



101 PREFONTAINE PL S
SEATTLE, WA 98104
4CULTURE.ORG

4Culture's 2025-2027 Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

Over the past four years, 4Culture has experienced major wins for King County's cultural sector, most notably with the rollout of the new Future Funding Model, designed to address historic systemic inequities in funding. The model provided a framework for developing the Doors Open legislation passed by the King County Council in December 2023. In 2024, 4Culture increased our capacity to integrate this new funding, awarding \$165 million to 700+ arts, heritage, science, and historic preservation nonprofits across the County, elevating racial equity and geographic distribution in the program design and implementation.

4Culture is in a strong, exciting place to support the cultural sector in King County today because of the decades-long legacy and strong relationships with the King County Executive and King County Council. We undertake this work with a deep commitment to extensive community input. This engagement has and will continue to define for 4Culture what racial equity and inclusion mean to us as an organization and how we advance opportunities for the cultural sector in King County—a core principle that we live into daily and in our planning for the future.

As we look to the next three years, the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan will serve as a "Bridge" to guide 4Culture, honoring our legacy while living into the potential of new opportunities. This plan will support the next steps in the internal organizational work needed to integrate Doors Open funding with existing operations and programs while promoting the well-being of staff and the external community engagement critical to ensuring our programs remain responsive and equitable.

The 2025-2027 Strategic Plan focuses on the following three goals.

1. **Goal:** Foster community internally and externally in this moment of growth to ensure our focus on racial equity supports a vibrant county where culture is essential and accessible to all.
1. **Goal:** Build towards a culture of storytelling and evaluation in collaboration with and for the benefit of the community we serve.
2. **Goal:** Develop and resource internal operations that prepare for the future state of 4Culture, recognizing our power, authority, and positionality.

As a "Bridge," this plan will build on and continue 4Culture's field-building and community engagement work while clarifying the path forward to advance our mission of supporting culture to enhance the quality of life in King County.

4Culture's 2025-2027 Strategic Plan

Introduction and Background

4Culture is an independent public agency chartered under state law and King County ordinance in January 2003, after 35 years as the King County Office of Cultural Resources. As King County, Washington's cultural funding and services agency, 4Culture works to make the region vibrant. The organization's program areas—Arts, Heritage, Historic Preservation, Public Art, and now Science—put public resources to use across King County to build a vibrant county where culture is essential and accessible to all.

Guided by a vision of a King County in which every person has what they need to explore and create culture, 4Culture is working to become an actively anti-racist organization. Knowing this work is urgent and ongoing, 4Culture is committed to transparency about its successes and failures. 4Culture is part of the system of white supremacy that has historically disadvantaged Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color and strives to understand systems of structural racism, dismantle them with the tools available, and build up equitable approaches that support and recognize the value in cultural expression of all people, especially those in King County.

4Culture is guided by and dedicated to our mission to *fund, support, and advocate for culture to enhance the quality of life in King County, with a focus on racial equity.*

Driving Change: Institutionalizing Equity Investments for King County's Cultural Sector

4Culture shepherded significant gains for the cultural sector over the last several years, leading to more funding and investments focused on addressing racial and geographic inequities across King County. The most significant was the unanimous passage by the King County Council of the historic Doors Open legislation in 2023, supported through planning and advocacy efforts led by 4Culture and key partners, including Inspire WA. This new funding stream will support arts, heritage, science, and historic preservation nonprofits building on 4Culture's Future Funding Model, which institutionalized equity investments by addressing historic systemic inequities in funding and expanding capacity in King County's geographic areas with limited funding for cultural resources. In the [first round of Doors Open funding](#) awarded in December 2024, 4Culture provided more than \$165 million to support 700+ King County cultural organizations over the next three years through general operating and facilities grants.

4Culture's success is largely attributed to its care and attention to cultivating community and fostering connection through authentic engagement—listening and integrating feedback from artists, organizations, and partners into action. Examples of this deep community engagement include the participation of more than 100 people in helping to shape 4Culture's 2020-2024 Strategic Plan to understand the external cultural landscape and 4Culture's internal performance in serving the region; and undertaking a two-year journey to study the cultural health of the region resulting in the King County Cultural Health Study. 4Culture staff visited every corner of King County, conducting community outreach, data collection, and self-reflection to analyze King County's cultural health.

