In January of 2005, through its Philadelphia Community Partners in Arts Access (CPAA) initiative, the Knight Foundation awarded a total of $4.9 million in grants to 18 cultural organizations located in North Philadelphia and Camden. The purpose of the Benchmark Project was to enable the Foundation to monitor progress towards its goal of increasing cultural participation in these two urban communities.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. http://repository.upenn.edu/siap_benchmark/1
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.
Philadelphia and Camden Cultural Participation Benchmark Project: Final Report

Abstract
The Philadelphia and Camden Cultural Participation Benchmark Project (Benchmark Project), undertaken from 2003 to 2005, was designed to document the current state of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey. These two urban communities had been chosen by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation for multi-year investment in order to broaden, deepen, and diversify resident participation in arts and cultural programs and events.

In the Benchmark Project final report, SIAP and partners—Research for Action and Alan S. Brown & Associates—provided a detailed description of cultural participation in five neighborhoods of North Philadelphia and Camden. Though not part of the original research design, the study also demonstrated how the disparate elements of cultural engagement influence one another and form a unique cultural ecosystem. Finally, the team identified a set of strengths and challenges in the community cultural sector intended to improve the ability of the Knight Foundation initiative to accomplish its goal.

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Comments
In January of 2005, through its Philadelphia Community Partners in Arts Access (CPAA) initiative, the Knight Foundation awarded a total of $4.9 million in grants to 18 cultural organizations located in North Philadelphia and Camden. The purpose of the Benchmark Project was to enable the Foundation to monitor progress towards its goal of increasing cultural participation in these two urban communities.

This research report is available at ScholarlyCommons: http://repository.upenn.edu/siap_benchmark/1
Philadelphia and Camden Cultural Participation Benchmark Project

FINAL REPORT

June 2005

Prepared by
Mark J. Stern and Susan C. Seifert

The Benchmark Project was made possible by the generous support of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The views expressed are solely those of the authors.
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Acknowledgements

Every research project is a collective effort. The Philadelphia and Camden Cultural Participation Benchmark Project is no exception. Indeed, because we could accomplish our goals for the project only through the active collaboration of local residents and community leaders, we are particularly indebted to those residents of North Philadelphia and Camden who completed our questionnaires, attended our focus groups, and filled in our sign-in sheets at public events.

Cultural organizations located in or serving North Philadelphia and Camden shared their data on participation with the Benchmark Project. Many staff also then took time out of their schedules to attend our research briefings during the spring of 2005. We hope the results justify the faith they put in us by doing so. Dr. Patricia Reid-Merritt of the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, consultant for the City of Camden Cultural Plan, and other members of the Plan Coordination Team, Ruth Bogutz and Mark Fields, generously shared their time and findings with us.

Our partners—Research for Action and Alan S. Brown & Associates/Audience Insight—brought considerable insight and experience to this research enterprise. Their contribution to the success of the Benchmark Project goes well beyond their individual research and enhanced the entire undertaking. The research team for RFA included: Elaine Simon, Gretchen Seuss, Eva Gold, and Leah Mundell. RFA recruited a number of community organizations to co-sponsor focus groups. We especially want to acknowledge the help of the Community Leadership Institute, Norris Square Senior Center, St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church, and Youth United for Change in Philadelphia and Dr. Gary Rodwell of Camden Community College and Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Camden.

Point Breeze Performing Arts Center and its staff took on the critical task of actually knocking on doors and encouraging residents to answer our questions. We particularly want to thank Donna Nolan Brown, Alfred Brown, and Keith Green.

There’s an old story where a kid says that “me and my brother” can do anything. Questioned about various accomplishments, the kid repeated says ‘my brother does that.’ Mehreen Zaman, research assistant for the Project, was ‘our brother.’ Whether it was chasing down participants at the Camden Children’s Garden or during Noches De Arte en el Barrio or cleaning data files, Mehreen brought professionalism, enthusiasm, and insight to the project.

TCC Group, manager of Community Partners in Arts Access, included us during the planning phase of the Knight Foundation initiative and shared their perspectives on community cultural participation. We particularly want to thank Marcy Hinand Cady, Lisa Dolberry Hancock, and Paul Connolly.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation invited us to undertake the Benchmark Project and provided the financial support. We particularly want to thank Julie Tarr, our program officer, for her aid and encouragement throughout this endeavor.
I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Philadelphia and Camden Cultural Participation Benchmark Project (hereafter the Benchmark Project) is to document the current state of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey. These two urban communities have been chosen by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation for multi-year investment in order to broaden, deepen, and diversify resident participation in arts and cultural programs and events. In January of 2005, through its Philadelphia Community Partners in Arts Access (CPAA) initiative, Knight awarded a total of $4.9 million in grants to 18 local cultural organizations. The Benchmark Project will enable the Foundation to monitor progress towards its goal of increasing cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden.

Approach and Methodology

The Benchmark Project was a collaboration of three research partners that employed three methodologies in order to gain different perspectives on cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden. The three methods and partners were:

- focus group discussions, led by Research for Action (RFA), to uncover the meanings of and barriers to cultural participation among community residents;
- a neighborhood resident survey, led by Alan S. Brown & Associates/Audience Insight and field work conducted by the Point Breeze Performing Arts Center, to document the types of arts and cultural activities and current levels of adult participation; and
- small-area participation estimates, led by the University of Pennsylvania Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP), to estimate the geographic distribution and characteristics of participation in organization-based cultural programs.

The use of several different methods to explore the same topic, called triangulation, proved to be a valuable research strategy. The analysis of data collected through complementary quantitative and qualitative methods enabled the Benchmark Project to mitigate the biases and maximize the strengths of each.

The research process, undertaken from February of 2004 to May of 2005, involved the following steps for the collection and analysis of data.

- RFA conducted three community resident focus group meetings in February and March of 2004 and completed its analysis and report in May of 2004.
- Alan Brown designed the resident survey and, with the Point Breeze Performing Arts Center, conducted the neighborhood survey fieldwork during the summer.

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and fall of 2004. Alan Brown completed the data analysis and final report in March of 2005.

- SIAP undertook two waves of data collection—during the winter-spring of 2004 and again during the fall-winter of 2004-05—to complete a two-year (2002-04) participation profile for each of the Benchmark data partner organizations (Appendix 2). SIAP then integrated these data into its regional participation database to examine the relationships between Benchmark participation, regional cultural participation, and other social indicators for North Philadelphia and Camden.

Upon completion of the three research studies, the Benchmark Project convened several meetings to gain perspective on the findings. During April 2005, RFA led discussions with cultural leaders—one with a focus on North Philadelphia and one on Camden—to gather feedback on the findings and insights about the current state of cultural participation in these neighborhoods. RFA completed a report on these sessions in May 2005. SIAP also met with representatives of the Knight Foundation and TCC Group to discuss the preliminary findings and draft report. In June 2005, SIAP sponsored an invitational briefing by the research team for all Benchmark Project partners.

The final report is intended to provide both benchmark measures of cultural participation and an understanding the underlying dynamics. This Introduction has outlined the research design and will close with a description of the neighborhood geography that bounded the study. Chapter II puts the Benchmark Project in perspective with a look at the regional context of community culture. Chapter III draws from the focus group and neighborhood survey findings to present a resident perspective on participation. Chapter IV draws from the small area estimates to present an organizational perspective on participation. Chapter V provides a synthesis of the research team findings followed by the cultural practitioners’ response to the research. Chapter VI highlights strategic opportunities and challenges for strengthening the community cultural sector of North Philadelphia and Camden.

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4 See also “Philadelphia-Camden Cultural Participation Benchmarking Project: Presentation of Neighborhood Survey Results, June 14, 2005,” PowerPoint presentation by Alan Brown.
Neighborhood Cluster Study Areas

For purposes of the Benchmark Project research and its use as a baseline study, SIAP delineated geographic boundaries for North Philadelphia, as shown on the map below. It is anticipated, however, that the reach and impact of the Knight Community Partners in Arts Access initiative in North Philadelphia will extend beyond the study area boundaries.

In order to facilitate sample selection for the resident survey and comparison among the three sets of findings, SIAP identified five neighborhood clusters across the two cities. This section provides a description of the neighborhood clusters—including geographic boundaries, a demographic table with thumbnail sketches, and a map of cultural resources.

Benchmark Project, neighborhood clusters in North Philadelphia and Camden
North Philadelphia

The North Philadelphia study area boundaries extend as follows: north to Roosevelt Expressway, Belfield Ave, Old York Road, Glenwood Ave, and Tioga St; east to Kensington Avenue, Oxford Street, and 6th Street; south to Poplar St and Montgomery Ave (west of Broad) and Vine Street (east of Broad); and west to the Schuylkill River and East Fairmount Park.

North Philadelphia Central centers on Broad Street and extends roughly west to 25th St and east to 6th St, north to Lehigh Ave and south to Poplar and Vine Streets.

The three North Philadelphia neighborhood clusters—West, Central, and East—contain all or parts of the following zip codes: 19121, 19122, 19123, 19129, 19132, 19133, 19134, 19140, and 19130 (north of Poplar).

North Philadelphia West cluster

The North Philadelphia West cluster includes three major neighborhoods—Strawberry Mansion, Allegheny West, and Tioga-Nicetown. West is primarily an African American neighborhood (95 percent in 2000). Its poverty rate in 2000 (34 percent), although well above the city average, is the lowest of the five neighborhood clusters.

North Philadelphia Central cluster

The North Philadelphia Central cluster includes all of two neighborhoods—North Central and Poplar—and smaller sections of Hartranft and West Kensington. Of the three Philadelphia clusters, Central has the most visible institutional infrastructure—including 38 cultural organizations—with Temple University at its center.

Central experienced the sharpest population decline during the 1990s when the total number of residents fell from 56 to 44 thousand. At the same time, thanks to significant new housing construction in the southern part of the neighborhood and the closing of several public housing projects, its poverty rate dropped from 49 to 45 percent.

North Philadelphia East cluster

The North Philadelphia East cluster includes all of the neighborhoods of Fairhill and Harrowgate and parts of Hartranft and West Kensington. East includes the largest concentration of Latino residents in the city. The proportion of Latinos in the population increased from 48 percent in 1990 to 62 percent in 2000. East also has the highest poverty rate and lowest median income of the five neighborhood clusters.
Camden

Camden City is divided into two clusters, **Camden North** and **Camden South**. The boundary between the two sets of neighborhoods is formed by the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, Admiral Wilson Blvd (Route 30), and the Cooper River.

Camden North includes zip codes 08102 and 08105. Camden South includes 08101, 08103, and 08104.

**Camden North cluster**

This cluster includes all of Camden City north of the freeway, the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, and the Cooper River. Camden North neighborhoods are: Coopers Poynt, Pyne Point, Cramer Hill, Biedeman, Rosedale, Dudley, Marlton, and Stockton.

During the 1990s in North Camden, Latinos replaced African Americans as the largest ethnic group, although Blacks still represent 36 percent of the population. The population and poverty rate remained relatively stable during the decade.

**Camden South cluster**

This cluster includes all of Camden City south of the freeway, the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, and the Cooper River. Camden South includes the downtown and waterfront districts, City Hall and Rutgers University. Camden South neighborhoods are: Cooper Grant, Lanning Square, Bergen Square, Parkside, Whitman Park, Liberty Park, Centerville, Morgan Village, and Fairview.

