



CREATIVE ECONOMY
WORKGROUP OF CALIFORNIA

The Future of California's Creative Economy

SYNTHESIS OF PUBLIC MEETING 3

Wednesday, February 19, 2025 | 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Thursday, February 20, 2025 | 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Miss T's Studio T Arts & Entertainment Innovation Factory

1215 Del Paso Blvd Sacramento, CA 95815



Graphic illustrations were recorded during the meeting in real-time by Michelle Boos-Stone

About the California Arts Council's Creative Economy Workgroup

Established in the 2022 California budget, the 2024 Creative Economy Workgroup (CEW) is tasked with developing a strategic plan to conduct a comparative analysis with other jurisdictions, evaluate existing financing models and government initiatives, identify opportunities for educational programs and earn-and-learn job training employment, identify geographic areas with the least amount of access or opportunity for a creative economy, and analyze existing initiatives and projects, including the role local governments can play in creating a stronger creative economy. The strategic plan is due to the Legislature by June 30, 2025.

About Institute for the Future (ITF)

The CEW has partnered with ITF to provide research, support, and facilitation. ITF is a nonprofit education and research organization with more than five decades of experience helping leaders, organizations, and communities anticipate the future and make better decisions in the present. ITF's process is a forward-looking, systems-based approach to developing strategies for a competitive and vibrant creative economy that serves all Californians.



About the CEW Public Meetings

IFTF used its Prepare-Foresight-Insight-Action framework to structure a series of three in-person, public workshops for the CEW. The first focused on foresight by identifying drivers of change – key external forces shaping the future of the creative economy. This second workshop focused on insight, eliciting implications of the future forces and drivers developed in the first session. The third and final two-day meeting used IFTF's action framework to brainstorm and refine strategies California can champion to improve the competitiveness and vibrancy of its creative economy. The California Arts Council (CAC) is the administrative body for these convenings; IFTF facilitates the sessions.

This brief details the meeting held in Sacramento, California on February 19 & 20, 2025. It is intended to summarize conversations and brainstorming sessions, and does not represent the consensus view of the workgroup. Ideas and suggestions described here should not be considered official CEW recommendations.

CEW Members in Attendance

- **Danielle Brazell** – executive director, California Arts Council and Creative Economy Workgroup, chair
- **Lauren Appelbaum** – senior vice president of entertainment and news media, RespectAbility, and founder of Entertainment Lab and Children’s Content Lab (Washington, D.C.)
- **Julie Baker** – CEO, Californians for the Arts (Nevada City, California)
- **Lindsie Bear** – vice president of strategic projects, Humboldt Area Foundation (San Francisco, California)
- **Matt Buchholtz** – global community lead, Riot Games (Los Angeles, California)
- **Roxanne Messina Captor** – filmmaker, Messina Captor Films Inc., and educator, Santa Monica College (Redondo Beach, California)
- **Deborah Cullinan** – vice president for the arts, Stanford University (San Francisco, California)
- **Kale Cummings** – president, American Federation of Musicians Local 6 (San Francisco, California)
- **Matt D’Arrigo** – director of creative youth development, The Clare Rose Foundation, and co-founder, The Clare Rose Center for Creative Youth Development (San Diego, California)
- **Tom DeCaigny** – program officer, Performing Arts Program, The Hewlett Foundation (San Francisco, California)
- **Snehal Desai** – artistic director, Center Theater Group (Los Angeles, California)
- **DeJon Ellis** – business manager, IATSE Local 80, and IATSE International DEIA/Education Committee member (Los Angeles, California)
- **Sophie Fanelli** – president, The Stuart Foundation (San Francisco, California)
- **Adam Fowler** – founding partner, CVL Economics (Los Angeles, California)
- **Jonathan Glus** – executive director for the arts and culture, City of San Diego (San Diego, California)
- **David Gonzales** – director of labor relations and government affairs, Association of Independent Commercial Producers (Los Angeles, California)
- **Leah Goodwin** – California Arts Council member and owner, Leah Goodwin Creations (Imperial Beach, California)
- **Alejandro Gutierrez Chavez** – executive director, Arts Connection (San Bernardino, California)
- **Ri-Karlo Handy** – CEO, Sunwise Media Inc., and founder, Handy Foundation (Los Angeles, California)
- **Gustavo Herrera** – chief executive officer, Arts for LA (Los Angeles, California)



