

Executive Summary

This project was commissioned by Akonadi Foundation and the Kenneth Rainin Foundation to address the lack of research on small, grassroots arts and culture organizations serving communities of color in Oakland, California. This research investigates the specificity of this sector of the ecosystem—its geography, existing infrastructure, assets, and challenges. By aggregating and analyzing the limited data on these organizations, interviewing a diverse cohort of stakeholders, and gathering existing research on organizations of color and the informal arts sector, this research project takes a first step toward understanding a complex and vibrant sector that builds social bonds, addresses community needs, and contributes to a strong sense of place in Oakland. This benchmark project will encourage funders to adopt intentional investment strategies to support the long-term stability of this important sector.

Key Findings

1. The grassroots arts organizations serving communities of color inventoried in this report are **densely clustered in Uptown and City Center/Downtown Oakland. There are limited data on organizations and events located in the historic cultural zones of Oakland's communities of color**, including Chinatown, Fruitvale, San Antonio, West Oakland and East Oakland.
2. **Grassroots arts organizations serving communities of color in Oakland are part of a robust, independent cultural ecosystem that is mission driven and fueled by a sense of place** defined by racially specific communities and locations.
3. Central challenges for the sector are the **limited capacity of and lack of resources for fiscal sponsors** to support the sector, as well as **limited general operating funding for organizations** inventoried in this report.
4. **At least 11.6 percent of grassroots organizations identified in this report use a social enterprise model** to provide low- or no-cost arts programming to communities of color in Oakland.

Recommendations

1. **Provide explicit racial equity funding** that relies on community input to develop grassroots funding strategies, including, but not limited to, earmarked funding for small arts organizations serving communities of color.
2. **Continue data gathering and inquiry** to identify grassroots organizations serving communities of color in Chinatown, Fruitvale, and other historic cultural zones. Additional research should focus on organizations with informal models and small businesses that sustain the mosaic of Oakland's arts and culture ecosystem.
3. **Provide cross-sector funding** that allows grassroots organizations serving communities of color to use their understanding of the community to identify constituent needs across sectors, including food justice, housing, transportation, health, economic development, and education, and to find timely solutions through art and cultural work.
4. **Invest in place keeping** to create and preserve historic cultural zones outside of the Uptown and Downtown core.