists' collective expertise illustrated how thoughtful architectural intervention and planning can create a lasting positive impact on communities while preserving and enhancing a place's cultural legacy.

Key Takeaways

- Architecture is a cultural catalyst for a city or region.
- Design can reimagine neglected or industrial spaces into vibrant cultural hubs.
- The Dib International Contemporary Art Museum in Bangkok (WXY architecture) and The Eden Project in Cornwall (Grimshaw) demonstrate how architecture can drive not only spatial transformation, but also economic and cultural transformation.
- Environmental responsibility is embedded in today's leading architecture. LACMA's redesign demonstrates how ecological sensitivity is now foundational to design thinking.
- The Timken Museum in Balboa Park in San Diego is a great example of balancing heritage and modernization in architecture.
- Projects demonstrate that community and stakeholder engagement yield more resilient and relevant outcomes.



Stories Without Boundaries: A District-Making Workshop for El Pueblo

Workshop facilitators

Edgar Garcia

Interim General
Manager, El Pueblo
de Los Angeles
Historical Monument

John Wirfs

Commissioner,
El Pueblo de Los
Angeles Historical
Monument, City of
Los Angeles

Naseema Asif

Senior Architect,
Cultural & Civic
Sector, RIOS

Mark Motonaga

Creative Director
& Partner, RIOS



This workshop brought together experts from architecture, urban planning, and cultural preservation to reimagine El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument — Los Angeles’s birthplace and historic district that commemorates the city’s Mexican origins. Participants brainstormed strategies for inclusive storytelling, economic sustainability, and innovative placekeeping for this historically significant area.

As the city’s historic core, El Pueblo holds layered narratives and complex legacies, many of which remain underrepresented in its public presentation. Speakers discussed the complex challenge of balancing traditional heritage with the city’s multicultural history. They acknowledged the importance of honoring the district’s ties to varied cultural histories, including the legacies of Indigenous, Asian, and African American communities.

Architectural approaches envisioned thoughtful design interventions that could create inclusive, vibrant spaces that honor cultural heritage while fostering broader community engagement. These approaches emphasized the role of materiality, craft, and construction methods in expressing cultural identity and fostering intergenerational connections.



The workshop was a great case study in how cities can honor historical continuity while embracing pluralism and change. By recognizing the full spectrum of cultural narratives embedded in place, districts like El Pueblo can become living platforms for shared memory, civic dialogue, and cultural innovation.

Key Takeaways

- Inclusive storytelling to reflect the diverse histories of Indigenous, Asian, and African diasporic communities is essential to district-making.
- Balancing historical preservation with the realities of a multicultural city was a central challenge discussed.
- Architects emphasized the use of materials and craftsmanship to reflect cultural identity and foster intergenerational ties.
- Practical strategies included converting unused parking lots to public spaces and building public-private partnerships for sustainable growth.
- Collaborative placekeeping and multicultural storytelling were seen as key to preserving authenticity while embracing innovation.

Cultivating Sustainable Creative Districts: A Global Dialogue



Workshop facilitators

Paula Trujillo

Director of Strategy,
Conexiones Creativas

Conrado Uribe

Director of Contents,
Conexiones Creativas

This workshop highlighted lessons from Medellín, Colombia, demonstrating how coordinated cultural planning can drive urban transformation. Presenters shared models for developing creative districts through mixed-use programming, public-private partnerships, and investment in cultural ecosystems. The session explored Medellín's impressive shift from a violence-ridden Latin American city in the 1990s to a lively global hub for creativity in the 2020s.

Projects like *Bodega/Comfama* and the Antioquia creative district showed how cultural infrastructure, programming, and entrepreneurship can activate underutilized neighborhoods and foster citywide resilience and renewal.

The workshop also addressed challenges such as political insecurity, funding limitations, and the importance of creating autonomous cultural spaces outside urban centers. Participants emphasized the need for strong government support, political stability, and community ownership to sustain and expand efforts. Key insights highlight the importance of balancing government intervention with grassroots initiatives when developing creative districts in settings outside of the West.

Key Takeaways

- Strong institutional support ensures long-term viability.
- Successful creative district projects require political stability and government support.
- Community ownership models enhance district resilience.
- Cultural equity requires intentional resource allocation.



What's Hot and What's Not?