- **Roy Hirabayashi** – co-founder, San Jose Taiko (San Jose, California)
- **Jason Jong** – cultural and creative economy manager, City of Sacramento (Sacramento, California)
- **Dorka Keehn** – principal, Keehn on Art (San Francisco, California)
- **Jennifer Laine** – executive director, San Benito County Arts Council (Hollister, California)
- **Lex Leifheit** – arts advocate (San Francisco, California)
- **Kamaal Martin** – founder, Art Power Equity (Lemon Grove, California)
- **Ted Russell** – principal, Ted Russell Consulting (Oakland, California)
- **Jas Sajjan** – senior manager of government relations and public policy, Live Nation Entertainment (Washington, D.C.)
- **Kristin Sakoda** – director, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture (Los Angeles, California)
- **Sarah Weber** – executive director, Association of California Symphony Orchestras (Los Angeles, California)

Introduction: Setting the Agenda

The event began with an introduction by Danielle Brazell, executive director of the California Arts Council. In her remarks, Brazell emphasized the importance of creativity and creative work in building and maintaining civil society and invited participants to be bold in their thinking and the actions they propose. She also led a land acknowledgement and shared the California Arts Council's commitment to race and equity.

A participant also acknowledged that the event was taking place on the "Day of Remembrance," the anniversary of the Executive Order that authorized the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans.

Tamaira "Miss Tee" Sandifer, founder and CEO, Studio T Arts & Entertainment, where the workshop was held, also spoke during the introduction. She told the story of her organization, which was able to purchase the entire block the venue was located on and turn it into a multimedia studio and performance space. The facility provides training in film, podcasting, commercial kitchens, and other creative fields and includes dance studios. Sandifer emphasized that policymakers' decisions directly impact grassroots organizations like hers that develop workforce skills and transform lives through art, expressing gratitude for the audience's leadership role in supporting creative economies.

Institute for the Future's executive director Marina Gorbis then reminded participants of the overall intentions of the workshop:

- To establish a creative forum for CEW members to collectively develop priorities for California's art and culture ecosystem
- To identify and develop specific actions to fulfill legislative mandates that include immediate opportunities for impact, medium-term initiatives and projects, and long-term visions for a transformed and strengthened creative economy in California

She explained that the workshop would accomplish these goals through a series of small group conversations (or "action cafés") to develop specific strategies and full-group conversations to share and refine these strategies.

Open Dialogue: New Priorities and Shifting Perspectives

CEW members were invited to engage in open dialogue about new priorities and shifting perspectives that could serve as important context for the identification of action steps.

One union leader expressed concern about the dismantling of the National Labor Relations Board, which has left collective bargaining agreements unenforceable, particularly affecting musicians and other creative workers. This reflected a broader worry about the shift of workers from stable W-2 employment to more precarious 1099 contractor status without safety nets.

The impact of recent wildfires in Los Angeles was cited as a critical issue and potential harbinger of things to come. One speaker mentioned that 350 union members had lost their homes. Several participants emphasized how cultural organizations often functioned as "first responders" during crises, particularly in rural and tribal communities where federal support was inadequate, while another described how arts organizations were deploying trauma-informed teaching artists to help children affected by the fires.

Several speakers highlighted economic pressures forcing artists to leave California. One participant from arts education noted how budget cuts at community colleges eliminated teaching positions that had provided artists with health insurance and pensions. A film industry representative pointed out that California's tax incentives weren't competitive with states like Georgia, causing productions to film elsewhere. There were some differing perspectives on priorities. While some focused on tax incentives to keep creative industries competitive, others cautioned about the tension between advocating for tax breaks and simultaneously calling for stronger government support programs.