4Culture will continue seeking and incorporating community input through its board, advisory committees, panelists, and active community presence. We will also undertake new evaluation practices and complete a second version of the King County Cultural Health Study to inform our future direction during the next strategic planning period.

2025-2027 Strategic Plan Highlights and Process

The 2025-2027 Strategic Plan serves as a “Bridge” plan as we build on 4Culture’s last strategic plan completed in 2024 and prepare for a comprehensive strategic planning process in 2028 to include broad public engagement. Like our last plan, this strategic plan serves as a working, living document to guide staff over the next three years and clarify 4Culture’s vision and direction with the board, staff, and key stakeholders with the following priorities.

- Integrate Doors Open funding into the organization’s existing Lodging Tax and Public Art programs and operations.
- Continue cultivating a positive and healthy work environment, especially within the context of 4Culture’s growth and onboarding new staff to support expanded program implementation.
- Build robust accountability systems to learn, listen, assess, and adapt programming based on community needs over the next three years.
- Build relationships within the new funding area of science to understand and best serve this sector's needs.

The following provides an overview of the inputs that helped shape the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan. The Appendix provides a detailed description of the strategic plan process.

- Feedback from two staff retreats and an all-organization Strategic Planning Retreat, including board, advisory board members, and staff.
- Input and development of the strategic plan from a cross-departmental internal team composed of the Executive Director, Department Directors, and staff.
- Ongoing collaboration with the King County Executive and King County Council.
- Completion of an evaluation and Final Report providing lessons learned during the 2020-2024 strategic plan implementation.
- Extensive feedback gathered from the community during the Doors Open Implementation Plan creation in 2024.

Celebration, joy, wellness, and transparency are integral to the design and implementation of the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan—emerging priorities shaped by the aftermath of the pandemic and shifting viewpoints around career fulfillment and well-being, elevating equity, access, and inclusion, and differing perspectives among staff on how to live these values being brought to the forefront.

Key Insights and Considerations

The strategic planning process uncovered key considerations across King County's cultural landscape that are critical to acknowledge in creating strategic goals and tactics to guide

4Culture over the next three years. The process also unveiled considerations important for 4Culture to grapple with as an organization during this period of growth and transformation.

Internal Facing

Greater, intentional emphasis on racial equity and inclusion

Over the past several years, 4Culture has elevated the urgency of transparency in becoming an actively anti-racist organization. From hiring and recruitment to training, program implementation, and more, 4Culture is learning and growing from successes and failures. The new strategic plan intentionally integrates racial equity and inclusion into the implementation of each goal, further embedding this into the fabric of the organization.

Support for interdepartmental collaboration

As 4Culture's staff grows and additional work areas, including the discipline of science, are added to our portfolio, we have a new opportunity to deepen cross-departmental collaboration. By learning and sharing across departments, we can streamline our resources and support creative changes to our processes that increase access and inclusion for individual artists and cultural and science organizations. 4Culture staff will still have the agency to create different structures inside their bodies of work to support specific community needs.

Opportunity to better understand and serve the science sector

Doors Open has introduced science as one of the discipline areas supported through the new funding stream. 4Culture recognizes the importance of supporting the work of our new Science Department to understand better and delve deeper into defining the concerns, challenges, and opportunities of the science field. This work will allow 4Culture to best support science nonprofits within the boundaries of the Doors Open legislation and better sync and align with our other focus areas.

External Facing

Rapid displacement of artists and residents in King County

Soaring housing costs and gentrification have led to the rapid displacement of King County residents, especially BIPOC and low-income communities. This displacement threatens the region's cultural vibrancy and creative identity. 4Culture made significant strides, especially through the Building for Equity facilities funding program, and will continue to work toward addressing this challenge through racial and geographic equity frameworks in disseminating funding and program implementation.