Digital Art and Placemaking for Cultural Districts

Speakers

Fady Atallah

Creative Director,
Moment Factory

Jason Bruges

Founder, Jason
Bruges Studio

Melissa Mongiat

Co-founder, Daily
tous les jours

Margot Mottaz

Head of Curatorial,
Superblue

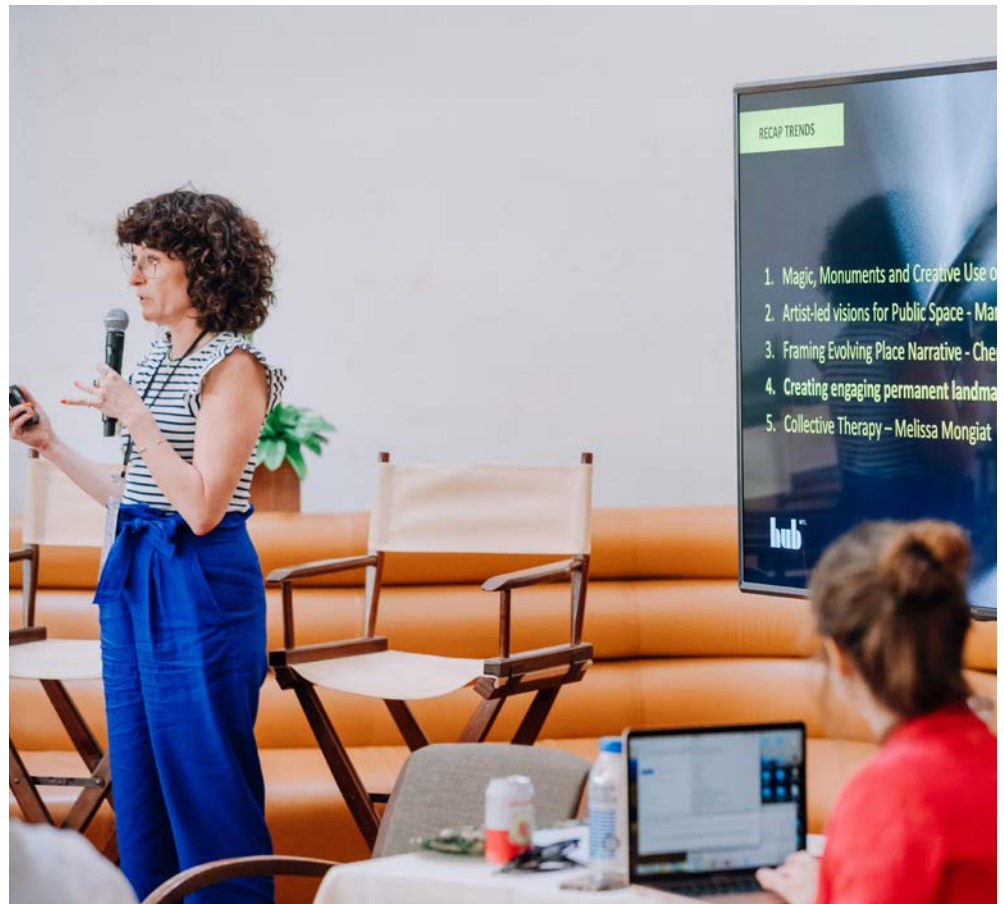
Moderators

Julie Dalbec

Head of
programming, HUB
Montreal

Jacquelyn West

Senior Advisor, Public
Realm Projects,
Quartier des
Spectacles



This workshop explored innovative approaches to integrating digital art into cultural spaces. The session began with an overview of placemaking principles focused on three key concepts: the right to the city, innovative curation, and co-designing the future with artists.

Examples included a major digital art studio presenting on the concept of “magic with the outside,” and how dynamic surfaces and heritage buildings can be contextualized in new ways. Planning strategies included high-tech palettes incorporating media control and robotics to facilitate responsive spaces and audience co-creation. Examples like programmable fountains and discussing the importance of integration of digital infrastructure in cultural districts through “place-telling” and “place-sensing”.



Further case studies included collective experiences through play, movement, and music, emphasizing how digital installations can foster connection and collective therapy. The speakers emphasized the need for thoughtful integration of digital elements that can create meaningful connections while respecting both artistic vision and community needs. Lastly, they stressed the importance of aligning digital art with local narratives and values, ensuring that innovation remains inclusive and grounded.

Key Takeaways

- Technical infrastructure requires careful planning.
- Artist collaboration is essential for authentic experiences.
- Budget considerations determine implementation scope.
- Interactive installations increase visitor engagement.
- Digital integration must enhance the physical environment.

Place Based Performances: Queer Anthropologies



This session, held throughout Grand Park (a 12-acre civic park in the heart of downtown Los Angeles), showcased three powerful performances. These works, curated by Robin Abad Ocubillo and Eric Solis, explored queer histories, survival, resilience, and storytelling through movement, voice, and performance of place. Led by artists Star Feliz, Carmina Escobar, and Tyler Matthew Oyer, each piece offered a unique perspective on the idea of queer anthropology and experimental modes of ethnography. The series of place-based performances demonstrated how public spaces can be reactivated through embodied research and poetic intervention.