During the 1990s, Camden South’s Latino population increased from 16 to 24 percent and its non-Hispanic white population declined from 19 to 9 percent. However, the area has remained predominantly African American (64 percent in 2000).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA NAME</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percent non-Hispanic White</th>
<th>Percent non-Hispanic Black</th>
<th>Percent Hispanic</th>
<th>Percent Asian, Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Percent non-family households</th>
<th>Poverty rate</th>
<th>Median family income ($)</th>
<th>Per capita income ($)</th>
<th>Percent 0-19 years old</th>
<th>Percent over 65 years old</th>
<th>Cultural providers in area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72,591</td>
<td>63,247</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>25,339</td>
<td>11,497</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>56,093</td>
<td>43,675</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>21,673</td>
<td>9,414</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>58,559</td>
<td>55,495</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>17,414</td>
<td>7,013</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>37,449</td>
<td>34,148</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>25,375</td>
<td>9,053</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Camden</td>
<td>42,780</td>
<td>39,020</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>23,743</td>
<td>10,521</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Camden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
North Philadelphia and Camden, cultural resources and Benchmark Project data partners

Source: SIAP inventory of cultural resources, 2004
II. COMMUNITY CULTURAL PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL CONTEXT

We often see cultural participation as simply the sum of many individual decisions: to take a class or not, to attend a performance or not. Yet, these decisions are influenced powerfully by the ecology of neighborhoods and the city. The presence or absence of cultural institutions presents the possibility of cultural participation; one cannot attend an event that doesn’t happen. At the same time, informal patterns of social interaction influence the decisions of individuals in powerful ways.

This chapter examines patterns of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden and compares them to regional patterns. Two sets of broader social forces bear directly on the dynamics of cultural participation in Philadelphia and similar metropolitan areas: the restructured cultural sector and the new urban realities of the 21st century.

Changing Ecology of Community Culture

A Restructured Cultural Sector

In recent reports on the performing and media arts, the Rand Corporation painted a mixed portrait of the organizational world of nonprofit arts. The upper tier of this sector has become enmeshed in our “winner-take-all” economy in which a select number of premier institutions gain control of a larger ‘market share’ of cultural expenditures. In many respects, large nonprofits operate in a market that requires them to act similarly to large commercial cultural venues in pursuing audience and revenue. Meanwhile, mid-sized organizations increasingly struggle for stability and survival in the context of limited options and declining resources. At the other end of the spectrum, Rand discovered that there has been a proliferation of small, voluntary organizations that cater to local or specialized groups. These associations—many of them part of the participatory, ‘informal’ cultural sector—are motivated more by the interests and commitments of their members and less by conventional organizational concerns like the strength of their boards or the growth of their revenues.⁵

SIAP has documented similar dynamics in Philadelphia. On the one hand, we have discovered a clear connection between socio-economic standing and the different strata of the cultural sector. We found that the participation patterns of large, mainstream cultural organizations reflect social class and ethnic divisions. High socio-economic standing neighborhoods are more likely to have high mainstream participation. On the other hand, we have found that alternative and community participation patterns are generally unrelated to social class. Community-based cultural organizations and

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http://www.rand.org/research_areas/arts/state_of_the_arts.html
participatory groups can be viewed as ‘irrational organizations’ that behave more like social movements than like formal organizations.  

Unfortunately, these smaller cultural organizations suffer from their unconventionality. Funding agencies tend to misread their purpose and effectiveness because of the yardsticks used to measure these qualities. At the same time, the increased market discipline in which the mainstream cultural sector operates makes cooperation between established and community-based cultural groups more strained and difficult. This market model explains why SIAP discovered weak links between the community cultural sector and established, regional cultural organizations to be a significant ‘structural hole’ in their institutional networks.  

The community cultural sector is critical to efforts to increase cultural participation. Community-based organizations represent grassroots efforts by local residents to involve themselves in neighborhood life. Although small in size, community cultural providers represent a very large proportion of total cultural participation in poor neighborhoods. It is easy to take the community cultural sector for granted, but if it did not exist, the current status of cultural participation would be worse and the prospects for expanding participation would be more limited.

The New Urban Reality

At the same time that the cultural sector has been remade by a variety of market and social forces, the urban context within which many cultural organizations operate has been fundamentally altered. Since the 1960s, our dominant lens for viewing metropolitan areas has been the ‘urban crisis,’ the view that cities can be sharply distinguished from suburbs by their economic and racial characteristics and that cities are the primary location for a range of social problems from crime to disease. The realities associated with the ‘urban crisis’ metaphor are no longer as clear as they were two or three decades ago. From the perspective of the cultural sector, the new urban reality is characterized by three important patterns: the increase in diversity, the emergence of youth districts, and the expanding presence of immigrants.

---


Increasing diversity

During SIAP’s first phase of research in 1995-96, we were startled to discover that economically and ethnically diverse sections of the city were the centers of cultural participation in Philadelphia. Our surprise was due not so much from the connection of culture and diversity as from the large number of Philadelphians who lived in diverse neighborhoods according to the 1990 census. The cognitive map of the city associated with the ‘urban crisis’ viewed ‘real’ neighborhoods as characterized by ethnic and class homogeneity. Yet, even by 1990, this image did not square with reality.

Percent of residents in block groups by ethnic composition, Philadelphia and its suburbs, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic composition</th>
<th>Metro status</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suburbs</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Latino</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian 10%+</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Diverse</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2000 US census

The 2000 census made it clear that diversity is no longer the exception in metropolitan areas. For example, the proportion of Philadelphians living in an ethnically diverse neighborhood nearly doubled during the 1990s to 38 percent. Although the suburbs remained overwhelming white in 2000, the 15 percent of suburban Philadelphians who lived in an ethnically diverse block group represented a significant increase from the 1990 figure of 8 percent. Among Philadelphia city residents, by 2000 more than forty percent were living in an area that was either economically or ethnically diverse.
Emergence of youth districts

An unappreciated component of the ‘urban crisis’ of the mid-twentieth century was the rapid shift in the character of the transition from childhood to adulthood that occurred after World War II. Early in the century, young people spent a protracted period in this transitional life-cycle stage because they left school early but did not marry until their late twenties. The generation of young people of age after World War II, by contrast, swept through this transition in a few years. During the past three decades, the transition to adulthood has again stretched out, often lasting into an individual’s thirties.

Percent of residents 20-34 years of age, Philadelphia census tracts, 1970-2000 (shaded areas are over 30 percent)

Although the contours of this transition have been well-documented, its implications for the geography of cities have not. During the early postwar years, the quick passage from childhood to adulthood was typically associated with a geographical move to the suburbs. As the transition has lengthened, however, it has been accompanied by the growth of young adult districts in major American cities. Young adults, living either alone or in groups, are now found in many urban neighborhoods in concentrations of over thirty or forty percent. As the above maps of Philadelphia in 1970 and 2000 make clear, this pattern was virtually unknown in cities three decades ago. Like the expansion of ethnic and economic diversity, the increased concentration of young adults provides a locus for both cultural production—including an influx of artists—and consumption.
New immigration

The influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America is perhaps the defining feature of the 1990s. This immigration has been disproportionately concentrated in metropolitan areas. Indeed, in many metropolitan areas, the U.S.-born population actually declined during the decade, meaning that immigrants composed more than 100 percent of all population growth. In the Philadelphia metropolitan area, immigrants accounted for nearly sixty percent of population growth between 1990 and 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan area</th>
<th>Population change 1990-2000</th>
<th>Percent foreign born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>Native born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>554,589</td>
<td>102,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>853,632</td>
<td>-86,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>540,896</td>
<td>321,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>104,910</td>
<td>73,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington DC</td>
<td>342,356</td>
<td>357,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>100,627</td>
<td>74,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>414,342</td>
<td>441,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>306,483</td>
<td>845,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>356,645</td>
<td>486,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>143,658</td>
<td>35,483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>295,653</td>
<td>717,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>122,254</td>
<td>307,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>177,450</td>
<td>138,371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>32,010</td>
<td>79,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>58,469</td>
<td>112,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>162,136</td>
<td>219,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>235,704</td>
<td>73,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>273,196</td>
<td>43,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>14,620</td>
<td>34,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>151,765</td>
<td>334,537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newark</td>
<td>119,344</td>
<td>-2,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>120,004</td>
<td>282,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>113,530</td>
<td>13,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Worth</td>
<td>109,598</td>
<td>231,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>225,927</td>
<td>-40,918</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2000 US census
Note: Percent can exceed 100 when city had net loss of U.S.-born residents.

This new wave of immigration has been critical to the new urban reality, including the revival of entrepreneurship in many neighborhoods and sectors. It has also brought a new urgency to cultural expression as a variety of old and new ethnic groups view a common reality through a unique set of lens. By and large, the organizational expression of the cultures of immigrants has occurred in the community and informal cultural sectors, providing these parts of the cultural world an importance that far outweighs their size and visibility.
The changing structure of the cultural sector and the new urban reality define the context within which we understand cultural participation. On the one hand, tensions within the cultural sector related to its differentiation between large, mainstream cultural institutions and community-based resources create a potential barrier to expanded cultural participation. On the other hand, the new urban reality—characterized by increased diversity, new immigration, and the concentration of young adults—expands opportunities to engage urban populations in creative and cultural expression.

**Regional Patterns of Cultural Participation**

Previous SIAP research has demonstrated that participation is influenced by strong neighborhood effects, that is, the characteristics of one’s immediate neighborhood are related to the frequency and intensity of one’s cultural participation. SIAP’s “small area estimates” are one of the few methods for developing a reliable portrait of participation for areas as small as a few city blocks and thus provide a unique perspective on cultural participation.

SIAP developed small area participation estimates by compiling data provided by cultural organizations that are located in or serve North Philadelphia and Camden (Appendix 2). A variety of participation data were collected, including mailing lists, audiences lists, event sign-in sheets, student registration, artists and teachers, and organizational connections. Using these data, SIAP developed a geographical database that identified the number of cases from each participant list located in each of the metropolitan area’s 4,000 block groups. The data were grouped into four indexes of individual involvement—audience/attendees, students, artists, and mailing list entries—and one index of organizational involvement.

The small area estimates provide a portrait of variations in organization-based cultural participation across the region as well as within North Philadelphia and Camden. Our Benchmark estimates of participation include twenty-eight cultural organizations located in or serving North Philadelphia and Camden. We compare the findings of the Benchmark estimates with a broader index of regional or mainstream cultural participation based on data from over seventy cultural organizations, including the metropolitan area’s major institutions. The Benchmark participation index includes information on approximately forty-four thousand participants while the regional estimate includes information on over six hundred thousand cultural participants.

**Small-area cultural participation estimates—data bases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data base</th>
<th>Type of organization</th>
<th>Number of organizations</th>
<th>Number of individual records</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional or mainstream</td>
<td>Large/mid-sized—metro area</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>600,000+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benchmark</td>
<td>Mid-sized/small—located in or serving N Phila or Camden</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional Participation in these Communities

As illustrated on the map below, regional cultural providers are largely un-represented in North Philadelphia and Camden. Several parts of the city—Center City, Northwest Philadelphia, and neighborhoods surrounding Center City—have high levels of participation in mainstream culture, as do sections of Montgomery and Delaware counties in Pennsylvania and Burlington and Camden counties in New Jersey. By contrast, rates of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden are among the lowest in the metropolitan area.

