

## Culture and Local Governance Culture et gouvernance locale



### Artists Embedded in Government: Expanding the Cultural Policy Toolkit

### Les artistes au cœur du gouvernement : élargir la boîte à outils de la politique culturelle

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#### Article abstract

Artists have long worked in fields that are not related to art, instigating innovative ways of working in different institutional contexts from health to business to technology. Civic systems are no exception, with artists spearheading new ways of operating within government agencies. Some artists work covertly, bringing creative methods to traditional civic roles, while others are invited into government agencies in temporary positions as artists in residence addressing specific concerns. As local governments are increasingly challenged to provide services and operate equitably amid eroding public trust, opportunities for cross-sector collaboration uniting artists with government staff are compelling mechanisms for them to cocreate the necessary conditions for systemic change.

The research reported herein explores how artists are engaged in cross-sectoral collaborative models of cultural policy within local governments. Governments already recognize the potential of formal artist residency programs conducted over set periods of time to advance civic goals. In addition, artists have been engaged in this work through informal government partnerships in departments including transportation, parks, and public health. Some collaborations act as applied research enacted internally, bringing more complex understandings of government operations, while others become deep processes of external engagement to expand awareness of local concerns.

This paper presents a framework categorizing the structures in which artists work within government agencies to advance civic goals. The framework is based on research conducted on artists who were embedded in the government across the US from 2020 through 2022. Describing these structures highlights new ways of working within local government that center artists as agents that promote change; this paper lays the foundation for understanding how they operate and delineates opportunities and challenges for the artists and the governments that initiate collaboration. The framework is a foundation for cultural policy makers to evaluate artist in residence in government programs as a cultural policy tool and enable evaluation of the impact of their implementation.

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# Artists Embedded in Government: Expanding the Cultural Policy Toolkit

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*Abstract:* Artists have long worked in fields that are not related to art, instigating innovative ways of working in different institutional contexts from health to business to technology. Civic systems are no exception, with artists spearheading new ways of operating within government agencies. Some artists work covertly, bringing creative methods to traditional civic roles, while others are invited into government agencies in temporary positions as artists in residence addressing specific concerns. As local governments are increasingly challenged to provide services and operate equitably amid eroding public trust, opportunities for cross-sector collaboration uniting artists with government staff are compelling mechanisms for them to cocreate the necessary conditions for systemic change.

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*Keywords:* artist in residence, cross-sectoral collaboration, government, cultural policy

*Résumé :* Les artistes travaillent depuis longtemps dans des domaines qui n'ont rien à voir avec l'art, en proposant des méthodes de travail innovantes dans différents contextes institutionnels, de la santé à l'entreprise en passant par la technologie. Les systèmes civiques ne font pas exception à la règle, les artistes étant à l'origine de nouveaux modes de fonctionnement au sein des agences gouvernementales. Certains artistes travaillent clandestinement, apportant des méthodes créatives aux rôles civiques traditionnels, tandis que d'autres sont invités dans les agences gouvernementales à des postes temporaires en tant qu'artistes en résidence pour répondre à des préoccupations spécifiques. Alors que les collectivités locales sont de plus en plus contraintes de fournir des services

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et de fonctionner de manière équitable dans un contexte d'érosion de la confiance du public, les possibilités de collaboration intersectorielle entre les artistes et le personnel de l'administration sont des mécanismes convaincants qui leur permettent de cocréer les conditions nécessaires à un changement systémique.

La recherche présentée ici explore la manière dont les artistes sont engagés dans des modèles de collaboration intersectorielle en matière de politique culturelle au sein des gouvernements locaux. Les gouvernements reconnaissent déjà le potentiel des programmes formels de résidence d'artistes menés sur des périodes déterminées pour faire avancer les objectifs civiques. En outre, les artistes ont été engagés dans ce travail par le biais de partenariats gouvernementaux informels dans des départements tels que les transports, les parcs et la santé publique. Certaines collaborations font office de recherche appliquée en interne, permettant une compréhension plus complexe des opérations gouvernementales, tandis que d'autres deviennent des processus profonds d'engagement externe visant à accroître la sensibilisation aux préoccupations locales.

Cet article présente un cadre catégorisant les structures dans lesquelles les artistes travaillent au sein des agences gouvernementales pour faire avancer les objectifs civiques. Ce cadre est basé sur des recherches menées sur des artistes qui ont été intégrés dans le gouvernement à travers les États-Unis de 2020 à 2022. La description de ces structures met en lumière de nouvelles façons de travailler au sein des collectivités locales, qui font des artistes des agents de promotion du changement. Ce document jette les bases d'une compréhension de leur fonctionnement et délimite les opportunités et les défis pour les artistes et les gouvernements qui initient la collaboration. Le cadre est une base pour les décideurs culturels afin d'évaluer les artistes en résidence dans les programmes gouvernementaux en tant qu'outil de politique culturelle et de permettre l'évaluation de l'impact de leur mise en œuvre.

