


2026–2029

THREE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN



SAN DIEGO
BLACK
ARTS + CULTURE
DISTRICT

October 2025

Introduction

Context

The journey to establish the San Diego Black Arts + Culture District began with a powerful vision shared by local artists, cultural leaders, and passionate residents determined to celebrate and preserve Black creativity in the city. Early on, then Council President Pro Tempore Monica Montgomery Steppe and community advocates recognized the need for a vibrant hub where Black art would thrive. As support grew, Montgomery Steppe, inspired by the collective energy, worked tirelessly to draft a formal resolution. On June 14, 2022, she presented the proposal to the San Diego City Council, where, after heartfelt public comments and a standing ovation, the Council unanimously approved Resolution (R-2022-508), officially establishing the San Diego Black Arts + Culture District.

As part of these efforts, Councilmember Montgomery included in the resolution the designation of the San Diego African American Museum of Fine Art (SDAAMFA) as the lead agency responsible for overseeing the District's administration and growth. SDAAMFA, as a longstanding Black arts organization, is uniquely positioned to partner with Council District Four, the San Diego Black Arts + Culture District (the Advisory Committee), the City of San Diego Cultural Affairs Division, the Economic Development Department, and a wide network of local corporations, property owners, and artists. Through these partnerships, the District will remain fully aligned with community priorities, ensuring coordinated leadership, effective resource management, and programmatic excellence.

Since its formation in October 2022, the Advisory Committee has played an instrumental role in guiding the District's early development. One of its first major accomplishments was supporting the launch of the official San Diego Black Arts + Culture District website, which now functions as a central platform for showcasing events, amplifying local artists, and sharing important community updates.

Today County Supervisor Monica Montgomery Steppe continues her support as a leading advocate for the District. Her vision centers on creating a dedicated space where the history, arts, and culture of Black communities can be celebrated, preserved, and advanced. We also acknowledge that the designation of the district builds upon the

foundational work of the late Councilmembers Rev. George Stevens and Charles L. Lewis, whose earlier community-led initiatives, including the Imperial Avenue Corridor Master Plan, continue to serve as a guiding framework for the district's development.

Early placemaking efforts also took shape in the District's inaugural year, with targeted funding directed toward a banner program that helped establish a unifying visual identity across the corridor. This initiative resulted in increased neighborhood recognition and a stronger sense of identity among residents. The Department of Cultural Affairs spearheaded the restoration of the 24 art panels by the late artist Eddie Edwards, located in the medians between 61st-63rd Street and originally installed in 1993. At the same time, the San Diego New School of Architecture facilitated community workshops to inform their conceptual design schematics for future renovations, thoughtfully addressing both the Advisory Committee's priorities and the broader community's vision for the physical environment. These efforts not only enhanced the District's aesthetic appeal but also fostered greater community engagement and pride in the evolving neighborhood.

The District's year one achievements were celebrated through a series of student-led projects that highlighted youth creativity and affirmed the value of young voices in shaping the District's trajectory. These initiatives gained further momentum with support from the Far South Border North Grant, which enabled a vibrant slate of cultural programming including the Black Women's Film Festival, a Spoken Word mixer, and the San Diego Black Arts + Culture District Music Festival.

Additional support from an economic development grant allowed for a comprehensive series of community workshops, covering topics such as district branding, the historical roots of Black arts in the region, special permitting requirements, and other critical infrastructure knowledge. Participation in the San Diego Design Capital initiative further expanded the District's profile, while the transformation of the first commercial space within the corridor—facilitated through the City's Storefront Improvement Program—offered a visible marker of progress in revitalization efforts.

The District's growing artistic momentum was formally recognized by the San Diego Department of Cultural Affairs through its designation as a featured site in the "Here Comes the Neighborhood: Encanto" public art initiative. Two of the three selected artists are set to install permanent works within the District, contributing to its cultural footprint. Additionally, Fourth District Councilmember Henry Foster III worked with Congressmember Juan Vargas to secure \$850,000 for enhancements to Marie Widman Park and an additional \$850,000 for economic development activities throughout the corridor. During the FY2026 budget process Councilmember Foster secured \$1.7 million dollars for new restroom facilities in Marie Widman Park.

Culturally significant businesses within the District include the Mental Bar, Maxx Moses Studio, and the Block Club. These establishments operate as more than retail spaces—they serve as hubs for mentorship, creative expression, and civic dialogue. Nearby, Marie Widman Memorial Park has emerged as an organically activated cultural site named in honor of a pioneering civil rights advocate. Widman, a longtime San Diego resident, served on the boards of the NAACP, the City Planning Commission, and numerous civic institutions. In 1994, Councilmember George Stevens worked with the community to rename the park in her honor, solidifying its role as a neighborhood anchor for arts and civic life.