Post-pandemic recovery challenges experienced by many organizations

The COVID-19 pandemic was particularly hard on the arts and culture sector. Organizations were among the first to close and last to reopen, and many artists, creators, and professionals faced a complex and uncertain future. While many organizations have regained their footing, many are still struggling, especially larger organizations challenged with rebuilding audiences, addressing financial instability, and adapting to new modes of engagement. 4Culture supports small and large organizations and will work to develop tactics to support the diversity within our sector.

External and Internal Facing

Desire for connection

Within 4Culture and across communities we interact with and engage through programs and in our daily lives, a collective desire for meaningful relationships and community continues as a salient need. Externally, 4Culture can help support the arts, culture, and science sectors to increase connection and belonging. Individual artists and cultural workers will benefit from opportunities to connect and build a community of belonging and support. Internally, 4Culture staff's well-being and creative collaboration depend on their feelings of belonging inside the organization.

Increased diversity of identities and needs

In the last four years, there has been an increased awareness and recognition of the diversity of identities and needs of cultural organizations across King County, within 4Culture's staff, and among applicants seeking funding support from 4Culture. With that recognition of the diversity that is and has always been a part of the cultural sector comes an increased responsibility to respond to different needs.

Increased accessibility through various engagement platforms

The rise of remote and virtual options for attending and participating in cultural events and activities has created opportunities for increased access and connections regardless of location or access barriers. Continuing to design opportunities that center on new ways to cultivate connection will provide avenues for creative exploration in making arts, culture, heritage, and science more accessible to all.

Next Steps

With strategic goals established to support this period of growth, strengthen 4Culture's internal workings, and engage in meaningful connection with the community, the next phase focuses on implementing the following actionable steps to bring the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan to life, ensuring measurable progress and sustained impact.

- 4Cultural approval and adoption of the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan.
- Assignment of strategic goals and strategies to individual departments.
- Implementation plans for each goal and strategy integrated into departmental work plans.
- Regular evaluation of Strategic Plan progress via the Senior Leadership Team.
- Adjustments made annually during departmental work plan creation.
- Formal evaluation and assessment report of 2025-2027 Strategic Plan.

2025-2027 Strategic Plan Goals and Strategies

Goal 1:

Foster community internally and externally in this moment of growth to ensure our focus on racial equity supports a vibrant county where culture is essential and accessible to all.

Strategy Areas:

1. Develop and utilize an engagement framework that recognizes connectivity to communities and our responsibility to meet their changing needs and unexpected opportunities.
2. Maintain investments and explore new opportunities to prioritize wellness and wellbeing at 4Culture.

Rationale for Goal 1:

The goal of fostering community during growth recognizes that collaboration and partnership are underlying values of 4Culture and core principles of how we carry out our work. Our community consists of the residents and visitors of King County, with a specific focus on those who are historically marginalized/underinvested. The community 4Culture is responsive to changes within the context of a specific body of work, both in looking at our internal community of staff and the communities we engage across King County. 4Culture acknowledges that no one definition of community works for all contexts. Community, like culture, is multifaceted and ever-evolving.

4Culture honors the value that communities hold past knowledge, current-day experience, and future vision. This goal and its strategy areas solidify our commitment to work authentically with communities where they are to address issues they prioritize—all while upholding our commitment to racial equity.

Goal 2:

Build towards a culture of storytelling and evaluation in collaboration with and for the benefit of the community we serve.

Strategy Areas:

1. Develop improved storytelling and data-gathering systems with the people and organizations we serve to demonstrate the impact of 4Culture's work.

2. Share stories that draw on data to ensure 4Culture's future and allow us to serve King County's current and evolving cultural needs.
3. Utilize gathered data to inform the meaningful evolution of funding areas and Public Arts commissions.

Rationale for Goal 2:

The theme of creating a culture of storytelling and evaluation addresses how 4Culture collects information and amplifies what is happening across the County's cultural sector, from celebrating wins to promoting transparency in processes and outcomes and showcasing 4Culture's impact through the work of individuals and organizations we support. Given Doors Open reporting requirements, 4Culture has the opportunity to strengthen its evaluation and move from evaluation solely for accountability to evaluation that allows us to learn, improve, and evolve.