*Mots clés* : artiste en résidence, collaboration intersectorielle, gouvernement, politique culturelle

## Introduction

The Office of In Visibility is housed in the New York City Department of Sanitation's Central Repair Shop, a massive vehicle repair complex in Queens. Inside, artist Sto Len makes sanitation work visible to promote a sustainable and healthy city for everyone, in which department staff spearhead this gallant effort on behalf of all New Yorkers. Len reactivates the department's archival materials such as promotional videos, signage, and photographs in connection to present-day staff to reframe their work as humane and necessary to the daily lives of residents. Len is just one of the many artists who is working within government agencies, using civic systems as their artistic tools of creation to shift internal operations and public perception while promoting community engagement.

As civic life becomes increasingly complex in the face of climate change, public health risks, and lack of affordable housing, public trust in the government is rapidly eroding. Governments must seek new ways to equitably provide services and to operate efficiently (Cole et al., 2020; Du et al., 2020; Dzigbede et al., 2020). Collaborating across sectors provides opportunities for government agencies to develop policy tools that make incremental shifts in addressing these and other challenges. Artists bring cross-sectoral perspectives to civic work, making collaborations, in which artists are embedded in government, establish the conditions for systemic change beyond arts contexts.

These entrepreneurial forms of arts labor include artists conducting their work within government systems, whether as full-time employees or in temporary part-time roles. Foundational artists working in this space include Mierele Laderman Ukeles, who has held the position of Artist in Residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation since 1977, and Frances Whitehead, whose work has been embedded within city agencies in Chicago, Illinois and Gary, Indiana. These artists have elevated art world awareness of art methods that advance civic agendas through cooperation with government agencies. Recognition of this sector grew as formal government Artists in Residence in Government (AIRG) programs operated across the United States and were modeled on the work that Ukeles, Whitehead, and others have developed.

These collaborations have been shown to spur innovation within government agency operations, increase resident involvement in the policy process, and begin to address systemic exclusion (Taylor, 2021). These artists are culture bearers, creative practitioners, and others who bring many forms of art practice to their work including storytelling, writing, and printmaking as well as broader creative analytical and experimentation skills. While formal AIRG programs are the most visible examples, artists also pursue government roles such as becoming elected officials, pursuing full-time civic positions, and performing contracted work for agencies.

Collaborations, in which artists are embedded in government, can expand the cultural policy toolkit through experimentation, working beyond the arts sector in agencies varying from transportation to public parks to immigrant affairs. This paper is guided by the research question: how are artists engaging in cross-sectoral, collaborative models of cultural policy within government? Based on data collected on collaborations underway in 2020 through 2022, a framework which maps the roles that artists pursue to work with government agencies to achieve civic goals is introduced. This framework details five roles that vary based on how power is shared and who determines the scope of the collaboration, ranging from formal AIRG programs to informal artist-initiated projects.

Arts-engaged collaborations bring new ways of working to government through creative methods that shift standard approaches, inspire alternative outcomes, and advance civic goals (Taylor, 2021). This paper begins with a discussion of precedents of cross-sectoral collaboration in this field and summarizes relevant literature. Next, an analysis of the data is presented through the framework of five roles of artists in government, followed by a discussion that analyzes the challenges and opportunities within the collaboration. The conclusion considers the future of artistic work in collaboration with government and the expansion of cultural policy.

### **Contextualizing Artists, Government, and Cross-sector Collaboration**

Artists have long collaborated across-sectors and pursued work in fields that are not related to art, instigating innovative ways of working in contexts from health to business to technology. Their influence is valued for sparking new ideas among cross-sectoral teams, such as the collaboration with engineers at Xerox to innovate new products at the Palo Alto Research Center Artist in Residence Program from 1993 to 1999 (Harris, 1999). US government programs have provided work opportunities for artists to support broader civic goals, including: the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project which employed more than 5,000 artists at its peak in 1936; and the State Department which has operated a jazz diplomacy program since 1956 that sends Jazz Ambassadors abroad to advance foreign policy.

Research on artists as workers outside of their traditional art world spaces has shifted over the past decade from studying the precarity of arts workers to emphasizing the uniqueness of these workers, recognizing the full spectrum of how artists participate and thereby identify opportunities for industries (Woronkiewicz, 2020). Artists are recognized as entrepreneurial workers, finding ways to advance their work across sectors while also identifying new markets and audiences (Lingo & Tepper, 2013). In non-arts settings such as government, artists leverage tools that expand dialogue among collaborators to advance organizational goals internally and externally (Antal & Strauß, 2013; Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2014; Lithgow & Wall, 2017).

Cross-sector collaboration unites government with businesses, community organizations, foundations, and the broader public (Bryson et al., 2006). Research on cross-sector collaboration demonstrates that connecting outside of field siloes promotes opportunities to address pressing public issues through new strategic programs and partnerships (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004). Arts in cross-sector collaboration is a model for boosting innovation and expanding productivity through creative practice (Schiuma, 2009; Sköldberg et al., 2015). These artistic interventions can expand the capacity of internal work and engage staff more fully in their shared goals by “seeing more and seeing differently” (Antal & Strauß, 2013; Barry & Meisiek, 2010).