Regional cultural participants per 1,000 residents, metropolitan Philadelphia block groups

Source: Benchmark Project, small-area cultural participation database, 2004
Although regional cultural participation is low overall in the five neighborhood cluster areas, there is significant variation across North Philadelphia and Camden. Camden City’s representation on the regional participation estimates is generally in the bottom 20 percentile of the metropolitan area’s block groups. North Philadelphia participation rates, however, range from a few block groups that are among the highest level (Yorktowne) to sections of East and West (Fairhill, Harrowgate, Strawberry Mansion) that have low participation rates.

Regional participants per 1,000 residents, North Philadelphia and Camden block groups

Source: Benchmark Project, small-area cultural participation database, 2004
Benchmark Participation in these Communities

The contrast of North Philadelphia and Camden with the rest of the metropolitan area is striking. Outside of these two areas, the average regional participation rate is 123 per thousand residents—participation levels are equal to roughly twelve percent of the population. In North Philadelphia, the figure is 30 per thousand, while in Camden it is only 9 per thousand.

Regional and Benchmark cultural participants per 1,000 residents, by location

![Graph showing participation rates](image-url)

Source: Benchmark Project, small-area cultural participation database, 2004

Regional cultural participation does not tell the whole story. Cultural organizations located in or serving North Philadelphia and Camden currently demonstrate substantial levels of participation. Although the Benchmark organizations have only one-fifteenth as many participants as the regional providers, the individual participation rate for the Benchmark Project partners is higher than that for the regional organizations in Camden and 72 percent of the regional rate in North Philadelphia. In effect, community cultural resources compensate for low regional participation.

Moreover, the Benchmark organizations are serving sections of the metropolitan area that are underserved by regional cultural organizations. As shown on the graph below, the regional organizations have relatively low participation rates in African American and Latin American neighborhoods and the highest rate in white neighborhoods. By contrast, the Benchmark organizations have their highest level of individual participation in Latino neighborhoods, while African American and ethnically-diverse neighborhoods have above average participation rates.
Regional and Benchmark cultural participants per 1,000 residents, by ethnic composition of block group, metropolitan Philadelphia

![Graph showing participation rates by ethnic composition.](image)

Source: Benchmark Project, small-area cultural participation database, 2004
Note: All rates are standardized with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1.

Economically diverse neighborhoods (those with above average poverty rates and an above average proportion of professionals and managers) have the highest participation rates on both the regional and Benchmark indexes. However, as shown on the graph below, Benchmark organizations also serve neighborhoods that have higher than average poverty as well as areas of concentrated poverty—places that are underserved by the mainstream cultural organizations.

Regional and Benchmark cultural participants per 1,000 residents, by economic status of block group, metropolitan Philadelphia

![Graph showing participation rates by economic status.](image)

Source: Benchmark Project, small-area cultural participation database, 2004
Note: All rates are standardized with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1.
Individual participation in community cultural programs varies dramatically within North Philadelphia and Camden. Overall, the Benchmark individual index of cultural participation demonstrates rather dramatic variation across North Philadelphia and Camden. The highest levels of participation occur in a set of neighborhoods that straddle the boundary between North Philadelphia Central and North Philadelphia East (Hartranft, West Kensington, Fairhill.)

**Benchmark cultural participants per 1,000 residents, North Philadelphia and Camden block groups**

As discussed earlier, the Benchmark organizations, although much smaller than mainstream regional cultural organizations, play a significant role in the cultural life of North Philadelphia and Camden. At the same time, they serve as a ‘destination,’ a community asset that draws people living in other neighborhoods into North Philadelphia and Camden. It is this balance of local presence and regional magnet that give community cultural organizations their unique value to urban neighborhoods.

The Benchmark data allowed us to look more precisely at different types of participation and at smaller geographical areas. The participation data were divided into five sub-indexes:

- audience/visitors—persons who attended an event or exhibition sponsored by the organization;
- students—persons who registered for a class or workshop sponsored by the organization;
- artists—persons identified as an artist by the organization who either taught, performed, or displayed their work there;
- mailing list entries—persons included in the organization’s mailing list; and
- organizations—institutions that were either identified as active partners or included on the organization’s mailing list.
When we restricted our attention to Benchmark organizations located within Camden and North Philadelphia, we found that the balance of local and regional participants varied by the type of participation. Students, as we would expect, were the most likely group to live in the neighborhood. Still, 62 percent of students came from outside of North Philadelphia and Camden to take classes or workshops at the local Benchmark organizations.

**Percent of participants living outside of North Philadelphia and Camden, local Benchmark cultural organizations**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of participants living outside of North Philadelphia and Camden by type of participation.](chart)

Source: Benchmark Project, small-area cultural participation database, 2004

The proportion of other types of participants—audiences, artists, and mailing list members—who live outside of North Philadelphia and Camden is even higher. Between 85 and 89 percent of these participants in local Benchmark organizations live outside of the North Philadelphia and Camden neighborhoods.
Conclusion

The regional context of community cultural participation has a variety of elements. First, as we have seen, the presence of mainstream regional cultural providers in North Philadelphia and Camden is quite low. Residents of these neighborhoods are one-sixth as likely as residents elsewhere in the metropolitan area to participate in a regional cultural program or event. Second, the Benchmark cultural organizations located in or serving North Philadelphia and Camden draw levels of participation that demonstrate a significant role in the cultural life of these neighborhoods. Finally, the local Benchmark organizations actually draw participants into North Philadelphia and Camden from outside of these neighborhoods.

The community cultural sector, therefore, plays two important roles in the regional cultural scene. On the one hand, it provides a level of cultural engagement in poor, urban neighborhoods that compensates for the relative absence of larger cultural organizations. On the other hand, it is a cultural asset for the entire region, providing cultural opportunities for residents of other neighborhoods that are not available elsewhere.
III. CULTURAL PARTICIPATION IN NORTH PHILADELPHIA AND CAMDEN—
A RESIDENT PERSPECTIVE

The Benchmark Project’s goal was to estimate levels of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden. However, before we could measure participation, we needed to define it. Our community focus groups and neighborhood survey allowed us to understand how residents of these neighborhoods view cultural participation and then to estimate participation using these definitions.

Residents’ Beliefs

In February and March of 2004, the Benchmark Project conducted three focus groups in North Philadelphia and Camden to shed light on the meanings of cultural participation in these low-income urban neighborhoods in the Philadelphia region. The focus groups were designed to reveal how residents define cultural participation, the range of cultural activities in which they participate, how they express themselves creatively, and the barriers to their cultural participation.9

We conducted two focus groups in North Philadelphia—one in the West and one in the East neighborhood clusters—and one focus group in North Camden. Participants in the focus groups were recruited through neighborhood organizations, senior centers, and churches. The objective was to engage participants who were active members of such organizations but who were not closely affiliated with arts and cultural institutions.

Three important themes emerged from the focus group analysis:

- a wide range of activities were identified as ‘cultural participation,’ which was often described in terms of markers of identity and experiences of public space;
- a broad definition was used to describe who is an ‘artist’ and what is ‘art;’ and
- neighborhood context—physical and social—influences patterns of cultural participation.

What Constitutes ‘Cultural Participation’?

North Philadelphia West

The North Philadelphia West focus group was characterized by organized arts and cultural events citywide. In general, this group was the most active in conventional arts activities such as concerts, theater, and art and history exhibits. Examples of their participation include concerts in Fairmount Park (the Dell), citywide festivals on the Ben Franklin Parkway and at Penn’s Landing, book readings at the central library, and African-American historical exhibitions at the African-American Museum or special exhibits such as the Amistad slave ship in Camden. The adults in this group were extremely mobile, willing and able to go to other parts of the city for arts and culture that

were not available in their neighborhood. The teenagers were, with one exception, more focused on activities in the neighborhood. It should be noted that none of the adults in this group had children living at home, which is likely to have eased their travel to activities around town.

**North Philadelphia East**

The North Philadelphia East focus group was characterized by family traditions and uses of neighborhood space. The most memorable events in participants’ lives focused vividly on family: births, deaths, family visits, and family holiday celebrations. Many of the cultural events recalled centered on the home rather than on the church or formal cultural and arts organizations. This centrality of family was a value that they spoke of passing on to their children and that they linked to Puerto Rican and Latino culture. The annual Norris Square festival—which includes public performances, artisan and craft stands, and Puerto Rican food—was lauded as one of the best events in the neighborhood. The festival was just one example of the ways that participants spoke of using and enjoying outdoor spaces. Sitting on the porch, planting flowers, feeling the breeze, listening to birds, and listening to musicians in the park were also cited as activities that reminded people of the things they loved about Puerto Rico.

**Camden North**

The Camden North focus group was characterized by church-based volunteerism and travel. Most cultural participation was mediated by the church, including social service and evangelical activities as well as more conventional arts and cultural experiences. The church seemed to be both a social and spiritual focus for this group. Their communal activities included attending a concert, taking a trip to Washington, D.C., and celebrating life accomplishments and rites of passage. On a more regular basis, they were involved in a variety of church missions—for example, volunteering at a food bank, working with the homeless, running a breakfast at the church, and teaching GED classes.

Focus group participants also emphasized the importance of family as a facilitator of cultural participation. They discussed family activities such as bowling and playing instruments at home, as well as outdoor hobbies such as gardening or walking at the park. They also described attending family reunions or cruises and participating in local cultural events, such as recitals and musical performances, with their children and grandchildren.

**What is the Value of ‘Cultural Participation’?**

**Perpetuation and rediscovery of one’s own cultural history and traditions**

In all groups, the cultural activities mentioned revealed a deep interest in one’s own cultural heritage. This was most evident in the Latino group, where cultural participation was linked to Puerto Rican identity and the loss of cultural associations and competencies.

> We carry our culture in our blood… the activities that you do, the music that we play during Christmas, because that is what culture means to us.... There are many of us that do not have the opportunity to go to a play, but we still live culture.
In the two African-American focus groups, participants also described seeking out opportunities to learn their own cultural history. Members of the Camden group pointed out that as children they had never been taught their own history and so sought out opportunities as adults to learn black history through travel and literature.

I like a lot of different authors, but the ones that I like the most are the ones that relate to my neighborhood and African-Americans.

Learning about other cultural traditions

In the North Philadelphia West focus group, participants spoke of appreciating opportunities to learn about other cultural groups. Several people, when asked about the cultural activities in which they participate, first named their experiences of cross-cultural interaction and education.

The kids in my school might only know about rap or hip hop, but I want to expose them to the classical music or the Latin and reggae explosion that’s going on.

Members of the North Camden focus group did not express the same interest in learning about other cultures. They suggested that the integration of people of different ethnicities, rather than enriching their neighborhoods, created new divisions based on language and culture. The different attitudes reflected generational as well as neighborhood differences—notably, members of the Camden group were older and clearly-ill-at ease in their ethnically diverse neighborhoods.

Connection to religious institutions and values

Participants emphasized cultural participation through the church that facilitated sponsored trips and volunteering opportunities. “I work with the Willing Workers … We have the basic Willing Workers attitude, … and we try to live out the meaning of Willing Workers.” The church also provided opportunities for cultural exploration.