The creation of the District builds upon these rich traditions, bringing an organized structure to amplify the community's cultural assets. It creates a united vision to ensure Encanto's cultural contributions are celebrated not only locally, but as a defining feature of San Diego's identity moving forward.

Today, Councilmember Foster has continued the momentum of his predecessor making the success of the District among his top priorities. Under his leadership, the District is positioned to evolve into a destination and resource hub for creatives, entrepreneurs, and community members of all ages. his vision is guided by a holistic framework of physical transformation, programmatic depth, economic support, and policy alignment. The plan includes extensive community feedback, local history, and best practices in urban cultural planning to ensure the District remains community-led and sustainable.

Vision, Challenge, and Resolution

Vision:

To establish the District as a nationally recognized cultural zone where Black arts thrive, local talent flourishes, businesses grow, and residents feel a sense of ownership, pride, and inclusion.

Challenges:

As the District continues to evolve, one of the central challenges remains fostering sustained community engagement and participation. There is an ongoing need to elevate the presence and importance of the arts within San Diego's Black neighborhoods, highlighting their role in preserving cultural identity, generating economic opportunity, and strengthening community life. Broadening the involvement and investment of Black residents is essential to the District's long-term success. Equally important is the intentional engagement of youth, ensuring that future generations are prepared to carry forward, expand, and reinterpret the artistic and cultural traditions that have shaped the community over time.

Despite the District's rich cultural assets and deep historical significance, additional challenges continue to emerge, many of which were reflected in the 2024–2025 community survey. A primary concern remains the longstanding inconsistency and limited visibility of arts programming within the District. Community members repeatedly expressed frustration over the difficulty in obtaining timely and reliable information about events and activities. As one resident noted, "There's no central calendar, no place to find out what's happening — it's always word of mouth."

In response to these concerns, the Advisory Committee has made significant progress by launching a dedicated website - <https://www.sdblackacd.org/> - that now serves as a central hub for listing events and promoting arts and culture programming. Marketing efforts have also expanded through newsletters, flyers, and social media, improving awareness and access. While this is a critical step forward, continued investment in outreach, visibility, and consistency remains essential to ensuring that the community is informed, engaged, and empowered to participate.

At the same time, deeper structural challenges remain. This area of the city has significant geographic importance but lacks official neighborhood

recognition, which creates a gap in community identity and institutional support. Building on these structural challenges, there is also a notable lack of designated cultural spaces where residents can gather, create, and learn. Youth programs are especially underrepresented, with survey participants citing limited access to after-school arts opportunities and mentorship. One parent commented, “Our kids want to perform, to create. But where do they go? Who is helping them?” Others expressed concern that young artists lack visibility and opportunities to grow professionally within the District.

Artists themselves described operating in isolation, without shared workspaces, support networks, or public venues. Many pointed to systemic underinvestment in the neighborhoods of Southeastern San Diego, noting that Black artists rarely receive public commissions or major grants. A muralist wrote, “We do this work out of love, but we’re not being paid, and we’re not being seen.” While these challenges reflect broader, citywide issues that extend beyond the boundaries of the District, they underscore the critical importance of establishing a centralized hub within the nine blocks. By concentrating resources, opportunities, and visibility in one dedicated location, the District is uniquely positioned to serve as a vital anchor for addressing these ongoing disparities.

Infrastructure issues were another common concern, including poor lighting, damaged sidewalks, and an overall lack of welcoming public spaces. Residents pointed out that these barriers make it harder to host events or invite visitors to the neighborhood. One participant said, “Fix the sidewalks, add some lights, and we’ll show you what this place can be.”

Mobility and parking present significant ongoing challenges for the District. Limited parking capacity creates accessibility concerns, especially during high-attendance events and peak business hours, and poses potential liability risks as activity in the District increases. Off-street parking options are minimal, while existing on-street parking along Imperial Avenue remains constrained by current curb configurations and limited signage, contributing to congestion and limiting ease of access for residents, businesses, and visitors. Additionally, while regional public transportation options such as the MTS Orange Line serve the area, usage remains inconsistent due to a lack of fully integrated wayfinding and navigation tools. Without clear guidance,

many visitors struggle to locate parking, transit stops, bike racks, and key cultural destinations within the District. As cultural programming continues to expand, these transportation and parking challenges highlight the need for long-term coordination and infrastructure planning with the City of San Diego to support the District’s continued growth.