Artists connect art methods into non-arts contexts, often in collaboration with staff and communities. Art can take many forms, such as: a dialogic method that engages constituents in the policy process, a collaboration with government staff to create more equitable workspaces and practices internally, and a translation connecting communities and staff to expand the capacity of government to support constituents (Taylor, 2021). Artists practice in many mediums across their careers to improve job opportunities and achieve stability. This ideal state of work for artists is a “positive economy”, in which there is a balance of work for fair and sustainable financial benefit (Martel et al., 2019). Artists embedded in government is one way in which the skillsets of creative labor are being actively applied in other sectors for mutual benefit.

Initiatives uniting art and government are contextualized within creative placemaking, a field connecting public and private partners across sectors in arts-led and place-based community development work (Jackson, 2018; Schupbach, 2017). While the US lacks a central federal cultural policy strategy and operates a multi-level governance structure (Redaelli, 2020), creative placemaking has become one strategy in the national cultural policy toolkit. This collaboration can target structural inequities by bringing together broad groups of residents, nonprofit organizations, community organizers, government agencies, and others (Frenette, 2017). While the broad interests and expectations of everyone involved creates tension over the process and outcomes (Zitcer, 2018), and the outcomes are difficult to measure (Frenette, 2017; Markusen, 2013), participation in creative placemaking expands awareness among diverse collaborators and increases future productive outcomes (Daniel & Kim, 2020).

## Artist in Residence in Government (AIRG) Programs

Artist residencies are typically sponsored by an arts organization, providing artists with studio spaces to work in, housing, and professional development (ArteEast, 2011; Neidich, 2012; O’Brian, 2013). These programs became codified in the art world over the twenty-first century. The US government has directly supported artists through residencies and other capacities including the National Parks Service’s Artist in

Residence Program which operates at 50 sites since 1916 and the National Endowment for the Arts which has granted fellowships to creative writers since 1966. NASA has also infrequently hosted artists including Laurie Anderson in 2002.

AIRG programs have become more prominent since 2010 and became a part of the US cultural policy toolkit, with cities including Minneapolis and Boston continually refining operations and increasing capacity. In this manuscript, programs are referred to as AIRG though each operates with different names (Los Angeles County: Creative Strategist; Oakland: Cultural Strategist; St. Paul: City Artist; New York: Public Artists in Residence). In other forms of collaboration addressed in this paper, artists have embedded their work within government by initiating relationships that are not formal programs or by working in traditional government staff positions.

Some government AIRGs provide office spaces to artists, but most do not offer art career incubating benefits. AIRGs connect artists and civic staff to address a particular issue, typically operating in a part time and temporary period lasting an average of nine to twelve months though many extend for an additional year. Artists are typically hired as contractors and receive a set stipend for the project duration in addition to a project budget (Taylor, 2021).

While consultants are hired to complete a defined scope of work as established by the government staff, AIRGs are given a broader mandate that requires them to engage with the culture of the agency and embed themselves into daily work. The result of the residency is not known at the onset; in many cases it is the *process* of relationship building between the artist and the agency that highlights an initially unknown goal or opportunity through which the artwork is created, if a final *product* is even included in the work at all (Taylor, 2021). This process can create tensions as government staff are familiar with working with consultants to complete concrete tasks and AIRG programs encourage expanded, seemingly riskier processes.

Tensions and lack of clarity also arise in the distinction between creative processes and government work. In some residencies this distinction is clear, in which artists collaborate with government staff and produce traditional artworks as final products, such as Julia Weist's archival collages created while in residence in New York City and which are now in multiple museum collections. Yet in many cases the boundaries are not clear or are even nonexistent as the process of collaboration is the artistic work; former St. Paul artist in residence, Amanda Lovelee, jokes that her retrospective will exhibit countless emails.

## Research Methods

Data for this research was collected from 2020 through 2022. In 2020, formal AIRG programs operated from coast to coast in large (e.g., New York, NY), midsize (e.g., Chattanooga, TN), and rural (e.g., Granite Falls, MN) municipalities; new programs were also developed (e.g., Lexington, KY). I collected names and titles of individuals to interview through a survey of operating programs and by referral, including those affiliated with AIRGs and people in other forms of collaboration. Forty interviews were conducted with independent artists, government employees in various departments, staff at nonprofit organizations who connect artists and government agencies, funders, and outside evaluators. During the interviews, notes of points emphasized by interviewee were taken. Additionally, surveys were used to ensure consistency

of the data that was collected, and the materials documenting collaborations and programs were reviewed including press releases, final reports, and documentation. Questions in the interviews and surveys sought to learn more about the context of program structures, specific projects, and outcomes. They were tailored for each participant to reflect the unique place-based contexts of their work. Interviews were transcribed and collated with survey data to generate categories of recurring themes. Additionally, writings by artists embedded in government, who were not interviewed for this project, are included in this paper for additional context.

The shifting economic, social, and political context brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 resulted in increased uncertainty for the work that the research participants were conducting, forcing many to pivot from original plans, extend project timelines, or put the future of the work in question. Shifting in response to new challenges and priorities was a theme for all research participants and influenced the process of collaboration and the work that was produced. As the research was conducted during this time, it is not clear to what extent the greater societal context heightened the uncertainty of embedding artists in government work or how much of this precarity would have been a part of the process and climate regardless of the pandemic.