Our church has its heritage day. That lasts during the whole month of February. We have our dinner on the last weekend. It’s a beautiful sight to see. Everybody comes dressed in their African attire. We’re all one big family anyway, but it just seems as though we are just so close on that day.

Spiritual and emotional value of cultural participation

In all three focus groups, participants suggested in various ways that cultural participation had a spiritual or emotional benefit for them.

Culture is not something that you can put into someone; it’s something that has to come out of the person and you have to offer it until, like a shipwrecked person out in the ocean waiting to be thrown a line, you have something to hold onto.

Staking a claim to—or seeking escape from—neighborhood public space

Groups expressed very different attitudes toward public space in their neighborhoods. In the North Philadelphia East group, participants voiced tremendous appreciation that they live in a place where Puerto Ricans can publicly express their culture without the fear of harassment or violence they had once felt. Neighborhood spaces are also a source of nostalgia for Puerto Rico.

Sometimes there was a man sitting there [in Norris Square] on a bench with a guitar. I remember, I would sometimes see him playing his guitar and singing outside … I remember because in Puerto Rico the serenades and everything …
In the North Philadelphia West group, participants suggested that they had lost control of public space in their neighborhood and no longer feel safe.

I barely stay in my own neighborhood. If I do, it’s to catch the bus to get out … I work all the way downtown. I told my dad that I would love to work around here, but I don’t feel comfortable working behind bullet glass … A lot of times kids don’t want to go outside in the neighborhoods, and if they do they are in fear. I don’t feel comfortable sitting on my stoop anymore because I see all these smokers sitting on the corner … So, I stay in the house, or if I have to go to work, I leave out as quickly as I can.

What are Barriers to Cultural Participation?

Personal and community commitments

In the North Philadelphia East and Camden North groups, personal issues such as scheduling conflicts or family obligations were likely to prevent cultural participation. Many Camden participants mentioned obligations to care for ailing family members or grandchildren. In the North Philadelphia East group, commitment to family helps to foster cultural practices in the home, but it may also prevent family members from participating in organization-sponsored activities. Similarly, in the Camden group, the church facilitates cultural participation, but church-based outreach and activities occupy a great deal of time and perhaps prevent members from participating in other organization-sponsored activities. The Camden focus group was the only one in which participants mentioned conventional barriers to participation such as cost and limited access to information.

Loss of neighborhood resources

Participants in the North Philadelphia West group, many of whom were extremely active arts participants in other parts of the city, discussed the lack of cultural outlets in their own neighborhood. Community centers that once offered arts and crafts classes had closed, libraries had limited hours, boys and girls’ clubs had moved away, and bowling alleys had been replaced by chain drug stores. Two grandmothers noted that their families had to drive grandchildren to other parts of the city for dance and music classes. This loss of neighborhood resources was also noted in North Philadelphia East, where participants remembered going to a local theater to watch Spanish language movies.

Youth culture

In all three focus groups, including the group with several teenagers, participants expressed their fears of what they saw as disrespectful and violent youth and their frustration at the lack of positive opportunities for young people. In the North Philadelphia East group, participants saw young people engaged in mainstream U.S. culture and were saddened by their abandonment of a Latino heritage. In fact, young people were under-represented in the focus groups, as was their perspective on cultural participation generally and youth culture in particular.
Who Are Artists?

Those with creative skills and who express themselves creatively

People defined “artist” in various ways, such as those with creative skills: “I see myself as an artist when I take pen in hand and try to write some type of poetry.” Another view of creativity is one’s ability to express culture in everyday life.

You express culture when a guest comes to your house... Because of how you behave, how you talk, how you treat her, what your house looks like, you have told her exactly who you are. Because of music that is listened to, the food that is cooked, the smell that stays in your house.

Most people did not consider themselves as artists. However, many identified some outlet for creative expression and production—such as, fashion, building, writing, singing, cooking, baking, or gardening.

Those who represent the African-American experience

Participants of both African-American groups, but particularly in North Philadelphia West, mentioned specific writers whose work related directly to their lives and who challenged them to think. Their list included: Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Phyllis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Alice Walker, Claude McKay, Walter Dean Myers, Alex Haley, Maya Angelou, Omar Tyree, Iyanla Vanzant, Tyler Perry, Toni Morrison, and Sister Souljah (writer, rapper, and activist). One young participant also mentioned Spike Lee:

He’s more about the people. He depicts what’s going on in the neighborhood realistically. He doesn’t just sugar coat it. He exposes every aspect of a place. I like him for that.

Community role models

For some focus group participants, the term “artist” evoked community role models, “people who really give back,” as well as people who act on a commitment to cultural heritage. Several mentioned their parents and teachers.

My mother really impressed me and impacted my life. By teaching us self worth no matter how poor we were she made us feel special and loved. She taught us to reach out to other people. Also, I was reared in the South. I had some dedicated black teachers that taught us how important our education was. They took an interest in us learning about self worth and our heritage. I grew up knowing that there was a Black National Anthem when a lot of people in the South didn’t know about it.

One women described the artist as one who is able to transform consciousness.

Yes, I have to be an artist because I have to visualize the positive forces. There are so many negative forces. Being an artist, I have to visualize the beauty, and I must do that. There are so many other vibes and I don’t want to be connected with those vibes. My connection is God. So that’s where I get my force from. So, yes, I’m an artist.

The focus group analysis highlights the wide range of activities that constitute cultural participation among residents; the varied places in which these activities take place—from traditional arts venues to activities in the home; and the connection of culture with ethnicity, one’s own heritage as well as others’. The study also found that the physical environment of the neighborhood influences the character of cultural participation.
Residents’ Behavior

In the summer and fall of 2004, the Benchmark Project conducted a neighborhood survey to build a cultural participation profile of adult residents of North Philadelphia and Camden. The survey asked respondents about all types of arts and cultural activities as well as the setting or venue of activity. Participation rates were calculated for a variety of cultural activities representing both observational participation (attendance at or visitation) and personal participation (making art, either alone or in a social context). Respondents were chosen using a multi-stage cluster sample. Individual blocks in North Philadelphia and Camden were randomly selected, and within each block several addresses were designated members of the sample. Interviewers conducted the surveys in-person. The survey team completed a total of 602 questionnaires, approximately 120 in each of the five neighborhood cluster areas, between June and October 2004.

The survey was broadly consistent with census estimates of the population of North Philadelphia and Camden. As with the census data, survey respondents in North Philadelphia West and Central and South Camden were predominantly African American while respondents in North Philadelphia East and North Camden were predominantly Latin American. Respondents were somewhat more likely to be non-Hispanic white than the census data would predict. The age distribution of the sample showed sharp variation by neighborhood. In particular, North Philadelphia West had a much higher proportion of respondents over the age of 55 (29 percent) than the other neighborhoods, a pattern also present in the census data. Across all neighborhood clusters, women made up roughly two-thirds of the sample.

Percent of residents who participated in specific cultural activities in past year, North Philadelphia and Camden

![Chart showing participation rates for various cultural activities.]

Source: Benchmark Project, neighborhood resident survey, 2004

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Observational Participation

“Observational participation” refers to spectator or visitation activities or attendance at a cultural event. Nearly two-thirds of all respondents attended a live performance or art exhibit during the past year. The most common types of events were music concerts, plays, and musicals. Only a minority attended a dance performance or art exhibit.

During the past year, about 50 percent of all respondents attended ticketed music concerts and about 30 percent attended free concerts. While free concerts attracted all groups, Latino and mixed-race respondents were less likely than Blacks or Whites to attend ticketed concerts.

The great majority of respondents attended live events in their own neighborhood. Local venues such as churches, community centers, nightclubs, and parks play an important role in providing access to live performances, both ticketed and free. Local nightclubs also serve as venues for music concerts and dance performances. Thus neighborhood-based commercial venues, in addition to religious and social service facilities, play a role in facilitating some forms of cultural participation.

![TYPE(S) OF VENUES USED FOR IN-NEIGHBORHOOD PARTICIPATION IN LIVE FREE CONCERTS](image)

Source: Benchmark Project, neighborhood resident survey, 2004

Nearly 60 percent of respondents reported going to the movies at least once over the past year. The 18-24-year-olds were most likely to go to the cinema to see films, and the 55-and-over-year olds were the least likely.

Nearly 25 percent of respondents rely on public transportation to attend social or cultural events outside of their neighborhood. A majority of respondents (about 60 percent) normally drive their own car.
Personal Participation

Social or community-based participatory activities

“Personal participation” refers to doing not just viewing art. The survey asked respondents about neighborhood venues as well as the social context of various activities. Respondents overall reported relatively low rates of formal training in any art form. During the past year, only nine percent (9%) of respondents took lessons in music, dance, acting, or the visual arts.

Approximately 40 percent of all respondents reported that they sing. By contrast only nine percent (54 of 602 respondents) said that they play a musical instrument. Latino and mixed race respondents were more likely than Blacks to identify as singers (59 percent vs. 43 percent respectively). White respondents were significantly less likely than others to identify as singers or to play a musical instrument.

Church-based musical participation was most prevalent among Black respondents. About half of Black and a third of Latino and mixed-race singers sing with a church group. Overall, Black musicians were much more likely than Latinos to play instruments in a community setting (with a church, school, or other community group).

Many respondents (about 40 percent) participate in social dancing. The 18-24-year-olds had the highest rate of dancers (67 percent) and the 25-34-year-olds the lowest (29 percent). Social dancing is most likely to occur in the neighborhood, often in private homes. Nightclubs, in addition to being venues for live music and dance performances, are the dominant social venue for participatory dance. Overall, survey respondents’ high interest in social dancing stood in stark contrast to their very low attendance at dance performances.

Annual cultural and religious celebrations play a role in community cultural life. The typical respondent participated in three to four traditional holiday celebrations during the past year.

Home or family-based participatory activities

Lack of formal training has not discouraged adult respondents from many forms of creative and cultural expression. The survey found a variety of at-home cultural participation, including music-making, social dancing, reading and creative writing, visual arts, and craft-making. Other “living arts”—the arts of everyday life—included such activities as dressing creatively, home decorating, displaying art in the home, and gardening.

“Reading for fun” was reported by approximately 90 percent of all respondents, the highest rate of cultural participation measured by the survey. In addition to newspapers and magazines, a great majority of respondents read books of fiction, non-fiction or history, and poetry.
About one-third of all respondents engaged in creative writing in the past year. The predominant mode of expression was “writing or performing poetry, rap, or song lyrics.” This form was reported by 60 percent of all writers and 70 percent of male writers.

Music participation via radio was also a dominant form of cultural participation (88 percent of all respondents). People of all ages said that they listen regularly to the radio at home, in their car, and at work. Adults regardless of ethnicity listen to music on the radio and collect musical recordings (records, tapes, and CDs).

Family-based cultural participation was most prevalent among Latinos. Latino and mixed-race respondents were significantly more likely than Blacks to play musical instruments or to do art and craft-making activities with family members. About half of Latino and mixed-race and a third of Black singers reported that they sing with family members.

A vast majority of respondents who sing as well as those who play instruments reported singing and playing instruments “by themselves.” Thus for many people making music is often a solitary activity.