Finally, the initial formation of the District, while designated with no funding, has had the benefit of individuals who serve on the advisory committee dedicated to seeing the District thrive. We recognize that the lack of a coordinated management structure may leave many promising efforts unsustainable. Artists, business owners, and cultural leaders noted a need for a shared strategy, project continuity, and organizational support.

These reflections underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive, well-resourced, and community-anchored plan that supports artistic expression, ensures access and equity, and builds lasting cultural infrastructure in the District.

Resolution:

Our response is a comprehensive, community-validated roadmap that links the District’s cultural heritage with a vision for creative, economic, and spatial development. This plan proposes interconnected solutions that blend placemaking, economic revitalization, cultural programming, youth engagement, and policy reform. It centers the voices of community stakeholders, prioritizing strategies they identified in multiple listening sessions and survey instruments.

Goals (2026–2029)

Goal 1: Build Cultural Infrastructure and Visibility

Over the next three years, the District will undergo a coordinated visual and physical transformation, strategically planned in phases to ensure measurable impact and long-term sustainability. Certain placemaking elements will be installed to strengthen the District’s identity.

The District will establish a mural program guided by specific criteria to ensure alignment with community values and cultural priorities. The program will prioritize Black artists and projects that reflect community stories, cultural identity, and historical narratives unique to the District.

Proposed mural locations will focus on highly visible public and private sites, including transit-adjacent areas, to enhance accessibility and visual impact. The criteria will also encourage youth involvement by incorporating co-design opportunities through partnerships with school art departments, fostering educational engagement and intergenerational collaboration. Inspired by successful models such as the Chicano Park Mural Program and Civic San Diego Art Panels, the program will offer small-scale stipends to support participating artists and ensure project feasibility.

While the construction of a permanent outdoor performance space (i.e., an amphitheater with stage, seating, lighting, and sound infrastructure for concerts, festivals, and community events) in Marie Widman Memorial Park is not scheduled to occur within the 2026–2029 timeframe, it remains a significant long-term objective for the District. The project is envisioned as an evolving concept that could take shape as preliminary planning progresses during this three-year period, with efforts focused on assessing overall cost. Community input is anticipated to inform the early visioning process, including public design workshops and planning sessions to help define the amphitheater’s features, accessibility elements, and intended uses. Concurrently, the District expects to explore various funding opportunities, including potential support from the City’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP), private philanthropic contributions, and community crowdfunding to build both momentum and financial capacity for eventual implementation.

In parallel with these planning efforts, the District intends to establish the foundation for long-term infrastructure maintenance. A key component of this strategy includes the proposed formation of a Maintenance Assessment District (MAD), developed in collaboration with the Diamond Business Improvement District (BID). The BID is positioned to advance the MAD proposal in fiscal year 2026–2027, providing dedicated funding and oversight for ongoing maintenance of public amenities such as lighting, landscaping, and public art. During the interim period, the District anticipates investing in local workforce development by initiating job training for maintenance positions, launching youth apprenticeship programs, and organizing mural restoration events—strengthening a community-based system of stewardship and care.

Goal 2:

Empower Artists and Black-Owned Businesses in partnership with the San Diego Economic Development Department. A grant program for local creatives launched in year one, with residencies, vendor opportunities, and subsidized studio/gallery space. Business owners expressed a desire for storefront improvements, and through the Art in Business initiative, the District will match creatives with commercial spaces to develop installations, exhibitions, or branded storytelling pieces. Entrepreneurial training programs will support artists in building sustainable practices.

Goal 3:

Youth-centered programming in collaboration with the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) is anticipated to integrate culturally relevant art into both curriculum and field trips. Plans include the formation of a Youth Arts Council, tasked with co-producing quarterly events and contributing to the design of public art projects. Partnerships with libraries, schools, and youth programs are expected to support the creation of media labs, poetry workshops, STEAM-based maker spaces, and mentorship initiatives that pair elders and artists with young people.

Goal 4:

Reinvigorate the District’s defining Cultural Events and Programming. Annual events like the Encanto Street Fair will serve as major milestones, supplemented by monthly programming such as jazz nights, storytelling circles, dance and drumming workshops, and rotating art exhibits. Programming will be spread across multiple venues and outdoor areas, ensuring visibility and regular engagement.