This artists in government research project builds on previously conducted studies framing this field by this author and others including: a literature review of the work of artists embedded in government within interdisciplinary dialogues across public administration, policy, and public art (Taylor, 2021), a literature review of artists in residence in government agencies connecting the United States and South America conducted by the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, in addition to three evaluations of AIRG programs led by city agencies in Los Angeles, Boston, and Minneapolis conducted in 2020-2022.

## **Analysis:**

### **Mapping Roles of Artists Embedded in Government**

Artists are embedded in government in different capacities, and they follow different pathways to arrive at those roles. Analysis of the data collected led to the categorization of five roles for an artist embedded in government that operate across a spectrum based on who holds power to determine the scope of work that the artist pursues (Figure 1, below). These roles are blurry, yet each operates in distinct ways, responding to how the interviewees in this study approach their own work and collaborations. In some cases, government agencies determine the work to be completed, such as hiring an artist to facilitate a gathering using storytelling methods. In other cases, artists establish an idea and approach the agency for collaboration. However, there is no simple delineation of power determining whether the artist or the government sets the full scope of work. Communication and negotiation are required in all instances of cross-sector collaboration. The following sections describe each role in detail.

## Mapping Roles of Artists Embedded in Government

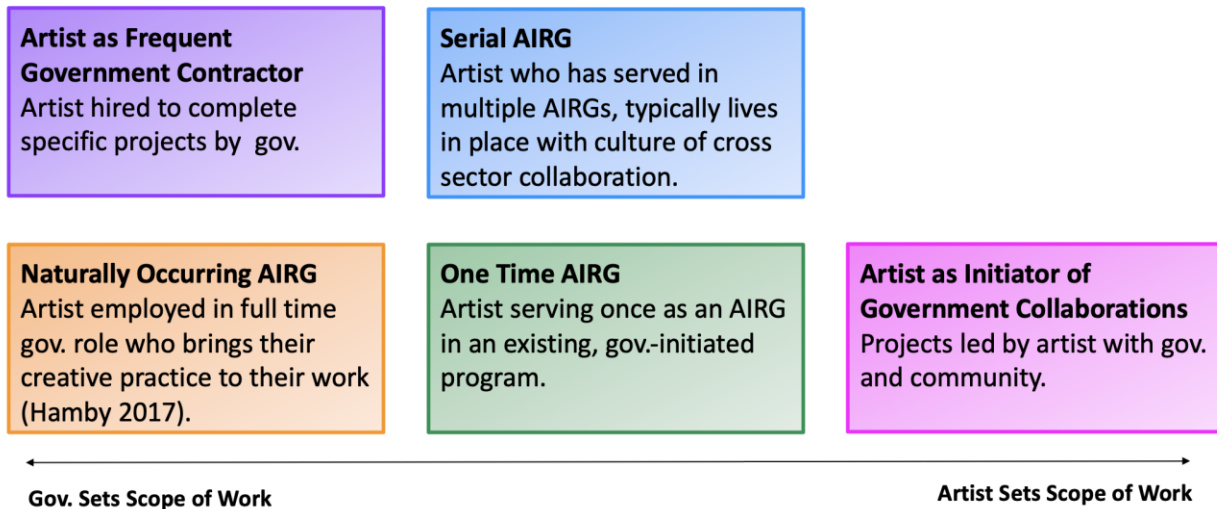


Figure 1. Framework mapping roles in which artists are embedded in government.

### One Time AIRG Participant

Artists apply to AIRG programs for various reasons. They may have an interest in public service and civic impact, they may see the residency as a way to extend their socially engaged art practice, or they may want to apply their art practice in a new context. Generally, programs are open to artists in any discipline from theatre to writing to visual arts and connect with departments including transportation, immigrant affairs, and public health. While artists normally operate within the narrow art disciplines defined by cultural gatekeepers such as curators, funders, and critics, AIRGs provide an opportunity to create artwork outside of institutionalized art world norms. As one artist interviewee observed, “even people who are in the arts, we’ve been programmed to think that a serious artist only does one thing” (2020). Being an artist in government is an opportunity to serve the public, advance civic work and extend expectations of what being a particular type of artist can look like. This is appealing to some artists, but not all.

New municipal government AIRGs are often designed to address a specific local concern or to connect with communities, and an artist, who already has some existing connections or expertise relevant to thematic goals, is selected from a regional applicant pool. Artists selected for a new program become the first in that civic context and, while learning what it means to work in government, they must also first create the conditions for the position before planning or implementing projects. Government staff simultaneously learn how to work with artists; often non-arts staff engage with a professional artist for the first time. Everyone must participate in the process of listening to develop working relationships and be willing to experiment. This requires government staff to shift from typical patterns while they often have limited capacity to dedicate to learning something new. Often, staff work with artists out of personal interest, making adding additional work to their busy schedules a welcome choice.



