

# King Street Station Community Feedback Report

January 2018



Photo by Benjamin Benschneider



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**City of Seattle**  
Mayor Jenny A. Durkan

January 2018

Dear Seattle Community,

For nearly 50 years, the City of Seattle has invested in realizing the vision of a community driven by creativity that provides the opportunity for everyone to engage in diverse arts and cultural experiences. Through the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture (ARTS) and the Seattle Arts Commission, we have adapted to the wants and needs of a changing City guided by that vision.


Today, we are focused on building a more equitable, affordable, and inclusive City. With those goals in mind, King Street Station represents a tremendous opportunity to address inequities in the field of arts and culture and ultimately advance our City's commitment to race and social justice.

In 2016, ARTS engaged the community and asked for their thoughts, dreams, and ideas on how to program a new arts and cultural hub at King Street Station with the goal of realizing tangible positive impacts in race and social justice. When it opens to the public later this year, King Street Station will not only reflect our unique City, but it will also be a national model for how arts and culture can support a truly equitable society, and empower individuals, artists, and organizations.

This report reflects the innovative and creative thinking that Seattle is known for. After all, Seattle has always been the City that invents the future. We are excited to open a new cultural space that will reflect exactly what the community has asked for; a place where people from across our City can see their experience reflected, and feel safe and comfortable. We offer our sincere appreciation to everybody who contributed to this work and, in doing so, contributed toward that vision of a City where everyone can engage in – and be enriched by – arts and culture.

Sincerely,

  
Jenny A. Durkan  
Mayor of Seattle

  
Randy Engstrom  
Director, Office of Arts & Culture

## Seattle art facts



**30,721 arts, culture and scientific organization jobs in King County**



**\$239 million generated income from cultural jobs**



**\$2 billion in spending generated by arts and culture in King County**

*Source: ArtsFund's 2014 Economic Impact Study compiles data from 313 non-profit cultural organizations in the Central Puget Sound region.*

## About King Street Station

The City of Seattle is transforming King Street Station into a hub for arts and culture. The Seattle Office of Arts & Culture (ARTS) will create a dynamic space for arts and culture in the heart of the city, with a mission of creating a more racially equitable, representative cultural space. We acknowledge that King Street Station exists on Indigenous land, the traditional territories of the Coast Salish people.

ARTS engaged in an inclusive, city-wide outreach effort to hear from the community about their needs. ARTS' intention with the new space is to increase opportunities for communities of color to present their work. The dedicated cultural space will provide public access to presentation and creative spaces, ARTS staff and resources, space for city convenings, and professional development, meeting space and other services that were requested through the outreach process. This innovative plan utilizes an underused city resource to address issues of affordability and quality of life while preserving the unique creative economy that drives Seattle and defines our city's culture.

This report represents the complete, unedited feedback of the community. A further set of recommendations for the King Street Station cultural space is forthcoming, based on this report.

King Street Station is a public asset that is an important part of Seattle's history. For more than one hundred years it has improved connections literal and figurative, serving as a gateway for millions of travelers coming into Seattle and the Pacific Northwest. The station has spurred economic growth and helped establish Seattle as a major metropolitan city. It is also a reminder of the way in which Chinese Americans were the unacknowledged economic drivers of the continental railroad.

King Street Station first opened to the public in May 1906. Reed and Stem, the architectural firm responsible for New York City's historic Grand Central Terminal, designed the station. The San Marco bell tower of Venice, Italy, served as the model for the building's familiar clock tower. The structure was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

While much of the exterior of King Street Station has remained intact since the building was constructed in 1906, parts of the interior have been substantially altered and other areas have suffered neglect. Similarly, while nearly half of the facility's original finishes remain intact, most of the significant finishes in the lower portion of the station have been removed. In March, 2008, the City of Seattle purchased the landmark building from the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway Company.



Photo by Benjamin Benschneider

## Seattle Office of Arts & Culture

Seattle Office of Arts & Culture (ARTS) manages the city's public art program, arts and culture grant programs, the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute, and The Creative Advantage initiative, in the effort to foster a city driven by creativity that provides the opportunity for everyone to engage in diverse arts and cultural experiences. In alignment with the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative, the department works to eliminate institutional racism in programs, policies and practices. The Office is supported by the 16-member Seattle Arts Commission, citizen volunteers appointed by the mayor and City Council.

**Mission: We activate and sustain Seattle through arts and culture.**

### Commitment to Racial Equity

The Seattle Office of Arts & Culture commits to an anti-racist work practice that centers the creativity and leadership of people of color - those most impacted by structural racism - to move toward systems that benefit us all. We also acknowledge that we are on Indigenous land, the traditional territories of the Coast Salish people.

We envision a city of people whose success, safety and health are not pre-determined by their race. A city where all artists, performers, writers and creative workers have the freedom, agency and platform to share and amplify their stories, art, cultures and experiences. At the same time, we acknowledge that our actions - both conscious and unconscious, past and present - have benefited some communities while limiting opportunities and outcomes for communities of color. We work toward our vision by addressing and working to eliminate institutional racism in our programs, policies and practices.