Goal 5:

Securing Sustainable Partnerships and Funding remains essential to the District’s long-term success. Institutional collaboration and diversified funding sources are central to advancing this work. A core objective focuses on securing CIP alignment for physical improvements and working with city and county offices to address policy barriers that impact arts activation. Grant strategies are anticipated to target the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), California Arts Council, and private funders. A fiscal sponsor is expected to manage budget oversight and compliance, while the Advisory Committee is positioned to coordinate grant submissions, manage project timelines, and oversee reporting.

Goal 6:

Develop standardized criteria for the use and programming of open public and private spaces. This framework should address permitted activity types, time-of-use guidelines, insurance and liability requirements, and appropriate restrictions, such as limitations on alcohol, amplified sound, or age-specific programming. By clearly defining these parameters, the District can support safe, inclusive, and culturally relevant activation of shared spaces. This goal aligns with the plan's broader emphasis on visibility, safety, cultural equity, and coordinated infrastructure development ensuring that all public programming reflects community values and contributes to a unified, welcoming environment across the District.

Listening Sessions

Over a series of 2024–2025 listening sessions, including structured town halls, one-on-one interviews, online surveys, and informal community gatherings, more than 150 stakeholders offered feedback that has become foundational to this plan. Feedback included responses from artists, youth, small business owners, educators, and civic leaders. A recurring theme was the urgent need for visibility and safe, welcoming public spaces. As one participant said, “There’s no place for us to just exist as creatives and be seen.” Another emphasized, “It would make a difference to walk down the street and see something that reflects who we are.”

Respondents highlighted specific cultural programming gaps and proposed a variety of solutions. Many requested free or low-cost art classes tailored to youth and intergenerational audiences. Others called for family-friendly festivals and storytelling events rooted in African American history. Several residents expressed interest in programs that would connect them to elders in the community through oral history or visual storytelling projects. Infrastructure concerns were also widely cited, particularly the need for improved lighting, sidewalk repair, and signage. One survey response stated clearly, “Fix the sidewalks, put up lights, make it feel safe. That would show someone cares.”

Artists and small business owners emphasized the lack of affordable space for exhibitions or performances, as well as the need for mentorship and promotional platforms. A young creative noted, “We have talent. What

we don’t have are the places to perform or the support to keep going.” Others echoed a need for unity: “We all work in silos. There’s no infrastructure to bring us together.”

The listening sessions also revealed concerns about access and inclusion. Some questioned whether future investments would truly benefit long-time residents, while others expressed distrust based on past community initiatives that failed to materialize. A participant warned,

“Don’t create a district where we can’t afford to live or work. We’ve seen that before.”

These comments, and many others, directly shaped this plan’s goals and strategies. In response, this strategic framework emphasizes youth arts programming, cultural visibility through murals and public art, small business partnerships, safety-driven infrastructure, and inclusive governance models that ensure community voice at every level.

Resource Assessment

The District is home to powerful assets: historical legacy, active civic leaders, creative entrepreneurs, and community-based organizations. Anchors like The Mental Bar and The Block Club already act as micro cultural centers. Marie Widman Memorial Park hosts cultural events and remains a key site for gathering. However, challenges include the absence of a staffed management office, lack of dedicated indoor gallery space, minimal wayfinding, and no marketing system to promote the District. Transit access is strong via the Orange Line trolley, but signage and connectivity are inadequate. These assessments point directly to early-stage investments in signage, information platforms, and cultural space acquisition.

District Demographics

Encanto’s African American population has played a critical role in shaping the region’s identity. From early civil rights advocates the neighborhood has nurtured leadership and vision. The area is home to a mix of long-term residents, young families, and small business owners,

with over 50% of residents identifying as African American or Latinx. This intergenerational, multicultural character is one of the District's greatest assets. Recognizing this, programs will intentionally bridge generational gaps and embrace cross-cultural collaboration.

Total population:

Approximately 66,248 residents

Ethnic Composition:

- Hispanic or Latino: ~ 50.5%
- Black or African American: ~ 20.1%
- Asian: ~ 15.4%
- White (non-Hispanic): ~ 9.7%
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander: ~ 6.5%
- Two or More Races: ~ 4.9%
- Some Other Race: ~ 2.3%
- American Indian: ~ 0.2%

Age distribution:

- Nearly 30% of residents are under age 17
- Median age: 30 years (younger than citywide average)

Household size:

- Average of 3.76 persons per household
- Common multigenerational living arrangements

Economic indicators:

- Median household income: approximately \$90,171
- Per capita income: approximately \$31,509
- Approximately 11.8% of residents live below the poverty line

Recommendations and Strategies

Programs:

Establish an "Art in Business" rotation that pairs Black visual artists with storefronts, including rotating exhibits and permanent installations. This initiative draws inspiration from successful models like The Mental Bar, both of which already integrate art into their business environments and function as informal cultural spaces. These partnerships will expand to include additional businesses along Imperial Avenue and beyond, incentivizing owners through microgrants and marketing support.