Artists and government collaborators experience new ways of working and time is required for everyone to establish processes for collaboration. Timelines are often extended, giving artists more time and funding to complete the work. Some artists are unsure that they would want to work in a government context again, while others are motivated to apply their lessons learned to future work. In smaller towns and rural areas, formal AIRG opportunities are not as common as in big cities, which can leave a One Time AIRG artists without another position.

## Serial AIRG

Some artists thrive in government spaces. They participate in multiple AIRGs and pursue other opportunities to embed their art practice within government work. Often, becoming a Serial AIRG is location dependent; artists in Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Seattle have many opportunities to participate while in other places, this is not common. In areas with an established practice of embedded residencies in government, Serial AIRGs also can pursue their own collaborations with government agencies based on their previous work. Usually, their portfolio consists of a combination of formal AIRGs and collaborations with civic entities such as libraries and hospitals. Some also work as artist teachers in schools or arts nonprofit organizations in addition to their studio practices. Some Serial AIRGs have transitioned this experience into a full-time government job or become an elected official at the city level. Minnesota has a culture of civic art opportunities which artists have leveraged to create opportunities: Amanda Lovelee used her tenure as City Artist in St. Paul to advance to employment in a regional parks agency; Jamal Osman built upon his experience in the Creative CityMaking program to be successfully elected in the Minneapolis city council. Once an artist establishes a Serial AIRG portfolio, it becomes easier and appealing to transition between other government departments.

Serial AIRGs, who have an interest in making a social or political impact, see themselves as “civic artists” or “behavioral artists”, who are dedicated to understanding people, working within systems, and supporting communities. Whitehead (2016) labeled these artists as “double agents”, who are able to operate on multiple levels and navigate the complexities of both government and community contexts in vital ways. They are adept at collaboration and listening; this process of engagement is central to their art practice whether they refer to it as socially engaged art, social practice, civic practice, or some other cooperative and dialogic form.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, serial AIRGs build knowledge about how government agencies operate, establish relationships across agencies, and learn how civic work evolves over time. Since artists work in multiple agencies and typically do not hold full-time positions, they gain unique perspectives about the larger government infrastructure. This depth of cross-sector knowledge provides advantages to any host department working with a Serial AIRG who is able to provide a more critical perspective on how the larger systems of government operate beyond the host department. These artists often have deep local

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<sup>1</sup> These art practices are based in cooperation, engaging with communities and groups in creating artwork (Finkelpearl, 2013); they are dialogic in nature, reliant on conversation which makes the process of creation just as much the artwork as any final product that may result (Helguera, 2011). Social practice or socially engaged art is also increasingly incorporated within the art world, within academic programs and inclusion in exhibitions at museums and galleries.

contacts among residents as well as community organizations and other groups to engage as collaborators. Serial AIRGs can build sustainable careers: Alan Nakagawa saw his tenure as a Creative Catalyst in Los Angeles as instrumental, observing “that was a great gig where I realized everything I was trained to do and led to subsequent A.I.R. opportunities” (Nakagawa, 2022, p. 51).

Many times, arts nonprofit organizations serve as conduits that connect artists to government agencies and facilitate setting a One-Time AIRG Participant on a track to become a Serial AIRG. In Washington, the nonprofit 4Culture acts as the cultural funding agency across King County including Seattle, Tacoma, and Redmond (each has run AIRG programs). Government staff reach out to 4Culture for guidance in connecting with artists, crafting the scope of work, and structuring relationships. Artists have relationships with 4Culture that match them to positions at the regional government agencies.

## Artist-Initiated Government Collaborations

Artists initiate partnerships with government agencies to advance community-based projects outside of formal AIRGs. These projects have formed an underlying foundation of exemplars of how collaborations between artists and government have led to AIRG programs and have also encouraged other artists to participate and develop collaborations.

A few artists have made collaborations with government the foundation of their career. Ukeles initiated a relationship with the Department of Sanitation after an art critic suggested Ukeles to collaborate with the financially strapped agency in 1976, when she invited three hundred maintenance workers to the Whitney Museum to enact their cleaning work as artwork for one hour every day (Tavecchia, 2017).<sup>2</sup> That conversation established foundations that she has continued to expand, creating artwork with agency staff and structures. During the interviews, she was frequently referenced as an inspiration by the government staff and artists alike.

Approaching government collaborations as opportunities to elevate community voice and to focus on local needs, artist Frances Whitehead works at “the scale of the city” (Hart, 2018). Whitehead partnered with the city of Chicago from 2006 until 2016 and collaborated with architects, planners, and others to work about urban infrastructure and sustainability, including a placemaking and adaptive reuse project that turned a former rail line into a multi-use park. In Gary, Indiana she developed Fruit Futures Gary Community Orchard Collaborative with community members (Whitehead, 2020). This project was a grassroots investment in the community, creating an agricultural infrastructure for residents that collaborated with the city as necessary but not as the primary partner.

