

# Year of Chicago Theatre Cultural Asset Mapping

## REPORT



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# WHAT DID WE DO AND WHERE?

## Free Street Theater

- Mapped **186 assets** in a cluster of neighborhoods:
  - Back of the Yards
  - Brighton Park
  - Englewood
  - Gage Park
  - McKinley Park
- Collected answers to questions about:
  - Impact of COVID-19
  - Barriers to culture making
  - Ideal performance/cultural spaces

# WHAT DID WE DO AND WHERE?

## Chicago Park District

- Collected **147 stories** set in Chicago neighborhoods, mostly on the South and West Sides
- Survey responses from **241 Chicago creatives** about:
  - How they identify (demographics, artistic discipline)
  - Where they create work
  - Opportunities or collaborations they seek
  - Resources they could offer
  - How would they use a database of artists & resources
- Themes from 10 Focus Groups with ALAANA/BIPOC artists, cultural producers & community members

## KEY THEME I

Everything from neighborhood histories to dances of the African diaspora are assets

- Significant individuals
- Neighborhood connections & histories
- Public art
- Food
- Black, Latinx, Asian & Indigenous orgs
- Performance spaces & orgs
- Events & festivals
- Visual art spaces & orgs
- Lost or former spaces



## ASSET SPOTLIGHT: Urban Pilón



Urban Pilón's cooking classes share the stories of Afro-Caribbean ancestors.  
Photo credit: Roberto Pérez

## ASSET SPOTLIGHT: Urban Pilón

“Urban Pilón is a culinary movement with a mission: to honor and preserve cooking traditions from Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and Latin America, while using completely natural, healthy ingredients. With this mission in mind, Roberto [Pérez] serves not only as chef, but as storyteller, sharing the stories of our ancestors through his cooking, classes, and demonstrations. His popular Caribbean cooking courses showcase these stories by teaching both classic and original recipes along with the history behind them.”

—Roberto Pérez

## ASSET SPOTLIGHT: Blues musicians & clubs



Storyteller Larry Taylor performing at blues venue, the Water Hole.  
Photo credit: Bonni McKeown, 2019



## ASSET SPOTLIGHT: Blues musicians & clubs

“I was in the second generation of Chicago blues performers whose parents brought the music here during the Great Migration from the South. We learned music from our elders, from school music classes, and R&B hits on the radio and club jukeboxes. We competed to get gigs in tiny Black-owned West and South Side clubs, also played on North Side in tourist clubs. Blues is the root of all American popular music—jazz, pop, soul, R&B, country, hip-hop—because it tells ordinary people's real-life stories. It grew out of our parents' hardships from slavery, Jim Crow and the cotton fields, and took on the rhythms of the city. I want to recognize my fellow musicians and the places we played, before we leave this world.”

—Larry Taylor

## KEY THEME 2

# Many neighborhood settings host & nurture arts & culture

- Multidisciplinary community art centers
- Spaces that provide social services
- Civic & community orgs
- Commercial venues & cultural businesses
- Gardens & outdoor gathering spaces
- Parks
- Libraries
- Religious venues & orgs

# ASSET SPOTLIGHT: IMAN's Beloved Community Ceramics Studio



Ceramics instructor Ariya Siddiqui at the kiln where they bake the clay  
Photo credit: Yaritza Guillen, September 2020

## ASSET SPOTLIGHT: IMAN's Beloved Community Ceramics Studio

“Ariya Saddiqui is a ceramic artist at IMAN [Inner-city Muslim Action Network] Central, an organization located between Englewood and the Chicago Lawn. She uses clay as a form of healing to give participants a full body experience that connects the use of all four elements (earth, water, wind, and air). She has classes that are interdisciplinary with not only creating with clay, but also connecting it with how participants interact with natural environment and their mental health.”