The creation of a Youth Media Lab, developed in collaboration with local educators and community media outlets, will provide hands-on training for students in documenting neighborhood history, conducting oral history interviews, and producing digital storytelling projects. The lab will offer technical instruction in video production, audio editing, and multimedia journalism while also emphasizing the importance of cultural preservation and civic engagement. What makes this initiative particularly distinctive is that it will be developed by and for the youth themselves, centered on their perspectives, interests, and leadership. This youth-driven model not only ensures relevance and authenticity but also empowers young people to shape how their stories and communities are represented, making the lab a truly original and transformative space for creative expression.

Pop-up museums and a traveling arts cart will be deployed to schools, libraries, parks, and local grocery stores. These initiatives are based on best practices from organizations like the San Diego Children's Discovery Museum and the New Children's Museum's mobile outreach program. These mobile units will feature curated displays of local art, hands-on activities, and historical information drawn from community archives and the African American Museum of Fine Arts.

An intergenerational mentorship program will formalize partnerships between elders and emerging creatives, focusing on traditional arts, civic storytelling, and entrepreneurship. Inspired by the oral history initiatives documented in the Encanto community's own history and modeled after the African American Genealogy and Historical Society's community-based interviews, this program will pair seniors with youth through storytelling circles, collaborative artmaking, and business planning labs.

All these programs aim to elevate existing talent, deepen historical understanding, and foster meaningful cross-generational and cross-sector collaborations, ensuring that the District reflects and amplifies the voice of its people.

Support reactivation of the City-owned building adjacent to Marie Widman Memorial Park, currently leased to the San Diego Boys and Girls Club. At approximately 8,500 square feet, this facility holds significant potential to serve as a dynamic cultural and community hub.

Repurposing this space would allow the District to house a wide range of programs and activities that are currently held outside its boundaries, further anchoring arts, education, and youth engagement efforts within the heart of the community.

Projects:

Early phase capital projects include crosswalk murals, art fences for vacant lots, storytelling benches, and sidewalk mosaics. These visible, participatory pieces signal the community's creativity and increase foot traffic. Long-term plans include transforming a vacant lot into a Cultural Commons—an open plaza with shaded seating, vendor booths, and a stage.

District Management Governance will include an Executive Director, Program Manager, and part-time cultural coordinators. The Black Arts and Culture District Advisory Committee will work with the District Management and the community to shape programming content.

Partnerships:

In addition to city agencies, there will be collaboration among the San Diego African American Museum of Fine Arts, libraries, neighborhood councils, recreation councils, businesses, arts nonprofits, Diamond Business Improvement District (BID) and the San Diego Black Arts + Culture District Advisory Committee. The partners will assist with grant writing, program delivery, data collection, and evaluation.

Funding and Capital Alignment:

Our team will pursue a multi-source funding strategy that includes local, state, and national resources to support both programming and infrastructure. On the federal level, this includes NEA Challenge America grants and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)

Community Initiatives funding. At the state level, we will target opportunities such as California Arts Council's Cultural Pathways and Creative Corps programs. Locally, we will work with the City and County of San Diego to secure hotel/motel tax allocations, and various grants including arts and culture commission grants. It is extremely important that we advocate for the various public improvements necessary for success be in alignment with the City's CIP.

Private philanthropic support will be a cornerstone of our approach. We will continue our partnerships with regional and national funders. Corporate sponsorships and earned revenue through events, pop-ups, and branded merchandise will supplement these core sources.

Additionally, the Advisory Committee will lead the development of a rolling funding calendar, coordinate grant submissions, and design evaluation tools that align with both community impact goals and the evolving priorities of public and private funders. Recognizing current fiscal constraints and shifting national funding landscapes, the committee will adopt a flexible, strategic approach to resource development—ensuring that the District remains both responsive and resilient in a competitive funding environment.

Public Art Criteria:

Art will be placed along Imperial Avenue and transit stops, with special attention to community-identified sites such as building facades, park entrances, and transportation hubs. The District website features an artist registration portal to facilitate participation, and we will continue to work with our expanding network of partner organizations to help identify and recruit interested participants. The artist selection process will be rooted in equity and transparency, requiring community input and prioritizing Black artists from the San Diego region. There are several opportunities to secure artists for these projects. In addition, the District will leverage city- and county-sponsored calls for artists, aligning with initiatives by the San Diego Cultural Affairs Department and the County of San Diego Office of Arts and Culture to ensure broad visibility and access to funding opportunities.