About half of all respondents engaged in one or more of a wide variety of art or craft-making activities. Latino and mixed-race respondents reported much higher rates than Blacks of participation in all types of art and craft-making activities with the exception of clothing design. About 60 percent of women and 40 percent of men who engage in art-making reported that they do arts activities with children.

Approximately 60 percent of all respondents use the Internet. Respondents who completed high school were more than twice as likely to use the Internet as those who did not (73 percent vs. 30 percent). Internet usage was related to ethnicity—82 percent of Whites reported usage, compared to 63 percent of Blacks, and 58 percent of Latinos and mixed-race respondents.
Desired additional cultural activities

Respondents were asked: “Of all the things we’ve talked about, what are the one or two activities that you’d like to do more often, if you had the time and resources?” People mentioned a variety of participatory activities that are currently neighborhood-based—such as, singing, dancing, cooking, sewing, graffiti art, auto-detailing, acting, reading, sports and recreation.

The most commonly voiced theme was the desire for more cultural activities for kids of all ages—both to help young people fare better in their lives and to strengthen the communities overall.

Cultural Participation and Community Engagement

The neighborhood survey asked respondents about types of community engagement to look at their cultural participation in the context of other types of community activity. Community engagement tended to increase with length of residence. Over 80 percent of respondents had lived in their neighborhoods for at least three years and nearly half for at least 10 years.

Community engagement and cultural participation were associated in several interesting ways. Voters and volunteers, for example, were more likely than others to attend performances and exhibits. Volunteers were twice as likely as non-volunteers to sing in a choir. People who regularly attend religious services were less likely to attend formal cultural events but more likely to be personally involved in art-making—especially singing. Six of ten respondents use the Internet. Internet users were more likely than non-users to attend live events (music, dance, and theater performances and art exhibits) and be involved in arts training and art-making of all types—except singing.

Conclusion

Cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden is really a three-part story. First, residents of these neighborhoods embrace broad and varied definitions of culture that include the arts as well as a variety of folk traditions and everyday activities. Second, residents participate in these activities regularly, usually at home, religious institutions, or commercial entertainment venues. Finally, formal nonprofit cultural organizations play a relatively minor role in the cultural life of North Philadelphia and Camden.

The full portrait of community cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden provides both opportunities and challenges to current efforts to broaden, deepen, and diversify participation. It demonstrates that residents of these neighborhoods see cultural activities as important to their lives. Yet, their interests in culture are different from those of most cultural organizations. The challenge, then, is not so much to get residents to care about culture; they already do. What is needed are strategies for connecting residents’ interests with the cultural programs of nonprofit groups by overcoming existing barriers to participation and bridging the current gap between informal social interaction and formal arts and cultural resources.
IV. NORTH PHILADELPHIA AND CAMDEN CULTURAL PARTICIPATION—AN ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The evidence presented until this point provides a split image of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden. When we spoke with residents about their cultural participation, either through focus groups or resident surveys, we discovered a rich and varied cultural life. People are actively involved in making music, reading, writing, as well as many creative activities that lie outside of standard definitions of the arts. However, when we examined how often they attend concerts, museums, or plays, residents of North Philadelphia and Camden emerge as having among the lowest rates of participation in the metropolitan area. This gap was particularly evident when we examined participation in mainstream, regional cultural programs.

The community cultural sector of North Philadelphia and Camden partially compensates for low mainstream participation in these neighborhoods. Yet, because the community cultural sector is so diverse, its profile varies from neighborhood to neighborhood. In this chapter, we examine variations in the cultural participation profile within North Philadelphia and Camden and ask if there are important socio-economic variables that explain this variation.

Participation Profile by Neighborhood Cluster

The five neighborhood clusters are characterized by different profiles of cultural program participation. In order to explore the character of these variations, we return to the five Benchmark sub-indexes of participation introduced in Chapter II:

- audience and visitors—persons who attended an event or exhibition sponsored by the organization;
- students—persons who registered for a class or workshop sponsored by the organization;
- artists—persons identified as an artist by the organization who either taught, performed, or displayed their work there;
- mailing list entries—persons included in the organization’s mailing list; and
- organizations—institutions that were either identified as active partners or included on the organization’s mailing list.

Different types of cultural participation have strengths in different neighborhood cluster areas. The graphs on the next page compare neighborhood per capita rates for each Benchmark participation sub-index. The top graph compares actual mean participation rates and the bottom graph compares variation from the mean.

Artists and mailing list entries are relatively evenly distributed across the five areas, although North Philadelphia East and North Philadelphia Central have the highest rates. However, the other indexes show distinctive patterns across the five neighborhood clusters.
North Philadelphia Central clearly has the highest rate of audience participation.

North Philadelphia Central has two clear locational advantages that help explain the relatively high rates of audience and attendee participation. First, the neighborhoods at its southern end border Center City. These areas enjoyed significant housing redevelopment during the past decade, as well as relatively high population growth. Second, Central is the location of Temple University, which provides cultural programming and attracts to the area a larger than average population that is inclined to participate in cultural events.

North Philadelphia East and Central are notable in their strong student representation.

The strong showing of student participation in North Philadelphia East and Central is most clearly associated with the Latin American sections of these neighborhoods. This is hardly surprising because three Latin American-focused cultural organizations—Taller Puertorriqueno, Asociacion de Musicos Latino Americanos (AMLA), and Raices Culturales LatinoAmericanas—are located in this area and together provide a strong mix of educational resources. Clearly, the presence of vital organizations that actively seek to engage their neighborhoods has a strong effect on actual levels of participation.

Camden stands out due to its high levels of organizational connections, particularly in South Camden.

As noted earlier, Camden’s individual participation rates, for both regional and Benchmark participation, are lower than those for North Philadelphia. However, both North and South Camden are more likely than North Philadelphia to have a high rate of organizational links. This pattern of weak individual participation and strong organizational connections appears to be a defining feature of the community cultural scene in the New Jersey city.
The following six maps provide a more detailed portrait of the distribution across North Philadelphia and Camden of individual participation and organizational contact indexes. The Individual Benchmark Participation combines the four household level sub-indexes: artists, audiences, students, and mailing list entries. (Participation rates are by block group per 1,000 residents.)
Neighborhood Characteristics and Cultural Participation

In order to understand the patterns of participation discovered by the small-area cultural participation estimates, we conducted a correlation analysis. The statistic used here, Pearson’s r (correlation coefficient), measures the extent to which knowledge of one variable improves one’s prediction of the value of another variable. Pearson r’s value varies from –1 if there is a perfect negative correlation of the two variables (as one goes up, the other goes down) to 1 if there is a perfect positive correlation (as one goes up, the other goes up). A score near to zero indicates a low association between the two variables. Finally, the relative strength of two correlation coefficients is measured by comparing their square, so a correlation coefficient of 0.2 (r-square of .04) is roughly four times as strong as a coefficient of 0.1 (r-square of .01).

One limiting factor of this analysis is the fact that most block groups in Philadelphia and Camden share similar characteristics; they generally have low incomes, high poverty, low educational achievement, and low numbers of married-couple-with-children families. Because the correlation coefficient measures the association between the variation across two variables, if the entire study area shares common characteristics, one is less likely to find high correlations.

Correlation coefficients, Benchmark participation sub-indexes and social indicators

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<th>Students</th>
<th>Artists</th>
<th>Mailing lists</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
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<td>-0.030</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>0.207</td>
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<td>Pct poor</td>
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<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pct vacant dwellings</td>
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<td>-0.030</td>
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<td>Pct renter occupied</td>
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<td>0.096</td>
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<td>Pct non-family HH</td>
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<td>Median value of dwelling</td>
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<td>Percent Asian-Pacific Island</td>
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<td>Pct owner occupied</td>
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<td>Median HH income</td>
<td>-0.057</td>
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<td>0.032</td>
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Source: Benchmark Project, small-area cultural participation database, 2004
Generally, within North Philadelphia and Camden, socio-economic variables are not associated with variations in Benchmark participation indexes. For the overall individual participation index (an aggregate of audience, students, artists, and mailing list entries), participation rates are correlated with only a higher than average percent of college graduates in the area. This could reflect the relatively high levels of participation around Temple University and the concentration of college-educated persons in the southern end of North Philadelphia-Central. Other socio-economic variables fail to explain even one percent of the variation in overall individual Benchmark participation.

Although the standard socio-economic variables fail to have much power in explaining variation in participation, the presence of cultural organizations does. That is, the number of cultural providers within one-half mile of a person’s block group predicts that person’s likelihood of participation in cultural programs, regardless of location. Its correlation coefficient of .186—although still relatively low—is three times stronger than the strongest socio-economic variable. The correlation between participation and the presence of cultural organizations is stronger for audiences (.280) and mailing list members (.207) but weaker for students and artists.

The correlation between cultural participation and institutional presence is a significant finding with important implications for policy and grant-making. First, the presence of cultural organizations in these neighborhoods is generally the result of local initiative. In contrast to Center City, the cultural organizations that are present in North Philadelphia and Camden—with few exceptions—are a product of local residents deciding to join together in forming and sustaining them. In this respect, participation begets participation; those neighborhoods in which residents are motivated to get involved are more likely to have higher participation across the board.

But there is more. Organizations influence the norms and patterns of behavior in their neighborhoods. As the focus group analysis suggests, culture often refers to patterns of shared behavior. The presence of a cultural provider that sponsors a street festival or a regular series of events can have a subtle impact on its neighborhood, developing patterns of behavior that influence the very fabric of everyday life. For example, the focus group members from North Philadelphia West recalled a time when there were more cultural opportunities in the neighborhood; their absence today may explain why there is lower participation in this area.

The connection of participation and organizations is not uniform. The relationship of organizational presence and participation is stronger in North Philadelphia than in Camden. If we rank block groups by their participation rate and the number of cultural providers, the correlation of the two factors in North Philadelphia is .17 while that in Camden is only .02. In North Philadelphia, average participation rises steadily with the number of cultural providers. In Camden, however, there is no clear pattern.
Student participation stands out because, compared to the other forms of participation, it is less correlated with organizational presence and more correlated with socio-economic variables. But it is not high socio-economic status that predicts enrollment as a student of the visual or performing arts in these neighborhoods. Block groups characterized by poverty, low income, low housing values, and a high proportion of Latin Americans are all correlated with student participation.

As shown clearly on the map on page 34, the center of student participation is in North Philadelphia East, the major focus of Philadelphia’s Latin American community. Ironically, although not correlated with organizational presence, student participation is a product of the historical presence of Latin American cultural organizations. Taller Puertorriqueno, AMLA, and Raices all mount significant educational opportunities for the youth and adults of these neighborhoods, and the small-area estimates of cultural participation testify to their effectiveness at reaching community residents.