Ukeles and Whitehead demonstrate different methods of artist-initiated government collaborations. In one case, the artist worked within a specific agency and in the other case, the artist leveraged government agendas to pursue community priorities. Among interviewees, artists applied the experience from formal AIRGs and informal embedded roles to a range of government opportunities such as: creating

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<sup>2</sup> Ukeles established an art practice in the 1960s and 1970s that made maintenance practices the tools, processes, and performance of her artwork at a time when she identified as a woman and a mother for whom maintenance was the function of value in every part of her life. Her work included cleaning the steps outside of galleries, celebrating what typically goes unseen. This is contextualized in her *Maintenance Art Manifesto* (1969) which asks “after the revolution, who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?” (Phillips et al., 2016).

collaborations with libraries, departments, schools, and other government programs as well as expanding the work they created as an AIRG through a new contract with a partner agency.

### *Naturally Occurring Artist in Residence*

Artists pursue professional opportunities that interest them regardless of formal recognition as an artist within the job, finding work in non-traditional settings and jobs across non-arts sectors (Bonin-Rodriguez, 2015; Frenette, 2017; Lingo & Tepper, 2013; Sidford & Frasz, 2016). Some identify as artists and work full-time in a non-arts industry to pay bills, others foreground their work in a different industry and see their creative practice as a hobby, while other artists experience influence of their art practice in all aspects of their work. Navigating hybrid functions that balance administrative and creative work is common across each of these positionalities (Bonin-Rodriguez, 2015). Within government agencies, artists may hold full-time permanent positions at varying levels, completing different tasks across sectors. The artists' hybrid professional identities are not accounted for within US census data which tracks professions by categorizing workers within the industry in which income is primarily earned. As artists often work in multiple sectors, they are difficult to track, particularly when they generate most of their income in a non-arts sector (Menger, 2006). Similarly, government agencies that hire artists may not recognize their work as a creative practice even if the artists actively employ creative skillsets in their government work.

Artist and a city government employee, Elizabeth Hamby, named this professional dual reality as being a Naturally Occurring Artist in Residence while she worked at the New York City Department of Health. For Hamby, artists always bring art skillsets to everything they do, which means “embedding creative approaches into existing systems, creating new normals of accepted, building tools and strategies, as well as convening diverse stakeholders” (Hamby, 2018). This could be engaging cooperative design practices within a transportation department or being willing to innovate new systems for inclusive community planning by working from the bottom up. Art practices often leverage constraints to spark creative innovation, a beneficial asset that artists often bring to government agencies which are constrained by limited budget and understaffing. This approach is evident in how artist interviewees spoke of their work. One claimed skillsets in “re-purposing things”, while others identified being able to creatively connect and extend limited resources (2020).

I have identified two subtypes of Naturally Occurring Artists in Residence: self-identifying artists who make creative approaches the forefront of their work, even as they still use subversive methods to integrate art practices into how they navigate government systems to achieve goals; and those who do not self-identify as artists within their government job but whose complex identities and experiences as a creative professional still inform their approaches to their work. In both cases, artist interviewees reflected on being a “unicorn” or “trespasser” or “spy” in government, working covertly as the only one of their kind among their colleagues.

Among interviewees, creatives who are employed in full-time government jobs often do not identify as artists within their government environment. In a few cases interviewees put their artist identity at the forefront of their work and made their creative practice transparent to colleagues, yet most were reticent to directly position themselves as artists in their work environments. One participant immediately clarified at the start of the interview that she does not identify as an artist and sees her music career as separate from her day job which defines her professionally. This ambiguity makes quantifying Naturally Occurring

Artists in Residence in government impossible, making this category a lens to understand how people approach their work as artists in government even if they themselves do not identify as such. Yet it is important to still include all artists in government within the greater framework because their art expertise still influences how they approach government in bringing their full selves to work, even if they do not individually break it down that way.

Artists were reticent about claiming a professional artist identity. Only a few made it central in their government jobs. One artist transitioned from Serial AIRG roles into a full-time position at a state agency to embed more deeply in civic work. In a job interview with a state agency, the artist promoted her professional artist identity and received enthusiastic response from an interviewer who saw this creative approach as influential to shake up the government agency's longstanding ways of operating (2020). AIRG experience may inform how this artist and others claim their dual identity as artists and government workers.

No worker can fully separate who they are outside of work from who they are at work; artists in full-time government jobs are complex individuals whose past experiences and creative skillsets accumulated outside of the office shape how they navigate projects and how they collaborate with colleagues. Leading with the identification of the self as being an artist may be off putting to government staff that do not understand the suite of creative tools that artists employ, or in some cases it may be seen as an asset. Hamby's "naturally occurring" concept aptly frames this multilayered work identity.

### *Artist as Frequent Government Contractor*

In some cases, a freelance artist is hired to do a specific project for a government agency in which the artist applies artistic methods and practices to complete the work. The scope of the work is typically defined by the government agency and requires the artist to operate for a predetermined period and employ specified methods. This can include storytelling, embodied acting work, asset mapping, and design thinking methodologies among other practices. Facilitation is often the central skillset sought; the artist creates an environment that invites staff to collaborate using creative methods that break from typical operations. From the government perspective, contracting an artist follows standard processes for completing predetermined tasks. At the end of the contract, the government owns any intellectual property produced and benefitted from the program facilitated.