These public agency opportunities will provide artists with competitive funding, greater exposure, and integration into broader civic arts planning. All public art projects within the District will be guided by

principles of accessibility, cultural relevance, environmental sustainability, and long-term community stewardship. Installations will be ADA-compliant and consider materials and formats that are interactive, multilingual, and intergenerational in their appeal.

Mobility and Parking:

Limited parking remains a significant challenge within the District and poses a potential liability, particularly during high-traffic events and peak business hours. In collaboration with the City of San Diego and regional transportation planning groups, the District will pursue shared-use agreements with nearby community centers, churches, and schools to expand access to off-street parking. Additionally, we will work in partnership with the City's Engineering Department to advance plans for improving on-street parking along Imperial Avenue. These improvements will include curb reconfigurations and enhanced signage designed to better serve local businesses, residents, and visitors.

To complement these efforts, the District will promote use of the MTS trolley system, particularly the Orange Line, which provides direct access to the area. A District Access Map and a mobile navigation app will be developed to guide residents and visitors to parking areas, trolley stops, bike racks, and key cultural destinations. These tools will ensure easier access while promoting multimodal transportation and reducing congestion.

Storefront Renovations and Maintenance District Formation:

Storefront renovations are the corner stone to the development of the District. The City of San Diego operates a grant program for property owners willing to make façade improvements. In addition to the Improvements that are part of the City of San Diego's storefront program improvements, we would like to encourage custom signage, new paint, murals, lighting, and window installations that facilitate exhibits featuring local artists.

Building owners will be encouraged to enlist the help of artists to design upgrades that would accommodate artistic interactions with visitors to the District. In 2025, one of the most notable examples of a successful storefront renovation is home to the Block Club, a Black-owned creative studio and cultural hub located along the Imperial Avenue corridor. The Block is envisioned as a space that bridges creativity, entrepreneurship,

and community wellness. The formerly vacant building was reimaged and renovated with a mission to provide space for local artists, entrepreneurs, youth leaders, and wellness practitioners to thrive collectively.

Today a walk down the Imperial Avenue corridor reveals the absence of trash receptacles, street furniture, and street trees. There are basic elements that are available in most thriving commercial corridors, items that cannot be installed without the formation of a MAD. It is important that the City of San Diego's Economic Development Diamond BID work to establish a MAD that includes the District.

Murals have increasingly become an important art form in several communities. The District is fortunate to have murals on private property as well as in the public right-of-ways. Most recently the Cultural Affairs Department named Encanto the location of its "Here Comes the Neighborhood" public art program. To sustain the aesthetic investment, we recommend the MAD include a Mural Restoration Fund to support annual touch-ups of public art. This coupled with the Community Stewardship Program will train local youth and volunteers to care for installations, maintain landscaping, and report issues. Collectively, these initiatives will not only elevate the visual appeal of the District but will also reinforce a culture of stewardship and pride in shared public space.

Strategic Locations

Key activation nodes include Imperial Avenue from 61st to 69th, Marie Widman Memorial Park, the Block Club's cultural courtyard, and vacant lots. Additional strategic locations include Huffman's Plaza (intersection of Euclid Avenue and Imperial Avenue,) the area surrounding the Encanto/62nd Street Trolley Station, and the interior/exterior of spaces like the Mental Bar, which continues to function as a gathering point for cultural expression. In alignment with city priorities for equitable development, the City of San Diego has begun clearing blighted or underutilized structures in the area to make space for future community-serving uses. This will facilitate pop-up galleries, mobile exhibitions, and event staging zones

Appendices

Appendix I: Advisory Committee

The San Diego Black Arts + Culture District Advisory Committee is comprised of individuals who reflect the cultural, professional, and geographic diversity of the community. Members include representatives from the fields of arts education, presentation and performing arts, and nonprofit arts, culture, and history organizations. The committee also includes Encanto Community Plan Area residents and business owners, a representative from the Encanto Recreation Group, and a member-at-large. Two positions are designated for youth artists (ages 18–25) with backgrounds in visual or performing arts; selection for these roles is currently pending the receipt of qualified applicants.

The San Diego Arts and Culture Advisory Committee will evaluate program proposals, coordinate district-wide schedules, guide grant priorities, and serve as ambassadors to city departments and funders. Their collective experience and commitment ensure that the District's growth remains anchored in community vision, equity, and artistic excellence.