In alignment with the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), we seek new solutions that use arts as a strategy to drive not only our office, but the City as a whole toward racial equity and social justice. We will continue to break barriers and build arts-integrated tools that challenge the status quo, and push us toward the inclusive society we envision.

## Executive Summary

This report encompasses feedback from citywide focus groups conducted in 2016 about King Street Station (KSS) and how it could align with the programmatic and cultural space needs of the community. Overall ARTS reached more than 500 people, conducted three public listening sessions and hosted 16 focus groups focusing on voices of people of color including Latinx - Hispanic, Asian, Asian American and Asian Pacific Islander, African, African American and Black, and Native artists.

The range of responses include how KSS can be a model for racial equity and inclusion, and support artists as well as provide technical and social programming needs of ALL communities and be a place where everyone is welcome. The information in the report is direct feedback from the community. This includes how King Street Station can be an accessible arts space and hub for information sharing, networking, and community building. These ideas will help to inform the future of KSS and ARTS' programs including grants, public art, cultural spaces, professional development, and arts education with a race and social justice lens.

Photo by Sunny Martini

# Racial equity and inclusion

Centering artists of color in the programming and art at King Street Station has the potential to center voices of people of color within the art communities of Seattle and King County. Inclusivity was a value that many people repeated and wish to see reflected in ARTS' transformation of King Street Station.



**Opportunity: Create a meaningful commitment to marginalized artists**

All of the focus groups and community meetings addressed working with artists who have been traditionally underserved. There were a multitude of ways that participants suggested working with the community, including hiring rotating community curators to highlight new or less visible artists; ensure that the building, staff and materials are inclusive of languages spoken in the city, beyond English; and desire to use the space for building cross-racial alliances.

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**"Now is a time to insert equity opportunities to structurally shift who has access to tools and training."**

**- African, African American and Black focus group**

**Opportunity: Foster partnerships throughout the city that make more resources available to all**

Specifically, community suggested working with service groups to connect with elderly residents and youth, and partnering with institutions that address homelessness issues and provide outreach and services to vulnerable populations. Agency level partnerships with Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) are also instrumental for furthering racial equity goals of serving immigrant and refugee communities — using arts as a medium for social justice and awareness raising. It was also suggested that KSS could foster a relationship with SODO sports arenas to increase visibility of cultural offerings in the space. More collaboration with transportation stations and the transit area could also be a canvas for more public art collaborations.

**Opportunity: Art as the how: create a safe place for people, especially artists, to address issues of our time and city**

The concerns of our growing city; affordability, gentrification, homelessness; made their way into every conversation. It is clear that these issues are tied into the fabric of everyday life. While there were no clear answers on how to solve these problems, there was a desire to address these issues through art. Suggestions ranged from partnering with existing organizations, providing grants to artists working in the social realm, and utilizing the space to discuss and creatively address civic issues.

**Opportunity: Honor the history of KSS welcoming immigrants to Seattle and its location between Chinatown/ID and Pioneer Square**

King Street Station is an historical landmark and community want to honor its place in Seattle's history, starting with the acknowledgement that we are on Duwamish land and a place where immigrants first came to the city. People also want to honor and see in the programming an acknowledgment of where the station sits, between Chinatown/ID and Pioneer Square.

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**"KSS should pass a 'if walls could talk' test: where the characteristics and features of the art of communities of color are embedded in the structure of the building space."**

**- Asian, Asian American and Asian Pacific Islander focus group**

# Art that reflects the city

Creating a new space to create, perform and view art in Seattle is an exciting opportunity that the community is hungry for. The idea of King Street Station as a cultural hub sparked the imagination and dreams of many. People want KSS to reflect their communities, their art, established and emerging, and be accessible to the widest range of artists and communities as possible. Interestingly, the desire to be Seattle-centric was complemented by desires to show international, national and regional artists and art, reflecting Seattle's position as a city within the Pacific Rim.

**Opportunity: King Street Station should encompass all art forms**

The one consistent theme was that it should encourage and include display and participation in all art forms. Suggestions and examples included representation from all levels of artists, emerging and established, in all mediums: visual art (murals, 2-D, sculpture), performing art (plays, readings, music), and culinary (everyone mentioned the need to represent their community and culture through food. Sharing food was also mentioned as a universal gateway to understanding each other.).

**Opportunity: Make exhibition space available to all levels of artists and engage youth**

The opportunity for free exhibition space with a low barrier for participation was very exciting to many in the focus groups. Many mentioned a desire to see art that they wouldn't be able to see in current art spaces, a place where established artists and emerging artists could come together and learn from each other. There were numerous suggestions of creating apprenticeships/mentor programs for youth, especially youth of color, who face both racial and economic barriers. Some also suggested creating a live web feed of artists working in the space.