Across this body of work, 4Culture intends to minimize the burden on grantee organizations and individuals, especially those with limited resources, by being mindful of how we design accountability systems. We will use tactics that create equity across organizations with different resource access, and design community-centered evaluation approaches that value creativity. Through racially and geographically disaggregated data, 4Culture and the broader arts and culture ecosystem can track progress on equity goals to gauge how new funding models are making a difference.

Goal 3:

Develop and resource internal operations that prepare for the future state of 4Culture, recognizing our power, authority, and positionality.

Strategy areas:

1. Develop a Code of Ethics that fits within our mission, vision, and values to ensure alignment and guide how we carry out our work across all departments and functions at 4Culture.
2. Evolve operations and systems to increase collaboration, cross-departmental work, and ongoing quality improvement to best serve our community constituents.
3. Create an internal working group and decision-making process to identify agency-wide focus areas that respond to gaps and areas of need for the communities we serve.

Rationale for Goal 3:

With Doors Open's passage came major growth and opportunity for 4Culture and the broader arts, heritage, science, and cultural sectors across King County. We recognize that as King County's cultural and arts funding agency, 4Culture holds power and resources. Our vantage point allows a unique opportunity to see common challenges, obstacles, and opportunities

amidst the 800+ cultural organizations and thousands of cultural practitioners of King County. Challenging issues such as affordability (housing, spaces, etc.), equitable development initiatives, regional and national legislative constraints, and artists' healthcare are frequent topics inside and outside 4Culture.

This goal is designed to provide a space for a more formal exploration of these issues in collaboration with our partners and a pathway to determine what positive impact, if any, 4Culture might have outside traditional funding/commission programs. We are committed to leveraging our increased size and profile to create change through community engagement, equitable practices, collaboration, and innovation while maintaining transparency and accountability.

Appendix A

4Culture Strategic Plan Process Overview

4Culture completed a report back on progress achieved toward their 2020-2024 Strategic Plan in September 2025 and then completed the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan in February 2024. Vessel Consulting supported the process of working with the Strategic Planning Committee (members listed below) to evaluate the last plan and identify priorities for the next three years. 4Culture's leadership prioritized extensive staff input in this process to include the expertise of those working directly with community and in understanding the implications and impact of the new Doors Open program and other organizational changes and drew from past community feedback.

The Strategic Plan process included the following components, prioritizing engagement of 4Culture staff, board, and advisory board; creating space for feedback and discussion; and incorporating learnings from extensive community feedback gathered during the King County Cultural Health Study, 2020-2024 Strategic Planning community process, and the Doors Open Implementation Plan development in 2024.

- **Strategic Planning Committee:** Reviewed and incorporated feedback, consulted on changes, provided editing support, and supported planning process development. Committee members included Brian Carter, Executive Director; Nina Yarbrough, Director of Arts; Claire Miccio, Government Affairs and community Relations Manager; Calandra Childers, Doors Open Year One Project Director; Kelly Pajek, Director of Public Art; and Consultants with Vessel Consulting.
- **Strategic Plan review process:** Reported back on progress, successes, and learnings by each goal and strategy area for the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. The final report was completed in September 2024 and used for planning during the 2025-2027 Strategic Planning development process.
- **Two staff retreats:** The first staff retreat was held in August 2024 to review the last plan and provide input on progress in achieving goals, and the landscape, challenges, and opportunities to frame the 2025-2027 plan. The second retreat focused on discussing the emerging key areas of opportunity to determine possible strategies in the 2025-2027 plan.
- **All staff, board, and advisory board retreat:** Held in December 2024, this retreat provided an opportunity to review the rough draft of the goals and strategies for the 2025-2027 plan and offer ideas and feedback for the final plan and implementation.
- **Additional feedback:** The board, Advisory Board members and staff gave feedback on the goals and strategies at staff office hours and the Board meeting in January.
- **Final plan completed:** The Strategic Planning Committee supported reviewed the feedback to finalize the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan draft for the board approval.