One of the interviewed artists has worked as an ongoing contractor with a national agency and sees facilitation as the entry point into exploring other creative practices with clients. Of the government staff with which she works she observed, "they all know I'm an artist. They know that what I bring is different" (2020). The difference the artist brings is a part of the appeal in creating new contracts to shake up standard approaches to addressing big problems.

Nonprofit arts organizations also exist in this context, operating programs that connect artists with corporations to advance targeted objectives. This includes the storytelling organization, The Moth, whose program is run by a theatre artist, and which often works with corporate clients to attract funding to support the nonprofit's other work. Consulting companies led by artists such as Another Limited Rebellion do similar work.

## **Discussion: Opportunities and Challenges of Collaboration**

Each of the roles of artists in government offer unique challenges and opportunities for advancing civic agendas with creative methods. Among interviewees, it was common to first hold one AIRG position and then pursue multiple AIRG opportunities or to launch a government collaboration. Others sought out full-time government work. Artists navigate across each of these work structures in advancing their career and in pursuing projects which address particular social or political agendas. As artists and governments form collaborations, the following series of guiding concepts can inform how they approach this work and structure their relationships.

## Methods of Art Practice in Government

Artists working in government need to have a willingness and aptitude for collaborating with people outside of the cultural sector. This work involves a wide range of creative methods including forms of traditional art production (theatre exercises, storytelling, painting, and drawing), creative research techniques (interviews, cultural mapping, and asset mapping), as well as skillsets in facilitation (listening and collaborating). This requires artists to connect their practice and approach with people who are often unfamiliar with working with creative practitioners, making the ability to connect across professional fields crucial. Artists able to navigate inside and outside of government conventions are “double agents” – they do not follow standard government operating processes, instead they make artworks by and with government structures (Whitehead, 2016). One artist interviewed referred to government as her art medium, saying she makes “policy out of poetry.”

For some artists, part of the appeal is to collaborate with government staff to advance a focused agenda such as sustainability or transportation. One artist decided to only work with partners outside of the arts because they see systemic change as requiring cross-sectoral approaches and “we each bring skills and tools that the other doesn't have” (2020). These double agents recognize the unique contributions that both they as artists and the government staff bring to the work, creating opportunities for unexpected ideas to manifest and advance civic agendas.

Others foreground the need to still be subversive in their creative practice. Reflecting on her work in Gary, Frances Whitehead explained the dual approach that she and her collaborators developed to both be transparent with government staff while also being more subversive about targeted strategies to recognize sensitive situations and ensure timeliness. As she reflects, “in true trickster fashion, we recognize that our role is also intentionally disruptive, that we are present as change agents” (Whitehead, 2020, p. 23). In this space of experimentation across-sectors, artists become civic innovators, agenda setters, and policymakers, who advance new ways of working to address the multi-level challenges that governments face.

Working in the public realm does not appeal to every artist nor does every artist possess the tools to do the work. As one city art department director observed, “it's not necessarily studio artists who are going to be able to jump into this. It has to be an artist who is already thinking about community” (2020). Working in government is not a productive space for artists to learn how to produce social practice or community focused art for the first time.

## Artist as Civic Unicorn

Often an AIRG is the only creative practitioner working in an agency, making their creative practices rare and unfamiliar while also providing new methods for advancing internal goals. They refer to this as being a “unicorn” or “trespasser” or “spy”, striving to connect art methods into standard ways of operating in government agencies that can feel stagnant or bureaucratic. This unicorn status is furthered because there is not a national group connecting artists working in non-arts settings for networking and support. They are isolated within their work environment and further isolated without a professional network. Increasingly, AIRG programs seek to build in mentorship support for artists; however, finding willing mentors with the right civic experience can take time.

Many government staff colleagues have not worked with an artist before and are uncertain about what that could imply. Additionally, most roles that embed artists in government agencies are temporary, part time, or contractor positions with a limited number of total possible hours. This temporary role discourages staff from deeply engaging with the artist while also putting pressure on the artist to achieve visible outcomes that demonstrate success. In response to these structural challenges, artists often begin their engagement with government by dedicating significant time to learning systems, building relationships with staff, and figuring out how to connect and extend their creative practice within a new context. They need to be proactive and diligent in meeting people and learning about the agency as they are the only person operating in their role.

While project success requires dedicated collaboration, government staff see the artists are temporary and part time while they themselves are overburdened. This leaves some to see the additional energy required to collaborate with an artist as impractical and futile. In response, artists need to make a case for their work and build support to develop and enact projects. This reinforces the feeling of being subversive and isolated. Some artists thrive in this space, building coalitions and enacting incremental change. Others face challenges to garner support for ideas that seem too substantial among government staff.

## Benefits of a Cross-sectoral Translator

Artists and government staff navigating collaborations benefit from the support of someone able to connect their field-based expectations. This role is a conduit facilitating connections, translating field-based knowledge between agency and art, and mediating conversations to build a shared understanding of ideas and goals despite different ways of operating. One city art department head interviewed referred to their role as being “the babysitters and the counsellors”, translating between the artist and government staff (2020). In this way they are a liaison building bridges to cooperation and resolving tensions.