Conclusion

Nonprofit cultural participation is low in North Philadelphia and Camden. Yet, this generalization covers two very different realities. On the one hand, large regional organizations, which account for more than half of total cultural participation in the metropolitan area, account for a very small share of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden. On the other hand, the community cultural sector, represented here by the Benchmark organizations, plays a compensatory role. Although small in size, these community-serving programs represent a critical element of the cultural ecosystem of the neighborhoods as well as an important resource in efforts to expand cultural participation.
V. COMMUNITY CULTURAL PARTICIPATION 2004—WHAT WE LEARNED

In previous chapters, we have presented the discrete findings of each of the three research strategies used in the project—focus groups, resident surveys, and small-area participation estimates. This chapter synthesizes the findings of the three strategies and incorporates feedback we received from cultural leaders who attended one of our data briefings. The first section uses the geography of neighborhood clusters to see how the findings of the three strategies converge or complement each other with respect to patterns of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden. In other words, did our ‘triangulation’ strategy work? The second section presents the practitioners’ response to the Benchmark findings, the last phase of the research process, based on focus groups with Philadelphia and Camden cultural leaders (April 2005) and a research briefing for all Benchmark Project partners (June 2005).

This section of the report validates the Benchmark Project findings in two ways. First, the research team found that, although the samples of residents represented and the methods of inquiry differed, the three sets of findings are generally consistent and complementary. Second, the findings resonate with cultural practitioners working in these communities.

Community Overview and Neighborhood Clusters

Chapters III and IV presented the findings of the three research studies from two points of view—a resident perspective and an organizational perspective. The three studies converged on several key community-wide findings.

- Residents of North Philadelphia and Camden are actively engaged in a variety of informal social and cultural activity close to home.
- North Philadelphia and Camden residents’ participation in cultural programs—both inside their neighborhoods and elsewhere in the region—is relatively low.
- Within these broad patterns of cultural participation, there is considerable variation. Neighborhood context matters. Even in poor urban neighborhoods, geography and history account for perceptible and measurable differences in participation.
- The texture of community cultural participation reflects, in part, the demographic character and changing social and physical landscape of the neighborhood.
- The level of formal cultural participation—in both community-based and regional programs—reflects a history of community building by local institutions. Of particular significance is the number of cultural providers located within and in proximity to a resident’s immediate neighborhood.

Below is a synthesis of the findings for each of the neighborhood clusters. As noted above, all five areas showed a general fit among the three sets of research findings. Each summary highlights points of divergence as well as consistency.
North Philadelphia West Participation Profile

The small area estimates point to North Philadelphia West as the neighborhood cluster with the least imprint by community cultural organizations located in or serving North Philadelphia—either through direct participation (audience, students, or artists) or outreach (mailing lists, organizational partners). However, parts of West showed modest representation in the regional cultural organizations.

Resident survey and focus groups findings corroborate this pattern. North Philadelphia West residents were the most likely to participate in formal cultural programming and to leave their neighborhoods to do so. Survey respondents reported the highest overall rate of attendance during the past year at live performances—in particular, a higher likelihood of going to a dance performance, art exhibit, historic site or museum—and the lowest rate of attending a play or musical in their own neighborhood. Adults in the focus group attended a variety of cultural events, mostly outside the neighborhood in Center City and Fairmount Park—such as, Robin Hood Dell East, the Parkway, Boaters Row, Merriam Theater, Free Library, Art Museum, African American Museum, Penn’s Landing, and Independence National Historic Park.

The resident survey and focus group findings gave a glimpse of neighborhood context. Local cultural activity takes place in two types of neighborhood settings: non-arts nonprofit organizations—such as, community and senior centers, schools and learning centers, and social service agencies—and night clubs. Residents reported the highest rate of social dancing, both at local clubs and house parties as well as outside the neighborhood.

West residents also indicated general neighborhood decline in recent decades and, in particular, a loss of cultural opportunities. Focus group participants noted that the neighborhood “used to have” community and senior centers, boys and girls clubs, dance and music and ceramics classes, and more library hours. West survey respondents, though current involvement was average, were twice as likely as all others to have taken art lessons or classes at some point in their lives. They cited more frequently “concern for safety” as a barrier to doing social or cultural activities in their neighborhood.

North Philadelphia Central Participation Profile

Based on the small area estimates, North Philadelphia Central generally has a positive presence with the community cultural organizations located in or serving North Philadelphia on all five indexes of participation—audience, students, artists, organizations, and mailing lists. Moreover, Central is the only neighborhood cluster with areas of high participation in the regional cultural organizations.

Central stands out as the neighborhood cluster with the highest rate of audience participation in community cultural programs. The survey findings are consistent. Central respondents reported the highest rate of attending a play or musical in the past year and an above average rate of attending these performances in their neighborhood.

Community cultural programs also show a strong representation in North Philadelphia Central of students. Here the survey findings are inconsistent. Central survey
respondents reported the lowest rate (matched only by Camden South) of involvement during the past year in any arts lessons or training.

Thus, from an organizational perspective, North Philadelphia Central residents show relatively strong “observational” as well as “personal” cultural participation. The resident survey, however, found a particular pattern of “personal” participation: Central residents were among the most likely to sing in a social or community context but the least likely to engage in creative writing, play a musical instrument, or display artwork or photographs in their home.

**North Philadelphia East Participation Profile**

North Philadelphia East is the neighborhood cluster with the highest rate of student participation in cultural organizations serving North Philadelphia. The resident survey findings are consistent. East respondents reported a substantially higher rate—nearly twice the average among all neighborhood clusters—of taking music, dance, acting, or visual arts lesson during the past year.

The individual Benchmark participation rate among East residents is high, largely due to this high level of student enrollment in arts and musical training programs. The resident survey found, on the one hand, that East residents were the least likely to report affiliation with a community arts or cultural program and, on the other hand, the most likely to attend free over ticketed performances or to go to a park or outdoor site or night club as a neighborhood venue for theater events, free or ticketed. Thus, a substantial amount of cultural participation occurs in community settings and is unlikely to be documented by sponsoring organizations.

The cultural values and uses of outdoor public spaces was a central theme of the North Philadelphia East focus group. Participants talked about the importance of local parks, plazas, and community gardens in everyday life and as settings for celebratory events such as parades and festivals.

**Camden South Participation Profile**

Community cultural organizations located in and serving Camden City—and South Camden in particular—do not appear to be connecting with individual residents at the household level. Camden South is especially noteworthy in its weak index of individual cultural participation despite strong organizational presence.

The survey research presents similarly contradictory findings. Camden respondents in general—and South Camden respondents in particular—reported a higher rate of organizational affiliation than the North Philadelphians. At the same time, compared to other neighborhood clusters, Camden South respondents were the least likely to have taken arts lessons of any kind during the past year or at any point in their lives.

Meanwhile, a variety of “observational” participation appears to be outside the purview of community cultural programs. Camden South survey respondents—who reported an above average rate of attending live events in the past year—were the most likely to attend music concerts, plays, and musicals in their neighborhood and to cite community centers as neighborhood venues for theater attendance, ticketed or free.
Camden North Participation Profile

Camden North demonstrates a modified version of the pattern that is so striking in Camden South—community cultural programs with strong organizational connections but weak individual participation. Camden North focus group participants, who were drawn from a local church ministry, described one form of organization-based participation. For this group of volunteers, cultural participation was often mediated by the church and included social service and evangelical work as well as conventional activities like going to a concert or traveling to historic sites in Washington D.C.

Camden North has a somewhat greater student representation in cultural programs than South Camden. Likewise, the survey found several forms of “personal” participation noteworthy among North Camden residents. North respondents were the most likely both to sing and to play a musical instrument alone or with family; to play an instrument with a church, school, or community group; to do art and craft-making activities; and (along with North Philadelphia East respondents) to do creative writing.

Community Cultural Practitioners’ Viewpoint

Overall, the Benchmark Project findings on community participation resonated with both the Philadelphia and Camden community cultural directors in the practitioner focus groups and research briefing. The research reflects “what we see on a regular basis, what we knew instinctively but couldn’t articulate.” Practitioners discussed residents’ beliefs and behaviors and, in particular, implications for increasing participation community cultural programs. Below are the highlights of these discussions.

Informal Cultural Participation

Arts of everyday life

The uses of the term “cultural participation” in the resident focus groups and survey were provocative for program directors whose work tends to focus on formal interpretations of the arts and culture. Neighborhood residents routinely include not only arts training or cultural events but a range of activities associated with ethnic heritage or that shape one’s identity or social life.

On the one hand, practitioners recognized the breadth of the resident perspective compared with the view from inside an organization. “Perhaps we should broaden our views of what the community sees as art, because what we’re seeing here is really broad.” On the other hand, practitioners wanted to hear more about a number of creative and expressive activities important to their communities—in particular, reading, writing, and the literary arts (“need to validate literacy and literary expression”) as well as social dancing (“people are dancing in their houses”). The role of public media—radio, television, newspapers, and magazines—was also cited as an area of interest.

Several programs work at the intersection of culture and horticulture, of the arts and the sciences. One practitioner was glad to learn that residents share her organization’s broad definition of culture.

Working in community gardening, we see it as cultural participation, but I was interested to see the respondents saw it as cultural participation … [Gardening] is something that
the community does, and there’s often ethnic aspects to it—people sharing their different
cultural backgrounds—and its also related to food.

It was noted that the survey did not solicit information about participation in science and
nature activities, which are close to home and to the interests of children and families.

Typologies of cultural participation—notably, the two broad categories of “observing”
and “participating”—were also a point of discussion. Directors see community arts
programs as a nexus for bridging participatory with observational experiences of the arts.
This issue is integral to the mission of one organization.

We think a lot about participating vs. observing. Our mission is transformation—
transforming people, which requires touching, participating. Observation does not
transform. Our question is how to convert observation types of experience to active
participation, which is needed to transform.

One director questioned the assumptions about “observational” participation. Listening
to music, especially a live performance, she argued, is not a passive “spectator” activity
but rather an active and participatory form of engagement.

Art vs. social mission

Community cultural directors talked about their concern with the larger context of
programming in different neighborhoods, which are generally high poverty areas where
children do not have the benefits of the cultural and arts programming generally available
in private school or suburban settings. Some suggested that nonprofit organizations are
often so concerned with sponsoring cultural experiences that are not available to residents
that they forget to connect with what is already happening.

Our arts goal is to bring something new to the neighborhood, an opportunity people don’t
have already. We don’t tend to look at what is already there.

By contrast, an established community arts center has already incorporated
informal cultural practices with its formal arts and cultural enrichment programs.

We don’t think as much about gardening, cooking, etc. as particular art forms, yet at the
same time in our events they’re always part of it ... So even though those things are
considered less formal art forms, they’re still part of what our arts programming is, so it’s
part of the whole experience of culture.

Another group reported success with a long-standing program called “Musical
Interludes,” whereby professional musicians visit the homes of the ill and
homebound—a literal interpretation of the healing potential of the arts.

We refer to this challenge as the ‘settlement house’ perspective, after the social agencies
founded at the turn of the 20th century that sought both to enrich the lives of poor,
immigrant neighborhoods and collaborate with residents. The same conundrum continues
to challenge those who want to work with poor community residents and also promote
social change.

See also Alan Brown’s model of five modes of arts participation based on level of creative control,
“Presentation of Neighborhood Survey Results, June 14, 2005,” pages 7 and 37.
Building on what’s happening in neighborhoods

Community arts directors talked about building on existing avenues of cultural expression as an opportunity for expanding participation.

In Eastern North Philly, 9 percent [of residents] go to an art exhibit, but 49 percent have art displayed in their homes, and a big light bulb went on in my head about what we ought to be doing there.

Sometimes community connectedness with an art form is unexpected but, as one director reflected, validates a strategy of building on the known and familiar.