STAR FELIZ

In “Acaiya’s Well Overflows,” Star Feliz, drawing from their Dominican Republic origins and New York upbringing, presented a performance that invoked deep earth time within the embodied memory of ancestral waters. Using the fountain at Grand Park, Feliz channeled mythical water-beings through haunting vocalizations, cyclical movements, and ceremonial gestures. Star Feliz portrayed these beings as bearers of gender-expansive grief and joy, transforming the urban fountain into an oracular site of renewal. Their performance highlighted the profound connection between queer history and nature, drawing the audience into a trance-like state where “the boundaries between devotional pleasure, trans-temporal resistance, and techno poetry dissolve.” During Star’s performance, viewers were encouraged to “connect to earth and memory.”

“Queer history is also nature
and interconnected.”

Star Feliz



CARMINA ESCOBAR

Carmina Escobar, a vocalist with Latin American roots, created “We Gather Here,” a nonverbal, participatory performance that utilized a mirrored Mylar-covered park table as a stage prop. This immersive experience transformed the space into a shared archive of queer memory through guided vocalizations, breath work, and intentional gestures. Her performance explored the relationship between voice, acoustics, and physical space, drawing inspiration from Indigenous Los Angeles tribes who use vocal sounds as expressions of power and resistance.

Escobar’s performance included distributing donuts to the audience, symbolizing historical resistance. The donuts honored the 1959 Cooper Do-nuts Riot (an LGBTQ + uprising that happened two blocks away from the site of the performance), citing local social struggles and current issues like food insecurity. Escobar stressed the importance of institutional bravery.

“The system is asking for
large conformity...
I ask for bravery now,
especially for these times.”
Carmina Escobar



**TYLER MATTHEW
OYER**

Tyler Matthew Oyer's performance "Miss Beverly Shaw, Sir!" presented the artist's latest installment of their ongoing CALLING ALL DIVAS manifesto (2014–present). This long-term project uses the body as a vessel for intergenerational queer dialogues. In this performance, Oyer reenacted Club Laurel, a lesbian cabaret in North Hollywood, California owned by Beverly Shaw (1909–1990) that operated from 1957 to 1971. Through lip-sync, Oyer gave voice and honor to this important figure in LA's queer nightlife history, bringing to light the importance of civic spaces in expanding local narratives and community.

"Queer space is safety,
freedom, and always changing
and morphing. It is opposition
to capitalistic forces, through
inclusiveness."

Tyler Matthew Oyer

Beyond the Performances: Dialogues with the Artistic Team

Co-curators

Robin Abad Ocubillo
Co-Chair of the
Board, Yerba Buena
Center for the Arts

Eric Solis
Architect, cultural
producer & creative
consultant, Imaginary
Space

Artists

Carmina Escobar
“We Gather Here”
(Community Table)

Star Feliz
“Acaiya’s Well
Overflows” (Memorial
Fountain)

Tyler Matthew Oyer
“Miss Beverly Shaw,
Sir!” (Pavilion)



The post-performance discussion led by curators, Robin Abad and Eric Solis, examined the role of institutions in supporting queer voices, emphasizing the importance of trust-building, authenticity, and community-led curation. Performers reflected how the park, in this instance, became a platform for dialogue as much as expression, underscoring the social and political potential of ephemeral performance. A key theme that emerged was the nature of queer spaces, described as places of “safety, freedom, always changing and morphing, opposition to capitalistic forces, inclusiveness, not narrow.”

The artists concluded their discussion by exploring the spiritual aspects of their work, emphasizing the importance of material support from institutions and effective alignment when creating place-based and site-specific performances. They acknowledged the need for

time to reflect before developing performance pieces. They shared their view that “artists have this burning need to create worlds” and mentioned the subcultural ethos of Do It Yourself (DIY) as a source of inspiration. They also emphasized the significance of trust over tokenism, with Star noting that “art carries a powerful experience, and that’s why Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) connects and survives for so long.” They concluded by calling on cultural leaders to involve queer artists in leading curation and storytelling as a way to build community trust and method to shift public narratives.

Key Takeaways

- Queer narratives reclaim marginalized histories.
- Site-specific work transforms spatial understanding.
- Performance activates underutilized community spaces.
- Inclusive programming builds diverse audiences.
- Authentic representation challenges dominant narratives and builds community power.