—Ariya Siddiqui



# ASSET SPOTLIGHT: North Lawndale Peace Park



Butterfly garden at the North Lawndale Peace Park  
Photo credit: Dianna C. Long



## ASSET SPOTLIGHT: North Lawndale Peace Park

“During the year, youth groups come to the Peace Park to learn about Black history and contribute to park maintenance. An example of an activity here is the annual “Youth Art Fest” on the last Saturday of August. It includes a contest for teen artists to paint portraits of Black heroes, open mic stage performances, drumming, dancing, kids watercolor table, face painting, free art supplies for all children, refreshments, and more. This year we are adding a food drive. Sometimes youth earn their service-learning hours here. Adults perform their community service hours here. University groups visit here to add art or get involved in gardening. The general population comes to enjoy the great outdoors and help with weeding and landscaping. Sometimes there are art workshops in the Peace Park. Everyone learns about Black history. The Peace Park offers an opportunity to discuss social justice issues. The Peace Park is open to the public. Individuals, families, and groups can utilize the park when they like.”

—Dianna C. Long

## KEY THEME 3

# Groups are connecting people to create, learn & work towards justice together

- Ideal spaces are accessible, welcoming & community-driven
- Artist collectives & gathering spaces
- Intergenerational arts & music education spaces
- Youth-oriented spaces
- Protests, community organizing & mutual aid

# ASSET SPOTLIGHT: La Casa del Fandango



“Follow Me Fandango” at La Casa del Fandango, August 2017.  
Photo Credit: Maya Zazhil Fernández, 2017

## ASSET SPOTLIGHT: La Casa del Fandango

“La Casa del Fandango is a space that was born out of the home of a family of musicians, educators, and cultural workers based out of Pilsen, Chicago. Dedicated to the practice and preservation of traditional son jarocho music from Veracruz, Mexico, in 2008 they began giving free youth son jarocho workshops out of their home on 18th street, from which the collective “Jarochicanos” emerged. Throughout the years, Jarochicanos became the entity to continue to carry out this labor through organizing various free and multigenerational son jarocho learning opportunities for their communities, such as Talleres en la 18. The other complementing part of their labor is organizing “fandangos” or “huapangos” which are the traditional community celebrations of son jarocho. The fandango is the manifestation of son jarocho as a community practice. In this space, everyone works collectively to house, feed, host, entertain, and share with an entire community.”

—Maya Zazhil Fernández



# ASSET SPOTLIGHT:

## Let Us Breathe Collective/The Breathing Room



Let Us Breathe Collective event.  
Photo credit: Sarah Ji-Lee

## ASSET SPOTLIGHT:

### Let Us Breathe Collective/The Breathing Room

The #LetUsBreathe Collective and the #BreathingRoom space have long been a place where I've been able to merge activism and artistry. I began organizing with them in 2015, coordinating #BlackBrunchChi in 2016 wherein we disrupted brunch spots in Lincoln Square. That summer we also organized #FreeDay wherein we gave out food, researched and developed a resource guide, and deployed a mobile clean-up and open mic. This set the stage for #FreedomSquare. What began there, a #FreeStore with clothes, books, food and other mutual aid, exists today at #BreathingRoom. There's something about the power of collective organizing that focuses on centering the needs of the people; and one that grew out of a need for folks to be together - through art, protest, rage. A lot of my personal practice, and the way I show up in the world, I garnered from this collective. Emerging artists need spaces such as these, and when artists imagine and support what people need, we create a more liberated society.” –Quenna L. Barrett

# Opportunities exist to support cultural production more equitably

- Funding & financial resources must target areas of historic disinvestment
- Easier access to info, training & supportive networks
- New performance spaces on the South Side & West Sides

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

How can we direct upcoming investments on the South & West Sides?

How can we support performance on the South & West Sides?



# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Counter disparities through targeted, innovative funding & investments in cross-sector uses
2. Develop cultural spaces through strategic matchmaking, cohort-based training & collaboration

# RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Invest in “people” infrastructure to increase accessibility & animate neighborhood cultural assets
4. Support networks to increase collaboration & access to resources

# RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Foster strategic training opportunities for small organizations and youth, particularly in performing arts and film
6. Invest in data systems and “cultural access” benchmarks to track and share progress

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