In supporting this process, Vessel Consulting facilitated the development of a strategy screen for 4Culture to utilize in making decisions on strategic direction, drafted the plan, and supported the Strategic Planning Committee throughout.

Decision Screen

Step 1: Mission Screen

With a focus on racial equity, we fund, support, and advocate for culture to enhance the quality of life in King County.

- **How does this goal or strategy fulfill the two main components of 4Culture's mission?**
- How does this strategy center racial equity? Does this strategy replicate, create, or exacerbate racial disparities (unintended consequences)?
- How does this strategy enhance the quality of life in King County? How will you measure this?

Step 2: Values Screen

With the proposed goal or strategy in mind; think about and take notes on how each of 4Culture's values is or is not reflected within the proposed strategy. You can use the prompts below to help:

- **Culture is a right for all**
How does this goal or strategy allow people to exercise their right to express and experience culture?
- **Culture is multifaceted**
Does this goal/strategy address or approach culture or your specific cultural discipline differently from how 'the field' has historically viewed cultural work? If so, how?
- **Connectivity with communities**
Are other departments or organizations solving for a similar problem? What is the ecosystem in which this strategy functions?
- **Responsiveness**
How does this goal/strategy respond to a community need? Why implement this strategy *now*?
- **Good Stewardship**
What resources, personnel, financial and time, do you need to execute this goal/strategy?
- **Racial Equity**
Does this strategy's approach to achieving racial equity help dismantle other forms of systemic oppression? *[Also see mission question for racial equity]*

Step 3: Feasibility

- Does 4Culture have the existing capacity and resources to allocate toward the successful completion of this strategy (budget, department, program)?

2. If we do not have current resources allocated to support this strategy, what would be sacrificed to accomplish it, and is it worth it?

Appendix B

Working definition/glossary of 4Culture terms

Community

4Culture acknowledges that no one definition of community works for all contexts. Community, like culture, is multifaceted and ever-evolving. Our community consists of the residents and visitors of King County, with a specific focus on those who are historically marginalized/underinvested. The community 4Culture is responsive to changes within the context of a specific body of work, both in looking at our internal community of staff and the communities we engage across King County.

4Culture honors the value that communities hold past knowledge, current-day experience, and future vision.

Culture

Defining culture is difficult when understanding, interpretation, and use of the word vary widely. For the purposes of the Plan, we define culture as that which falls within our programmatic areas: Arts, Preservation, Heritage, and Public Art. In alignment with our values, we acknowledge the intersecting and evolving disciplines, forms, and places where culture is expressed and experienced within these four focus areas.

Racial Equity

This definition of racial equity was chosen by the 4Culture Racial Equity Team and is included in this group's charter:

We define equity as a system in which everyone has access to what they need to be successful. It recognizes and celebrates our differences. While 4Culture acknowledges the importance of recognizing and addressing all forms of oppression and inequity, the organization has strategically chosen to adopt a racial equity lens to focus its efforts toward achieving greater social justice* and equity for all.

*We define social justice as a movement that seeks to build safe, supportive communities where all people can be recognized as fully human.

Storytelling

The practice of communicating a point of view, experience or collective knowledge that uses human-centered accounts, anecdotes, and experiences across a wide range of mediums including interviews, written accounts, videos, and/or audio recordings. We believe the use of storytelling, within evaluation methodology, helps build trust-based relationships with applicants/awardees and allows 4Culture to better understand challenges and opportunities within the cultural sector. The effective use of storytelling when coupled with quantitative data adds persuasive depth to traditional evaluation methods. It can help capture and share how public funds, when

used to support a vibrant and thriving cultural sector, will result in a flourishing and healthy society.

Funding Programs & Commissions

There are many ways and methods by which 4Culture spends revenue. For the purposes of the Strategic Plan, we agree to use “**Funding Programs & Commissions**” to describe the overwhelming majority of expenditures including sales tax and lodging tax grant programs; initiatives; technical assistance programs; and 1% for Art public art commissions.