The group debated strategies for communicating their value. Some advocated for focusing on economic arguments about creative industries representing 8% of the economy, while others suggested a broader cultural narrative about creativity driving innovation.

Several participants expressed frustration about the lack of a cohesive shared narrative about the creative economy in California.

Despite their concerns, participants expressed hope in the resilience of creative communities.

The group agreed on the importance of creating concrete, actionable recommendations for policymakers. Several emphasized positioning California as a global leader in creative economy policy rather than trying to "reinvent the wheel." As one arts administrator argued, "If we really are the fifth largest economy on the planet, why aren't we talking about what is happening in the United Kingdom and what the Design Council in Britain has been doing for decades?"



Action Cafés

Participants spent most of the workshop in small group discussions or “café” centered around specific themes, which were selected in advance based on interviews with CEW members. The themes were:

1. Improve security and stability for creative economy workers
2. Enable a more comprehensive and collaborative support infrastructure for creative workers
3. Actively market California’s creative talent and products
4. Encourage zoning and permitting reforms that support art and cultural ecosystems
5. Build robust pathways from educational institutions and workforce development programs to jobs in the creative economy
6. Provide financial incentives for creative businesses and individuals to grow
7. Collect and analyze data on the creative economy and the creative workforce
8. Fully integrate arts and cultural workers into non-creative sectors
9. Develop regulatory policies to promote innovation and support creative industries
10. Support equitable economies in the creative industries and incentivize the creation of equitable creative enterprises
11. Use creative financing models to deploy and de-risk arts funding



ITF program director Rod Falcon explained the café process and facilitated group share-back discussions in between sessions. Based on interest expressed by participants during the workshop itself, one café was removed and replaced with a new topic, “Creating a shared definition of the creative economy.”

Some ideas highlighted in the share-outs include:

Protect intellectual property as generative AI advances

With the rise of artificial intelligence and other technologies that can “take inspiration from” or build upon creative works, many artists find their work being used without permission or compensation. Participants suggested developing stronger protections and more accessible legal resources for creative workers. One specific idea was to partner with legal clinics, like the one at Stanford Law School, to create streamlined pathways for artists to protect their work through copyright registration and enforcement.

Provide protection to 1099/independent contractors in the creative sector

Many creative workers don't necessarily want to be entrepreneurs but are forced into independent contractor status. This classification often leads to a lack of healthcare benefits, unemployment insurance, retirement savings, and other protections that W-2 employees receive. The recent dismantling of the National Labor Relations Board further complicates this issue, as it leaves collective bargaining agreements without enforcement mechanisms. Suggestions for addressing these challenges included: creating portable benefit systems, specialized unemployment insurance programs and healthcare cooperatives specifically for creative gig/contract workers, advocating for state-level labor protections that can fill gaps left by federal enforcement, and creating emergency funds specifically designed for disaster response in creative communities.

Reinvest in the California Creative Corps

This program, which deployed artists to address public health, climate, civic engagement, and social justice issues, demonstrated the power of embedding creative workers in communities throughout the state. Participants noted that evaluations from various regions show promising results and provide valuable lessons for future implementation. By structuring the program around rotating priorities that align with the state's changing needs, Creative Corps could become a flexible and responsive tool for deploying creative talent to address California's most pressing challenges.

Create a menu of offsets for developers who include arts spaces

Develop a “menu of offsets” for developers who include arts spaces in their projects, similar to incentives offered for transit-oriented development. Under this approach, developers who dedicate space to creative uses might receive benefits such as increased density allowances, reduced parking requirements, or streamlined permitting. This concept acknowledges that creative spaces often struggle to compete with other uses in the real estate market but provide significant public benefits that merit support through regulatory incentives.