We found when we had our exhibition, we had an artist who made food and preserved it with varnish. And the kids would run in there immediately because it was set up as a table, and they were like, “My Mom makes this!” It was really neat, but it was set up sort of like artwork, like sculpture. And it was kind of fun that they all had this reaction because it really meant something to them.

Directors discussed ways of translating their program vocabulary to mesh with residents’ perspectives of cultural participation. Someone suggested, for example, landscaping as a way to build on the community’s attachment to place and “to change the experience of public space.”

Reaching adults through youth programming

Cultural program directors talked about using programs for youth as a vehicle for reaching adults, because parents are willing to attend an event in which their children are involved. The challenge, however, is to engage parents in additional activities.

Lots of times, the first time people are introduced to culture is through their children, and then they’ll appreciate it. They’ll go to see their kids perform at something and, if we’re having something other than what their child is participating in, they might come to see another type of performance. Especially when we do outdoor activities, they’ll initially come to see their kids but … stay if we have other entertainment. It also leaves the door open so that if we get free tickets to events downtown, we can pass them on to [the parents and other family members] to see other things.

When we offer a program for kids, the whole family gets involved. And we know that. … But how do you translate that into something we can pay for?

Youth culture as a hook

A number of directors talked about intergenerational cultural tensions as well as the need to integrate youth culture into programming. The challenge is that “culture” is translated differently by the young and the adults, as described by one director:

The youth really believe they have a culture that’s worth something. And they don’t really see their connection to their elders or the neighborhood. Plus on top of that, in Eastern North Philadelphia you have the whole immigrant experience where the kids’ language is different from their parents’. So the expression of cultural forms is automatically going to be different because of the language.

Community arts organizations have the potential to use youth culture as a hook for attracting young people and possibly as a way to connect youth with adults. Practitioners would like to have seen more input by young people in the focus group research.
Home access via the media

Cultural directors discussed the potential of television, radio, or the Internet as a vehicle to get cultural programming “inside” people’s homes. However, cost is a significant barrier.

It takes a lot of money to get something videotaped and in a nice package to hand to a television station. And even with a public station, even to get them to play that perfectly nice, expensively edited piece you have, takes jumping through a gazillion hoops.

Home is where the art is

The intersections between the informal and formal cultural world, even at the scale of the neighborhood community, are complex. For example, evening programs often compete with home- and church-based cultural practices. But that’s not the whole story. A director at an established center mused about the surprising gap in attendance at their outdoor vs. their indoor programs—“people are intimidated to come inside.”

Among Latin Americans, another director explained, a lot of art happens at home. “My mother taught me how to dance … Everyone dances at parties. There is not a perceived need to take lessons.” Some consider the expression of their art a private albeit social but not a public activity. Many women, for example, will dance at home or at friends’ but not in public. Although from this perspective, young women don’t ‘need’ a community-based dance program, young men ‘need’ to take salsa lessons so they can dance in nightclubs. And many a talented performer—immigrants working “in survival mode” six days a week—would be happy for a venue on the seventh day.

Barriers to Regional Cultural Participation

Opportunity costs of a night on the town

From a resident’s point of view, leaving one’s neighborhood for a cultural event is a whole different category of activity. One Philadelphia-based community cultural director talked about the opportunity costs and high expectations entailed for “regional participation.” The model is “a night on the town”—in other words, it’s “entertainment” not “art.”

“Culture” is what happens in the neighborhood … When you talk about going in town to see a ticketed event, that’s a “destination,” especially when tickets are anywhere from 75-100 dollars. I don’t know about other cultures, but for African-Americans to see a 75 or 100 dollar ticketed event means an outfit, the hair is done, I mean it’s an outing. It’s not something you take lightly…it’s a dress up and go downtown to see that kind of thing.

Cultural meaning is personal and local

Opportunity costs, of course, are weighed against the benefits. Community cultural directors understand and respect the fact that neighborhood residents want to engage in cultural activities that speak to their personal experience and are “relevant” to their daily lives.

I found that people don’t go to or understand a whole lot of esoteric stuff, like plays where you have a lot of people bouncing off the walls… “What are they doing and what are they even talking about?” For us it makes us only do things that they absolutely can
relate to. So if we have a play going on it has to be something that’s relevant to the neighborhood. And I think when you see Beauty Shop and Barber Shop, those movies sell out and the critics say, “It was such a lousy movie,” but they’re making 100 million dollars. A lot of people relate to it, and that’s what goes on when you go to the barber shop or the beauty shop. So for them, it’s relevant.

For many people, leaving their neighborhood for culture or the arts increases the risk of esoterica and decreases the chance of relevance.

Organizational Challenges

Limits of collaboration

Both Philadelphia and Camden directors agreed with the Benchmark finding that organizational collaboration does not necessarily result in a higher rate of program participation. A number of directors expressed concern over pressure from funding agencies to forge partnerships that are not productive or sustainable because they are not based on strong social ties, intimate histories, or parallel goals. There was general agreement that foundations share common goals with the cultural arts organizations but that there need to be stronger lines of communication about the realities of collaborative programming.

I think it’s time for an open dialogue about what we all want the world to be like. It’s not about complaining. It’s been a real challenge for me, personally, to figure out how to accomplish that ... having a social justice background and not knowing how to translate that into politically appropriate action.

Camden context

Camden cultural directors acknowledged the possibility that their organizations are not as closely connected with their neighborhoods as North Philadelphia’s community cultural programs because of their particular origins and orientations. Camden directors described a particular set of challenges: residents’ lack of access to information about organization-sponsored cultural activities; working with communities that have very few neighborhood activities to build from; and encountering negative feelings among residents about institutions in general.

There can be such a barrier with feelings about institutions that people won’t attend [our events], but we’re slowly but surely trying to make sure that people know they’re invited, but going out into the community or the schools you get a whole different experience.

When you go into a community and start providing stuff, people are still not quite able to take advantage of it ... Our challenge is to meet people where they are and to build trust, and go from there.

The Camden Cultural Plan Coordination Team, in fact, identified substantial community-based cultural activity in neighborhoods throughout Camden. However, the planners found, these neighborhood groups are not getting the kind of support, recognition, or publicity that they need to connect with residents and establish trusting relationships. In any case, there was consensus among Camden cultural leaders regarding the need to

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recognize the importance and legitimacy of activities, whatever they may be, that contribute to strengthening the social life of Camden communities.

**Community culture infrastructure**

Cultural leaders in both Philadelphia and Camden directors talked about how grant-makers could structure their support strategies in light of the research. Specific strategies proposed were: a commitment to providing general operating support, rather than always requiring new program development; funding staff that does outreach and community building activities, in conjunction with arts programming; and increasing communication with local arts organizations.

Directors agreed that local organizations fill a gap or need for residents of low- or mixed-income, minority neighborhoods. Several felt strongly that cultural participation could be increased, in part, simply by supporting the longevity and sustained presence of cultural organizations in neighborhoods.

> What this says is that if you’re there doing the job, it’s important, but it is very difficult to get anybody to pay straight up for salaries and light bulbs. This says that having the lights on and doing the job is really more important than coming out with an AMAZING new program. Sexy new initiatives are really quite cost consuming.

The research makes a strong case for foundations to continue or expand support for community-based arts organizations.

> I think that what makes sense is a legitimization of the importance of community-based organizations to residents. We’ve noticed that neighborhood residents tend not to go outside the neighborhood very often ... There are relatively higher rates of participation from outside the area, even as far as the tri-state area, and … the perception is that we offer something valid and authentic.

Increasingly, practitioners recognize community culture as a legitimate sector and each other as career professionals. “It’s not just a stop on the way to the Ballet!”

**Conclusion**

The Benchmark Project was designed to meld a variety of perspectives into a coherent understanding of the current state of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden. As this chapter suggests, for the most part, the separate results inform and complement each other. In addition, the response of cultural leaders to the findings suggests that the Benchmark Project reinforced practitioners’ perception of the opportunities and challenges to increasing cultural participation in these communities.
VI. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

What is the current state of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden, and how might we expand it? Answering this question has been the central focus of the Benchmark Project.

In many respects, the cultural life of North Philadelphia and Camden is strong. Our informants tell us that if we use a wide-angle lens to view culture—one that includes patterns of everyday life—these communities have diverse and rich patterns of social interaction and private cultural expression. The home, the family, religious observance, and informal social interaction are the foundations of culture in North Philadelphia and Camden. Our study suggests that this foundation is strong.

At the same time, the strength of the informal cultural life of North Philadelphia and Camden does not carry over to its formal nonprofit cultural sector. From a regional perspective, formal participation rates in these neighborhoods are strikingly low. Although local community arts centers and cultural resource organizations—what we have called the Benchmark organizations—partially compensate for these shortcomings, these groups are modest in size and budget.

The Knight Foundation’s Community Partners in Arts Access (CPAA) initiative was designed to respond to this situation through grants to groups located in and serving North Philadelphia and Camden. The initiative has funded a diverse set of projects directed at providing more grassroots participation as well as expanding cultural opportunities through institutions like the public schools, social service agencies, and public housing authority facilities.

As CPAA moves forward, it is critical that success of the initiative be judged with an eye toward both the assets and shortcomings of the current community cultural life. The assets identified by the Benchmark Project include:

- a vital and diverse informal cultural scene; and
- a community cultural sector with a history of providing cultural opportunities in these neighborhoods.

The shortcomings that need to be addressed include:

- weak links between the informal cultural scene and community arts nonprofits;
- the minor neighborhood role played by regional cultural organizations; and
- uneven development of the cultural ‘ecosystems’ of North Philadelphia and Camden.
Building on Strengths

A Vital and Diverse Informal Cultural Scene

Our focus groups and resident survey provide a full portrait of the cultural life of North Philadelphia and Camden communities, centered on the home, family, traditional celebrations and religious observances, and for-profit entertainment venues. Adult residents are involved in music, dance, and the literary arts to a much greater extent than popular stereotypes of ‘underprivileged’ neighborhoods would lead us to expect. The neighborhood survey findings on the literary arts are especially impressive. Reading and writing appear to be central to the lives of a large proportion of residents.

The vitality of family-centered and informal social activity presents a tempting target for building cultural participation, but one with many pitfalls. As one cultural leader noted, the very vitality of this sector may resist efforts to build on its strength. To the extent that residents perceive their cultural opportunities at home or through religious observance as sufficient, they may not see a need for improvement. In addition, because so much of cultural expression occurs in ‘private’ settings, individuals may not wish to open it up for outside interaction.

The literary arts present the most obvious opportunity to build on what’s already happening. As we know, ‘spoken word’ and the development of literary prowess as a competitive skill—for example through poetry slams—present examples of the public expression of private cultural engagement. Our survey suggests as well that residents of North Philadelphia and Camden are avid readers. Given the proliferation of book clubs, readers’ circles, meet-the-author events, and other bookstore programming, this interest too provides an opportunity for building on strength.

Historical Presence of the Community Cultural Sector

As we have noted earlier, the presence of a community cultural sector—composed of small and mid-sized organizations that offer classes and workshops and mount festivals, performances, and exhibitions—is a critical element of the community ecology of North Philadelphia and Camden. This sector represents an active achievement of residents of these communities focused on improving social life and increasing opportunities for local residents. What is more, previous research by SIAP suggests that neighborhoods with cultural resources were more likely to experience population growth and poverty reduction over the past two decades.