Welcome Reception at The Music Center

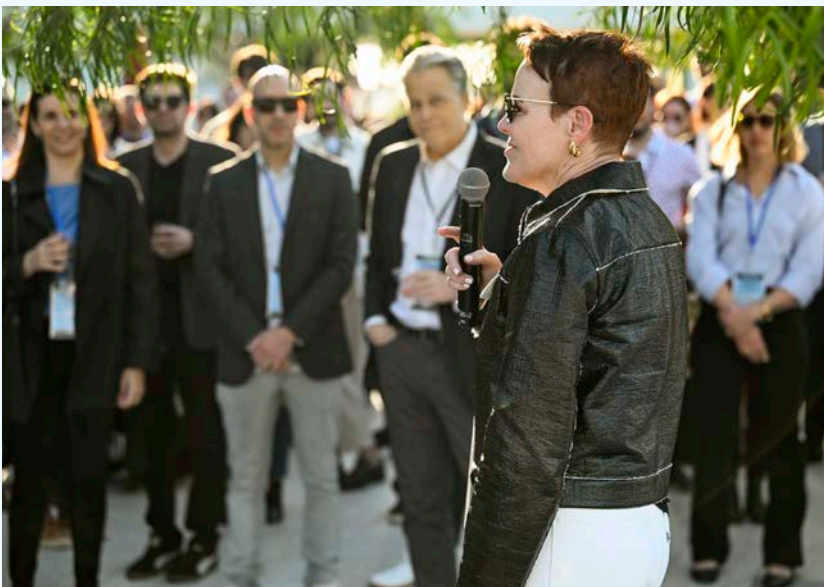


The reception was held on the Jerry Moss Plaza of The Music Center.

Welcome remarks from:

Gregorio Scarpella
Director, The Global Cultural
Districts Network (GCDN)

Rachel Moore
President & CEO, The Music
Center



Hosted Dinner at RIOS



RIOS welcomed participants into their studios for a relaxed evening gathering, a warm and celebratory close to the day.





Closing Reception at the Los Angeles Central Library





New Members Luncheon at Gensler



Los Angeles-based GCDN member Gensler welcomed members who are new to the network at their downtown office. This event is an opportunity for members to begin making connections before the convening officially begins.

Closing Remarks and 2026 Convening Announcement



GCDN leadership conveyed their thanks to everyone who participated — with special acknowledgement of AEA Consulting, RIOS, and Bloomberg Connects for their generous support of the event and to The Music Center for hosting the 2025 convening.

The convening ended with the exciting announcement that the 2026 convening will be held in Doha from 13-16 April 2026.

Cultural Districts as Civic Anchors

By Eduardo Robles
and Michael Manalo,
Convening
Rapporteurs



The LA25 GCDN convening took place just a few weeks before U.S. federal troops descended upon Los Angeles in a direct militaristic attack and media dragnet against immigrant and cultural communities. The plazas of Grand Park, the very place where we'd gathered over lunch, became the stage for unthinkable violence and unrest. The clear opposition from community groups and civic bodies revives the conversation about the role of cultural districts as a bridge to an engaged democracy, with cultural leaders called to lead during a time of social upheaval.

The federal authoritarian actions occurred as LA neighborhoods were still recovering from a global natural disaster, with the region having experienced very brief or no respite from the January 2025 wildfires. Against this dystopian backdrop, cultural districts emerge as essential platforms for community expression and solidarity. As Ragsdale and Litzenberger (2025) ask in their essay, "Weaving a Culture of Civic Life," How can we live well together?

The question resonates as Los Angeles prepares to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympics while managing social tensions. What GCDN LA25 revealed in critical conversations is how cultural districts can evolve through digital innovation, community co-design, and inclusive programming.

Underpinning this cultural labor, presenters emphasized three vital questions:

- *What is the quiet work that builds inclusivity beyond the disconnection that keeps us from seeing each other?*
- *How can stories connect different human experiences and histories?*
- *What is a cultural district's purpose if not to provide frameworks for genuine connection?*

As cultural districts continue to formalize into civic processes, it is paramount for initiatives to balance institutional priorities with community needs, ensuring they remain accessible civic spaces where art, technology, and community come together to address our most urgent social challenges.

But the questions remain: What is the role of cultural institutions as welcoming spaces for diversity of thought and belonging? And what are the essentials, like an umbilical cord or photosynthesis, that link institutions to public life and regional communities? How will global cultural districts respond *strategically* to uphold values of inclusivity and community, especially given events like the Los Angeles wildfires and federal raids?

Cultural districts uniquely connect civic engagement and creative expression, providing infrastructure where communities can process their collective experiences. How can global cultural districts respond to this moment, as civic anchors, with actions that will advance GCDN's values of community and place?

References

Ragsdale, Diane, and Litzenberger, Shannon. "Democracy as Creative Practice: Weaving a Culture of Civic Life." 2025.