Appendix II: Artwork Selection Principles

Artwork selection criteria will include local artist representation, community consultation, heritage preservation, accessibility, and innovative formats such as augmented reality or participatory design.

Appendix III: History of the District

Established in 2022, the San Diego Black Arts + Culture District (SDBLACKACD) is located in the historically and culturally rich Encanto neighborhood of Southeastern San Diego. Encanto has served as a key center of Black civic, cultural, and social life since the post-World War II migration period, when discriminatory housing policies forced many African American families to settle in this region. Over the years, Encanto evolved into a beacon of Black political activism, artistic expression, entrepreneurship, and education.

In parallel, the leadership of the many great people upon whose shoulders we stand ensures the continuation of Encanto's legacy. During the 1980s and 1990s, Encanto was home to youth talent shows, poetry nights, block parties, and cultural festivals that nurtured intergenerational storytelling and artistic innovation. Despite periods of disinvestment, the

neighborhood's cultural resilience has remained intact, sustained by its deep community roots and a strong tradition of collective action.

Conclusion

The San Diego Black Arts + Culture District is not merely a designation on a map—it is a powerful declaration of cultural visibility, equity, and creative possibility. Rooted in the historic legacy of Encanto and shaped by the visionary leadership of generations past and present, the District represents a bold and necessary step toward honoring and investing in the Black experience in San Diego.

This strategic plan charts a path for the next three years that is both ambitious and grounded in community need. From revitalizing infrastructure with artist-designed signage and public murals to transforming vacant lots into vibrant cultural hubs, the plan envisions a District that is walkable, welcoming, and culturally resonant. Through initiatives such as the Art in Business Program, the Youth Media Lab, and rotating pop-up exhibitions, we are not only creating opportunities for Black artists and entrepreneurs but embedding their voices and talents into the everyday experience of the neighborhood.

At the core of this vision is a commitment to intergenerational engagement. By building mentorship pipelines, supporting youth-led programming, and activating spaces we ensure that every resident regardless of age has a stake in shaping and sustaining the District. The District's programs intentionally bridge cultural, generational, and disciplinary boundaries, creating a mosaic of collective ownership.

We are also setting a foundation for long-term sustainability through multi-source funding strategies, robust city and county partnerships, and community-led governance structures. From securing hotel tax revenues and public arts grants to leveraging the expertise of organizations like SDAAMFA and the Arts and Culture Advisory Committee, this plan ensures that leadership and accountability remain in the hands of those closest to the work.

The challenges ahead are real, but the assets i.e., creative, human, historical, and institution are profound. By anchoring our work in the stories and aspirations of Encanto's residents, and by building infrastructure that reflects their contributions, the District will stand as a model for equitable cultural development citywide.

In short, the San Diego Black Arts + Culture District is not only a tribute to what has been, it is a launchpad for what's next. Through this plan, we reaffirm that Black art, history, and innovation are essential to the future of San Diego. We invite all public, private, civic, and creative stakeholders to join us in bringing this vision to life.

San Diego Black Arts + Culture District Three-Year Implementation Plan (2026-2029)

Overview:

This implementation plan outlines a phased, milestone-driven roadmap for the San Diego Black Arts + Culture District (SDBLACKACD) over the 2026–2029 period. It aligns with the goals established in the Strategic Plan, detailing annual objectives, key performance indicators (KPIs), responsible parties, and reporting mechanisms.

YEAR 1 (2026): Foundation and Activation

Focus: Infrastructure, Visibility, and Capacity Building

- Coordinate the production of the Encanto Street Fair, establishing it as a signature annual event and cultural anchor for the District.
- Identify and pursue funding sources, through both public and private sectors to support the hiring of staff required to implement the work program outlined in this strategic plan.
- Submit grant applications to major local, state, and national funding agencies, in accordance with the City’s funding strategy, to support programmatic and infrastructure goals across all three years.
- Launch artist and small business grant programs; advocate for the City of San Diego to expand its existing small business and cultural arts support programs to include dedicated funding for the District’s initiatives.
- Support the installation of public artworks associated with the Here Comes the Neighborhood: Encanto program, ensuring coordination with artists, city departments, and the Cultural Affairs Office.
- Create the District website and integrated access map mobile application, building upon the existing digital infrastructure to improve community engagement and cultural navigation.
- Coordinate the formation of the Youth Arts Council, ensuring representation from across the District and establishing its initial priorities and structure.