The community cultural sector is important to initiatives like CPAA for two reasons. First, strengthening the community cultural sector would allow grantee organizations to reach a wider set of residents and to deepen the involvement of those already participating. Second, in addressing the gap in regional cultural participation, community-based resources provide a set of experts and partners from which larger institutions could benefit.
Addressing Challenges

Although the Benchmark Project has identified a set of strengths in the community cultural sectors in North Philadelphia and Camden, it has discovered challenges as well. The diagram below highlights several shortcomings in the cultural ecosystems of the two communities: (1) a weak link between engagement in the informal cultural activity and participation in local community arts programs; (2) a lack of participation in regional culture by neighborhood residents generally; and (3) the uneven effectiveness of organizational partnerships in increasing participation in community cultural programs.

As CPAA moves forward, assessment of its success should take into consideration progress toward narrowing these structural gaps—by both funded and opportunistic projects—as well as increasing Benchmark participation. This last section will discuss in more detail the challenges of the initiative.
Weak Links between the Informal Cultural Scene and Community Arts Nonprofits

The findings of the resident focus groups and neighborhood survey demonstrate that cultural and creative expression is an important aspect of everyday life in North Philadelphia and Camden. The vast majority of cultural expression, however, occurs outside of formal institutions—in the home, at church, or in other informal settings.

A variety of strategies might be pursued in bridging this gap. Alan Brown, based on the resident survey, suggested several strategies including: encouraging partnerships between churches and cultural organizations; developing home-based cultural activities; encouraging a wider range of participatory cultural events; and increasing access to artists and cultural leaders at the neighborhood level.

Previous research points both to the promise and problems of collaboration between cultural institutions and religious organizations. In Philadelphia, religious activities are the form of community involvement most often mentioned by cultural participants. Yet in a survey of institutional relationships of community arts organizations, the arts groups were much less likely to have connections with churches than with other types of social organizations.13

This lack of connection may stem from competition. A survey of Philadelphia religious congregations by the Penn School of Social Work discovered that roughly half the congregations offer arts-based programs—in addition to music associated with worship services (typically church choirs)—as part of their ministry. Because of the large number of congregations in Philadelphia (over two thousand in the city alone), these figures suggest that there are more arts programs sponsored by religious institutions than by cultural organizations.14

At the same time, national studies indicate that the high-profile attacks on controversial art based on religious beliefs have created distrust between religious congregations and cultural organizations. Although DiMaggio et al discovered that most of these controversies were not initiated by religious organizations or their affiliates, concerns about morality and free expression continue to serve as barriers to fuller interaction between these sectors.15

North Philadelphia is home to a number of faith-based organizations with active cultural programs. Centro Nuevo Creacion, a program sponsored by New Creation Lutheran Church, offers after-school and teen programs. Its Goodlands Arts Program involves mural projects and a photography class that serve as ways to educate, inspire and beautify the community. The Goodlands Photography Show, which consists of original photos

taken by youth ages 8 to 14 years, is produced annually and travels to different locations to counter the misconception of its community as “The Badlands.”

Festivals also present an opportunity for building on informal cultural engagement. Street festivals usually are free and outdoors—removing two often cited barriers to participation—and include both narrowly-defined cultural activities like dance and music and widely-defined forms of cultural expression like food and ethnic identity. Camden Children’s Garden, for example, directs several of its programs toward local festivals, including the annual June celebration of Parada San Juan Bautista. The Asociacion de Musicos Latino Americanos (AMLA), Taller Puertorriqueño (Taller), and other community partners sponsor the annual Feria del Barrio along North Fifth Street every September.

One community response to the Benchmark research, however, was a caution against relying too heavily on informal social interaction. As noted previously, many systems of cultural reproduction are self-sufficient. Children learn to embroider from their parents. Songs sung at family gatherings are passed from generation-to-generation. These forms of cultural expression do not generate ‘needs’ to which the cultural sector can respond. Meanwhile, the desire of young adults to learn to new dances to go to night clubs may provide an opportunity to join informal social activities with the nonprofit cultural sector.

The impact of the artist on cultural participation was not a central concern of the Benchmark Project, but there was suggestive evidence that artists do play a significant role. Only one in ten survey respondents claimed to “know an artist or cultural leader”, but these individuals were more likely to engage in participatory cultural activities than those who don’t. Moreover, much of the informal cultural life relies on the presence of folk artists, storytellers, or other cultural “keepers” who transmit traditions, heritage, and ways of seeing the world. Several CPAA projects, such as InterAct Theatre Company’s InterAction residencies, are committed to hiring teaching artists who have a connection to the community. Taller is working with La Colectiva, an artists’ collective, to expand its monthly Noches de Arte en el Barrio, an effort to use visual and performing artists to bridge the street life of the barrio with its local cultural programs. CPAA assessment should monitor whether interactions with artists serve as a mechanism for increasing cultural participation.

Finally, as several directors revealed, the community cultural sector may be hampered by the legacy of its ‘settlement house’ mentality. Many community cultural programs were founded to bring new resources and opportunities to poor urban neighborhoods. Yet, in their focus on new opportunities, one of our respondents suggested, cultural organizations may neglect engaging residents around the culture they already have. A commitment to both honor and strengthen existing creative and cultural expression is likely to be an ongoing challenge for local community arts programs.

**Minor Neighborhood Role of Regional Cultural Organizations**

Certainly one of the most striking findings of the study is the near absence of North Philadelphian or Camden residents among participants in the region’s major cultural organizations. This deficit in individual participation is compounded by a lack of institutional connections between larger regional organizations and smaller community-
based cultural programs. At a recent meeting of CPAA grantees, for example, accommodating the schedules and demands of larger institutions was identified as a common problem around collaboration. These instrumental concerns are often further compounded by differences associated with race, ethnicity, language ability, and social class that create suspicion and short-circuit the creation of trusting relationships. Finally, a number of community cultural organizations have voiced frustration due to a history of efforts at collaboration with larger cultural institutions that have been characterized by misunderstandings and unrealized expectations.

The CPAA grants provide an opportunity to try out a different strategy—one based on links between community-based organizations and smaller regional resource organizations. In addition to a number of specific collaborative projects, the grantees as a group have one foot in the regional cultural scene, based in and around Center City, and another foot in community-based culture in North Philadelphia and Camden. The development of planned and unplanned collaboration among the grantees deserves particular attention as the initiative moves forward.

Uneven Development of the Cultural ‘Ecosystems’ of North Philadelphia and Camden

Although Camden and North Philadelphia share many characteristics, they have a very different cultural ecology. North Philadelphia’s local cultural sector boasts both old established organizations and many emerging groups. Parts of North Philadelphia that are rich in groups also are more likely to have higher rates of participation. Although participation in regional culture is low by metropolitan area standards, it is much higher than in Camden.

Camden’s cultural sector is more segmented. Several of the organizations located in the city define themselves as regional and draw an overwhelming proportion of their participants from outside of Camden City. There are fewer formal, non-profit organizations, and the majority of community-based cultural resources are either non-arts organizations—especially churches—or informal groups. As pointed out by Camden cultural leaders in the focus group discussion, Camden lacks institutions that combine arts instruction and programming with a broader community service agenda.

The dissimilarity between the two communities is illustrated by the differences in the relationship between organizational partnerships and individual participation. Although organizational connections are quite common in North Philadelphia, they are balanced by high rates of individual participation. In Camden, cultural leaders—regardless of the size or social background of their organizations—asserted that ordinary residents simply will not turn out for events, a claim substantiated by the resident survey and the small-area estimates. In this context, Camden organizations appear to go to great lengths to partner with other local organizations. Yet, because of the lack of community response, these organizational links often serve as a substitute for grassroots involvement rather than a stimulant of it.

Here again, several of the CPAA projects provide models for overcoming the participation barriers in Camden. Walt Whitman Arts Center’s Storefront Arts initiative seeks to use physical location to bring cultural opportunities closer to residents in five
neighborhoods. The Arts Ambassador program, coordinated by Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts, seeks to use personal connections to more closely link local residents to the city’s cultural institutions.

It should be noted that North Philadelphia’s cultural ecosystem, despite its longevity and diversity, could still be stronger. The goal of the North Philadelphia Puppet and Parade Collaborative, launched with CPAA funding by Spiral Q Puppet Theater, is to establish a community-based arts network of nine local partner organizations and a yearly tradition of the North Philadelphia Parade. The assessment of CPAA should pay particular attention to these collaborative efforts.

**Conclusion**

The Benchmark Project began with a modest goal of describing the current state of cultural participation in North Philadelphia and Camden. As the Project comes to a close, SIAP and its partners—Research for Action and Alan S. Brown—can be satisfied in knowing that we have provided a detailed description of cultural participation in these neighborhoods.

At the same time, the Benchmark Project has produced dividends that were not part of the original research design. First, it has demonstrated how the disparate elements of cultural engagement influence one another and form a unique cultural ecosystem. Second, the study has identified a number of strengths and challenges in the current situation that may serve to increase the ability of the Knight Foundation initiative to accomplish its goal.

The stakes involved in strengthening the community cultural sector are significant. In a world in which issues of identity represent an important element of social life, an absence of cultural opportunities can demoralize an entire community in ways that move well beyond the cultural sector. Although there are many features of the new urban reality that provide reason to be optimistic about the future of urban culture, the realities of economic inequality and the marketization of the cultural sector fuel pessimism.

Knowledge of the current situation and an understanding of its dynamics are important. The Benchmark Project believes that it has provided this foundation. But knowledge is no substitute for motivation and action to bring about social change. This is a challenge to which we must all respond.
APPENDIX 1.

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Benchmark Project Research Partners

Data Partners
ArtReach
Art Sanctuary
Asociacion de Musicos Latino Americanos (AMLA)
Asian Arts Initiative
Camden City Garden Club, Camden Children's Garden
The Clay Studio
Centro Nueva Creacion
Full Circle Theater, Center for Intergenerational Learning, Temple University
Georgia E. Gregory Interdenominational School of Music
InterAct Theatre Company
Naylamp Street and Puppet Theater
New Freedom Theatre
Perkins Center for the Arts
Philadelphia Mural Arts Program
Philadelphia Young Playwrights
Point Breeze Performing Arts Center
Raices Culturales LatinoAmericanas
Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts
Scribe Video Center
Settlement Music School, Camden School of Musical Arts Branch
South Jersey Performing Arts Center
Spiral Q Puppet Theater
Strings for Schools
Taller Puertorriqueno
Village of Arts and Humanities
Wagner Free Institute of Science
Walt Whitman Arts Center

Resident Focus Group Sites
Mount Calvary Baptist Church
Norris Square Senior Center
Saint Martin de Porres Catholic Church

Other Organizations Consulted
African American Cultural Arts Center & La Unique Bookstore
Camden County College
Camden County Cultural and Heritage Commission
Camden Neighborhood Renaissance
Community Leadership Institute
Cultural Plan for the City of Camden, Plan Coordination Team
La Colectiva and Noches de Arte en el Barrio
Norris Square Neighborhood Project
Philadelphia Doll Museum
Puerto Rican Culture and Arts Center
Rhythm and Moves
Youth United for Change