This translator is a government staff member within an art and culture department, or in some instances works for a partnering arts nonprofit organization. In some cases, city governments have found that it is important to have a designated translator within the host department, particularly when operating simultaneous artist cohorts across agencies. The Boston public art team strategically organizes regular group meetings both for the full artist cohort as well as for all government agency hosts to meet separately to discuss ideas and complexities. Similarly, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture holds regular convenings with the departmental advocates supporting AIRGs across the county, finding this a strategy for connection. The translator does this work in addition to their already overly

committed jobs making it challenging for them to support the artist in an urgent moment. Government staff report that this translator is most influential as an advocate when they are personally committed to the core concept of collaborating with an artist on agency goals, making them willing to take on the additional responsibility, something that can be initially hard to identify. The translator can facilitate building a sense of shared goals.

## Intellectual Property

Artists further their careers by promoting artwork and ideas, therefore, the rights to their own intellectual property are crucial to career advancement (Halbert, 2018; Klein et al., 2015). This is a central legal tenet of how artists gain recognition within gatekeeping institutions and are rewarded in economic markets, in opposition to typical civic work structures in which intellectual property products are owned by commissioning government agencies. Some artists pursue a scope of work determined by the government following a standard contractor model on a pre-determined product, and full-time staff complete work for their department. In both cases, their work process and product are determined by and belongs to the government. Artists in AIRGs or who initiated other collaborations with government do not produce work solely owned by government.

Artists are dependent on maintaining intellectual property rights over their work to promote themselves for future opportunities in exhibitions, performances, commissions, and other art opportunities. This can look like an artist exhibiting their artworks that were created during a residency or compiling documentation that tells the story of the process that occurred. While in residence in the NYC Department of Records & Information Services from 2019 to 2020, Julia Weist created a series of photographs called *Public Record* that is included in the city's public records archive and is publicly accessible, as well as created physical versions of the artworks that have been acquired by MoMA, Jewish Museum, Brooklyn Museum, and Queens Museum (Packard, 2021). Similarly, Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya's residency in the New York City Commission on Human Rights in 2020 resulted in a project called *I Still Believe in Our City* that celebrates resilience of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. It was exhibited on billboards in New York, on the cover of *Time*, and at the 2022 Bangkok Biennale. In each case, the art both furthered the agency's agenda and advanced the artist's art career, demonstrating that shared access to the knowledge and artwork produced can benefit the government and the artist. In other cases, artists do not produce work that is legible to the art world as "art", further complicating their ability to hold intellectual property rights and showcase their creative process in public arenas.

Increasingly, ownership of intellectual property is negotiated in advance between artists and government and detailed in contracts or letters of agreement which acknowledge the artist as a creative professional and ensure their legal rights to the work produced. Guidelines for how to address this in contracts can come from professional groups such as Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and the College Art Association, and researchers such as Whitaker's framework of ungenerous and generous artist contracts (2022). Further scholarship could identify how to specifically support intellectual property rights for artist and government collaborations.

## Conclusion: Expanding the Cultural Policy Toolkit

This paper establishes a framework to understand the roles through which artists work within government and describes some the challenges and opportunities for both the artists and the government as they engage in this process. Rather than framing artists embedded in government as unique to the civic context in which they operate and as dependent on specific individuals to create a new collaboration, I investigate the common structures of collaborating across each role mapped. This work demonstrates the wide pathways through which artists are already advancing civic agendas and cooperatively creating new ways for agencies to operate. Just as industry partners have recognized that collaboration with artists enhanced their impact, government agencies have recognized the value of artist residencies. The framework and discussion provided in this paper can inform policymakers and help them to project strategies and tactics to build AIRG programs and other opportunities that engage artists more deeply in implementing cultural policies which imagine more equitable systems of operating in government.

Often studies focus on policy *actors* and the decisions they make rather than focusing on policy *impacts* based on the instruments used to advance set goals. In this framework, the roles of artists embedded in government focus less on the individual collaborators than on the impacts of embedding an artist in government across sectors. I call for a recognition of artists embedded in government as a part of an expanded cultural policy toolkit that pushes cultural policy to not only support and sustain cultural work and products, but also as an active player in advancing broader civic goals from climate impacts to public health.

The ways in which artists are working now are expanding, yet that expansion also reflects our willingness as a field to truly see and celebrate where artists choose to operate. Recognizing the full spectrum of ways in which artists are working now in government and other sectors provides more complex understandings of *how* artists work and *where* their art methods are impactful beyond institutionalized art world models and can make these pathways visible for other artists to follow. Increasingly artists are embedded in government in formalized ways such as AIRG programs but also in less clearly understood opportunities including contracted roles. This framework details possible pathways for artists to pursue in building their careers, while also making visible existing opportunities for government agencies to shift their own processes.

As the use of artists embedded in government in full-time roles increases, their analysis can inform future work to avoid structural challenges and promote systemic change across sectors while also enabling evaluation of future AIRG collaborations. The framework of the structures of artists embedded in government demonstrates that artists themselves are policymakers and agenda setters that cooperate with government staff to advance shared civic goals. Artists and government staff working in collaboration across cross-sectoral issues can cocreate the necessary conditions for systemic change into the future.

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