- Encourage the City of San Diego Economic Development Department to formalize and expand the Art in Business pilot program, beginning with three storefront activations aligned with District branding and artist visibility.

Reporting Methods:

- Quarterly dashboard updates to the Arts and Culture Advisory Committee
- Annual community town hall (live and virtual)
- Production of Bi-monthly Newsletter electronic and hard copies.

YEAR 2 (2027): Expansion and Participation

Focus: Youth Engagement, Program Growth, and Place-Based Innovation

Key Milestones:

- Complete phase 1 of mural series
- Launch Youth Media Lab and Pop-Up Museum programming in 3 schools/libraries
- Utilize newly created criteria to monitor the activation of available vacant lots with temporary cultural programming, public events, or creative experiences.
- Review existing documentation of oral histories through intergenerational storytelling project and coordinate additional interviews as needed.

Reporting Methods:

- Produce mid-year review reports to City of San Diego and major funders as required
- Public art documentation and feedback survey
- Youth Council report and portfolio of contributions

YEAR 3 (2028–2029): Sustainability and Legacy

Focus: Policy Integration, Economic Empowerment, and Cultural Stewardship

Key Milestones:

- Host 2nd annual District-wide festival and monthly activation series
- Publish the District Impact Report, including resident testimonials, economic metrics, and cultural participation data
- Secure 3-year renewal funding through CIP alignment and private foundations

Reporting Methods:

- Comprehensive three-year District Evaluation Report
- Financial audit submitted by fiscal sponsor
- Community-led impact forum and public celebration
- Policy recommendations presented to San Diego City Council

Cultural Events and District Activation (2026–2029):

To strengthen the visibility and vibrancy of the San Diego Black Arts + Culture District, a core focus across all three years will be the strategic amplification of key cultural events and local activations. Beginning in Year 1, the District will implement a coordinated marketing and outreach strategy to increase attendance and engagement with cornerstone events, including:

- The Black Music Festival (annual)
- The revitalized Encanto Street Fair
- The Mental Bar events and cultural programming
- Various Farmers Markets and Food Festivals
- Maxx Moses Studio public art and open house experiences
- Ancestral Heritage Garden (Stand on Their Shoulders A/R exhibit), Marie Widman Park

These events will be supported by targeted social media campaigns, print and digital advertising, and integration into the District's website and app. In Year 2, the plan aims to allocate additional resources to expand infrastructure support for these events, including temporary street closures, vendor coordination, and public safety management. By Year 3, these cultural events will form a fully integrated part of the District's economic and tourism development strategy, with partnerships established across city departments and local business networks.

Cross-Cutting Strategies (2026–2029):

- Ongoing grant writing by Advisory Committee and fiscal sponsor
- Biannual listening sessions for feedback collection
- Annual review of artist selection criteria and community engagement metrics

This plan provides a replicable and transparent framework to track the District's growth and ensure accountability. It translates vision into coordinated action, engaging residents, creatives, civic leaders, and funders in building a nationally recognized cultural district rooted in Encanto's legacy and future potential.

Acknowledgments

The preparation of the SD Black Arts + Culture District 2026/29 Strategic Plan was a community-driven effort that benefited from the unique contributions of several dedicated individuals and groups. Community members provided valuable input through listening sessions, helping to shape the vision and priorities of the plan. Local artists shared creative ideas for cultural programming, ensuring the plan reflects the vibrant spirit of the District. Additionally, the Advisory Committee played an active role by thoroughly reviewing drafts and providing insightful feedback, helping to refine and strengthen the plan in very meaningful ways.

San Diego County Board of Supervisors District 4, Supervisor
Monica Montgomery Steppe

San Diego City Council District 4, Council Member
Henry L. Foster III

SDBLACKACD Advisory Committee

Derrick Banks
Dajahn Blevins
Phillip Colman
Kelsey Daniels
Kendrick Dial
Dr. Marilyn Harvey
Kamau Kenyatta
Kimberly King
Francine Maxwell
Dr. Denise Rogers
Johnathan “Jay” Shelby
Denise Webb
La Raza Webb

San Diego African American Museum of Fine Art

Gaidi Finnie, *Executive Director*
Sinia Benson
Brian Matthews
Dr. Fern Nelson
Ed Nesfield
Carolyn Smith
Ramel Wallace

City of San Diego Cultural Affairs Division

Jonathon Glus, *Executive Director*
Christine E. Jones, *Chief of Civic Art Strategies*
Bell Raza, *Project Manager*

Consultants/Contributors

Kendrick Dial
Dr. Denise Rogers
Carolyn Smith

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