Establish a grassroots employer coalition for work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities

Bring together employers from across the creative economy to develop shared approaches to workforce development, including apprenticeships, internships, mentorship programs, and other forms of experiential learning. Participants emphasized that employer engagement is essential for ensuring that training programs align with actual job opportunities and that pathways lead to sustainable employment rather than dead ends.

Create an "arts prescription" program where healthcare providers can prescribe arts experiences

Establish a program where healthcare providers can "prescribe" arts engagement as alternatives or complements to pharmaceutical interventions. Participants described pilot programs at Stanford University and in San Diego where healthcare providers can prescribe arts engagement for mental health and other conditions. In the Stanford pilot, demand for this option far exceeded expectations, with 40 referring partners instead of the anticipated six.

Expand existing film and TV tax credits to include small/medium businesses and nonprofits

Currently, California's film and television tax credit program primarily benefits major studios and large productions, leaving independent producers, smaller companies, and nonprofit organizations without similar support. One participant who works in production stated bluntly that for network-level decisions, California "is not even in the conversation" due to its less competitive incentives. The group recommended expanding eligibility to a broader range of organizations while maintaining the program's focus on job creation.

Create a creative economy dashboard that can be filtered by region

This dashboard would present key metrics and trends in visual formats, allowing policymakers, industry leaders, educators, and others to understand the state of the creative economy quickly and easily. The ability to filter by region would recognize California's diversity and allow for more targeted strategies based on local conditions.

Create a standard set of measures aligned with other agencies and national data collection efforts

Different agencies and organizations currently use varying definitions, metrics, and methodologies to track creative activity, making it difficult to develop a coherent understanding of the sector or make meaningful comparisons over time or across regions. By developing standardized measures that align with both state agencies (like the Employment Development Department and GO-Biz) and national frameworks (such as those used by the Bureau of Economic Analysis), California could create a more consistent and credible data foundation for policy development.

Develop a statewide playbook for how other sectors can work with artists

Many organizations and agencies express interest in working with creative practitioners but lack the knowledge and frameworks to do so effectively. Drawing on lessons from successful programs like LA County's Creative Strategist initiative and the California Creative Corps, this playbook would provide practical guidance on structuring creative partnerships, establishing appropriate compensation, defining roles and expectations, and evaluating outcomes.

Integrate native cultural leaders in land stewardship, moving from consultation to co-stewardship

Move beyond the current "consultation" approach where indigenous perspectives are solicited but not necessarily incorporated into decision-making. Instead, establish formal co-stewardship agreements that would give indigenous cultural leaders real authority in land management decisions. One specific application mentioned was cultural burning and fire management, where indigenous knowledge could contribute to more effective environmental stewardship.

Create pathways for artists to become recognized community health workers under Cal-AIM

CalAIM (California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal) is expanding the definition of community health workers who can provide services reimbursable through Medi-Cal, but it does not currently recognize artists or teaching artists in this category. By advocating for their inclusion, California could create a sustainable funding stream for artists working in health contexts while bringing creative approaches to healthcare delivery.

Support cooperative ownership models for housing, arts businesses, and projects

Develop cooperative structures — where ownership and decision-making are shared among members — to create more sustainable and equitable conditions for creative work. For housing, this might include artist cooperatives or community land trusts that preserve affordability while giving residents governance rights. For businesses, cooperative models could allow creative workers to share resources, distribute risks, and build collective assets rather than competing as individuals.



Reflections, insights and aligning actions with goals

The second day featured a series of discussions intended to build on the previous day's action ideas, ensure they are aligned with the goals of the enabling legislation and surface any overall takeaways that extend beyond the specifics discussed in the cafes.

Danielle Brazell, executive director of CAC and CEW chair, opened the session by encouraging bold thinking: "We're looking at these actions and saying, is this something that's short term, medium term, long term? Maybe what tends to be in these conversations is there's a lot of things that people post that's very short term, which is to be expected, right? Things that you can imagine."