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**"Seattle is the wave! Documenting our wave in all art forms would be dope. Social justice themes in art is also a wave that is present here in Seattle."**

**- African, African American and Black focus group**

Photo by Sunny Martini

# Strengthening Seattle's creative economy by supporting artists

At King Street Station, the City has the opportunity to be at the forefront of a Seattle arts resurgence. With the current affordability crisis that affects artists and organizations alike, the need for opportunities to connect, support, and generate revenue is greater than ever. Some mentioned using the space to support artists in a kind of start-up mode, with shared administrative overhead (wifi, photography services, video conferencing available), and possibly create work trade opportunities (such as portfolio shoots for dance classes). The main focus was on avenues where King Street Station could provide stability and new ways for artists and organizations to create and thrive.

**Opportunity: Provide a generative space to create, including an artist-in-residence program**

In almost every focus group the desire for an artist-in-residence program was named. There were a number of artists who expressed a need for studio space because they couldn't find space in the city or they couldn't afford it. In addition, generative space ideas ranged from co-working space for artists, to tool libraries, and rehearsal space for organizations.

**Opportunity: Help artists expand their creative capital**

There were a number of requests for ways to share more information about creative economy jobs, artist residencies, apprenticeships, grants and artist living/working spaces. Many felt that if artists don't know about available opportunities they couldn't take advantage of them. Ideas to facilitate this information sharing included an app to promote arts events and opportunities, and computer or kiosk access at KSS. Artists also expressed a desire to generate revenue, either through sale of their work, fundraising (through events or rentals), workshops/classes offered by artists, or admission to film screenings and other events.

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**"Incubator space—messy and experimental."  
- Native artists focus group**

**Opportunity: Professional development for artists**

Ideas on how to help artists develop professionally included connecting artists with local businesses like Microsoft, Amazon and Google and to technology that artists might be able to use. Others also expressed the need for professional services and technical advice including website development, marketing expertise and promotion, and connecting artists to organizations and business that can help them create, market and thrive. Artists also expressed their desire to mentor the next generation through mentorship programs.

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**"Exchange of ideas amongst different disciplines."**

**— Latinx-Hispanic focus group**

# Community ownership that promotes accessibility

When discussing King Street Station, an historic building owned by the city, it is clear that the building itself is very much in the public realm. Community members already feel a sense of ownership over the space considering its importance and role in transportation and a connection point for many in the city. They expressed ways in which ARTS could enhance that feeling of ownership and connection and a desire to see it fully accessible to all, regardless of race, immigration status or physical ability.

**Opportunity: Create a place to connect and participate in civic life, where everyone feels safe and welcome**

Every focus group saw the need for a staffed reception/concierge area where visitors can be greeted and feel welcome. There were multiple requests for signage in multiple languages (Chinese, Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, etc.). This speaks to the issue of accessibility for people of all backgrounds, including immigrants and refugees for whom English is not their primary language.

Additional accessibility should focus on all ages, neurodiversity, cognitive disabilities (emotional disorders, autism) and physical disabilities (blind, deaf or conditions requiring assistive devices), genders, and ethnicities and races. A reference desk or kiosk would also complement having an in-person receptionist/intake specialist. There were some concerns about subsidized transportation/parking access on days such as first Thursdays. More than a few indicated the desire for childcare onsite or child friendly satellite activities that would provide access for families.

Individuals also expressed the need for meeting and event space for more than 20 individuals. Many also felt that KSS should embrace ecological and green conservation principles.

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**"King St. Station is like Ellis Island—immigrants, refugees pass thru."**

**- Asian, Asian American and Asian Pacific Islander focus group**

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**"Showing the world what Seattle really is: totally inclusive and diverse."**

**- Chinatown/ID focus group**

Photo by Sunny Martini

## Conclusion - Space for Change

Responding to community needs and concerns is a guiding principal of the ARTS Office. In soliciting feedback for King Street Station, we are also developing recommendations and collecting ideas that will have larger implications for the ARTS Office's policies, programs and practices. The information gathered in this report will not only inform the programming model for King Street Station, it will also help inform how racial equity and social justice is infused throughout the Office's work.

In a city in which displacement is a universal concern, borne overwhelmingly by communities and artists of color, one of the strongest statements the City can make is the establishment of new, safe cultural space. Tackling gentrification, displacement and economic inequality is neither easy nor straightforward, and there is a risk of oversimplification when we say that we are taking on these issues with the opening of this space. Yet, we want to retain the potential that King Street Station can serve as both a remedy to the constant space crunch, and as a model for what it might look like for a government agency to more closely partner with community on creative, non-traditional solutions to challenging issues.

King Street Station can be a new kind of place in which communities of color feel heard, seen, and safe. It will be an incubator for artists, amplifying their work, and can reveal new ways of being for City government. In order to be an incubator, the program will need to be nimble and flexible enough to change in response to our time and environment. Our goal is for King Street Station to be a resource for the city and the embodiment of our commitment to creating tangible change in the name of racial equity.

Real, lasting and sustainable change requires resources and commitment. At King Street Station we have the opportunity to assess the impact of our programs and create a meaningful space where everyone in the City feels welcome. It is an exciting prospect and we look forward to creating space and creating art with you.



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Photo by Hugo Ludeña