Participants analyzed action items organized by timeframe (short-term, medium-term, and long-term) while discussing how to frame these recommendations within a broader vision for California's creative economy. Several participants noted the imbalance in the proposed actions, with many concentrated in the short-term category and fewer in the long-term, reflecting the sense of urgency and crisis felt across the sector. As one participant observed, "We see so much in the short term because, as we identified yesterday, we're in a crisis... I think it's really hard for us to hit that long term five to 10 [years horizon] when we realize so many things need immediate attention."

The group also discussed the need for significantly increased funding for arts and culture in California. One participant highlighted the stark contrast between international arts funding and California's current investment. She pointed out that France allocates approximately \$11 billion (0.4-0.5% of its GDP) to its Ministry of Culture, while Germany invests about \$2.9 billion in arts and culture. By comparison, California's Arts Council operates on a much smaller budget of just \$26 million. The participant calculated that if California were to commit 0.5% of its budget to arts and culture — comparable to France's approach — it would result in an \$18 billion investment, representing a 700-fold increase over current funding levels.

Gaps and oversights

Participants were asked to identify areas that they felt were underrepresented in the proposed actions captured thus far. One noted the need to more explicitly focus on youth, "If we're forecasting what's coming, let's not miss an opportunity to incorporate people who haven't hit the workforce yet"

Another raised concerns about small arts nonprofits: "Small arts nonprofits who are employing a lot of creative workers and artists... the sustainability of very small arts nonprofits is maybe missing."

Overall takeaways

One participant emphasized the urgency of focusing on artists' economic security: "I worry that we talk about artists as second responders... But we do all of this on the backs of artists who we know, to this very day, are struggling to really keep themselves afloat and keep themselves sustainable."

The group spent significant time discussing the need to develop actionable policy recommendations that could be implemented through legislation. Another participant explained what makes an effective policy recommendation: "You're gonna start with, what is the problem we are trying to solve?... Then you have to determine, is there a financial implication for the state of California?"

Another stressed the importance of brevity: "What was most important about the development of that plan was brevity, and to be as concise as possible... These ideas are amazing, and they need to be narrowed in a way if you want anyone to read this plan, to speak to the audiences that will do something about this."



Headlines from the Future

The meeting culminated with an exercise where participants drafted aspirational headlines for the future of California's creative economy. These included:

- "California leads the world in creative economy, and we have the data to show it"
- "Creative economy fuels California's financial recovery and rebuilds community in the process"
- "California becomes the hub of creative innovation due to California's focus on attracting and retaining individuals and industries within the creative economy"
- "California leads with an annual, ongoing investment in arts, driving cultural and natural resources"
- "California voted number one place to live and raise a family and breathe clean air in the world with creative economy as driving force"
- "Governor Newsom launches creative economy strategy with \$100 million investment in newly formed creative economy [initiative]"
- "California's creative economy saves America"
- "Movement of coalitions across the entire creative sector unite to elect a champion for arts, culture and creativity in the legislature and in the administration"



- "The creative economy is an orchard of many fruits. By investing in the soil of the creative economy, the workforce yielding the harvest and marketing competitively, we're harvesting the fruits of arts, culture, design and innovation industries and California is thriving"
- "Every young person in California has access to the resources, relationships and opportunities they need to pursue a creative career"
- "\$60 billion for 60 years: Arts Council sets record"
- "California creative economy is the number one employer in the country"
- "London cites California creative economy as a goal for the whole country and establishes the Office of Creative Economy"
- "Female artist elected president"
- "Prescriptive art becomes a leading cure for depression and ailments around the world"
- "Equity wins: new president cites equitable investment in underserved communities as the key to economic resilience"
- "California develops a model of what a people's-driven creative economy is and looks like across the world."

One participant emphasized that the vision should focus on quality of life rather than simply economic dominance: "Defining what makes it premier... is it because it's the largest economy? Is it because it's the least extractive from the people?... Would it mean an economy that allows the greatest number of people to have a self-determined and thriving lifestyle?"